

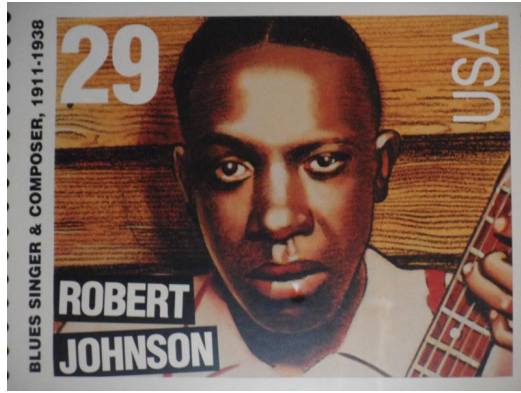


Robert Johnson

Group 1

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Robert Johnson-Imagery



3



Some general info

-Used the hardships and experiences he had and witnessed and the lifestyle of/as an African American during the Great Depression in the South to write his lyrics.

(2)

-Country blues artist. (2)

-Recorded 29 songs for the American Record Corporation - "Terraplane Blues," "Cross Road Blues," "Love In Vain," "Hellhound On My Trail," "I Believe I'll Dust My Broom," "Walking Blues," and "Sweet Home Chicago." are among his most renowned (2)

-Was able to write and perform with intense emotion.(2)

-Evolved the country blues of the Mississippi Delta. (6)

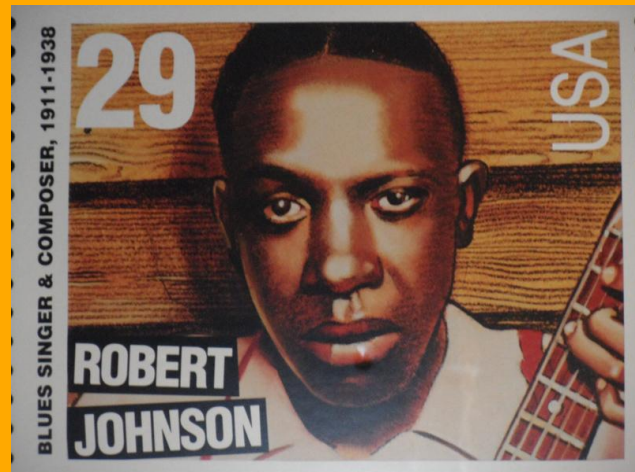
-Tutors included Charley Patton and Son House. (6)

-Traveled with Johnny Shines. (6)

-Performed at juke joints, levee camps, and country suppers. (6)

Why was this artist selected?

Robert Johnson was a revolutionary blues figure. While he was largely unknown during his life, he has posthumously been dubbed "The King of the Delta Blues Singers" (2)



Personal biography

Relatively little is known about Robert Johnson's personal life, which helped pave the way for rumors to develop, such as the one that he sold his soul to the Devil for his musical talent (2)



The Genre

Delta Blues- One of the earliest styles of blues music originating from the Mississippi Delta, an area famous for extreme poverty.

The genre frequently uses guitars, harmonicas, cigar box guitars, and steel guitars along with vocals.

Johnson's Style

Johnson played the Delta Blues most frequently, but he was renowned for being able to pick up on a song in any genre just by hearing a lick of the song. He was proficient in uptown swing, country, and jazz.
(Wald 127, 133)

Musical Influences

Robert Johnson's vocal style seems to have been influenced by Lonnie Johnson, particularly in the songs "Drunken Hearted Man" and "Malted Milk". His guitar style is reminiscent of "Blind" Arthur Blake's ragtime guitar (Wald 170-171, 174-175)

Musical Influences cont

Eric Clapton said, “I have never found anything more deeply soulful than Robert Johnson.” (2)

His influence is also obvious on artists such as the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, and The Allman Brothers

Relationship with the devil

Perhaps the most interesting story of Robert Johnson is the legend that Johnson had to sell his soul to the devil to become talented at the guitar. In his songs he would even relate to "Satan" on a first name and personal basis, establishing the fact that they were close together.

Still, Johnson used his fear of Satan as a frequent trope in his music. He always appeared to be running away from something, and many believe that the deal he made with the devil was the root of his fear.

Relationship with the devil

"In the delta of the Mississippi River, where Robert Johnson was born, they said that if an aspiring bluesman waited by the side of a deserted country crossroads in the dark of a moonless night, then Satan himself might come and tune his guitar, sealing a pact for the bluesman's soul and guaranteeing a lifetime of easy money, women, and fame. They said that Robert Johnson must have waited by the crossroads and gotten his guitar fine-tuned."

Johnson's mysterious relationship with the devil is unique but fascinating folklore and mystery.

Other music of the period

The stock market crash of 1929 influenced this era a lot. The drought commonly referred to as the "Dust Bowl" happened during the year 1935-36

People turned to music to brighten their spirits

In the Mood- Glenn Miller
Over the Rainbow-Judy Garland

Other Music of the Period(s) Cont

Folk Music- Woody Guthrie Huddie
Ledbetter

Musical Movies- Wizard of Oz

Pop Performers- Shirlie Temple

Jazz, Swing, and Big Band
Country Western



Robert Johnson's musical persona/passion analysis

We can look into his music by focusing on his top five rated songs (According to Yahoo; 7)

Hellhound On My Trail
Come On In My Kitchen
Stones In My Passway
Me And The Devil Blues
Cross Road Blues

Hellhound On My Trail

*"I got to keep moving, I got to keep moving
Blues falling down like hail, blues falling down like hail
Mmm, blues falling down like hail, blues falling down like hail
And the day keeps on remindin' me, there's a hellhound on my trail"*

The most well known, and most memorable fact about Robert Johnson was that he sold his soul to the devil at a crossroads, this set of lines is excluding his fear of the devil being constantly following him. Using the devil in his songs is very powerful.



Come On In My Kitchen

*"When a woman gets in trouble
everybody throws her down
Lookin for her good friend
none can be found
You'd better come on in my kitchen
babe it going to be rainin outdoors"*

Unlike Pop songs that sing about innocent young love, Robert Johnson's song "Come On In My Kitchen" takes on a darker tone. It focuses on a woman who should live with and give herself to Johnson out of necessity. She has been rejected by many others for her promiscuity, and now Johnson is her last option to find shelter from the winter and rain.

Stones In My Passway

*I got stones in my passway, and my road seems dark as night
I got stones in my passway, and my road seems dark as night
I have pains in my heart, they have taken my appetite*

In this song Robert Johnson uses images of darkness and night that allude to the fear of Robert. He is singing about the problems that his life poses, without the repetitive phrase "dark as night" he wouldn't be able to connect with his audience as deeply. He is conveying a message of a dark unclear road up ahead and emphasizing that his problems will be very laborious.

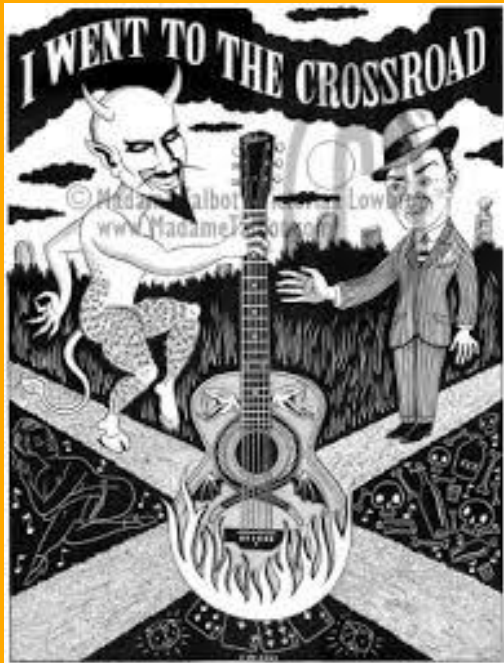
Me And The Devil Blues

*"Me and the Devil, ooh
was walkin' side by side
And I'm goin' to beat my woman
until I get satisfied"*

While Johnson is rumored to have made a deal with the devil, in this song he compares himself with the devil for his evil behavior. He tells the woman he's abusing to bury him by the highway when he dies so that his evil spirit can catch a greyhound bus and get away from her.

Cross Road Blues

*I went to the crossroad, fell down on my knees
I went to the crossroad, fell down on my knees
Asked the Lord above "Have mercy, now save poor Bob, if you please"*



Perpetuating the belief that he got his skill at guitar from Satan at the Crossroads, *Cross Road Blues* is about begging for holy forgiveness after selling his soul. The song follows a 12-Bar blues format in five verses.

Robert Johnson's Role in Music History

Robert Johnson pioneered Delta Blues, but more importantly he developed a widely believed persona, which would become a necessary evil for all subsequent popular musicians. His lyrics also break the mold of what a popular song should be about. His songs criticize his own actions, and show that he is a person filled with regret for his own behaviors. He isn't concerned with young love, he's concerned with the damnation that he and those who believe his mythos find inevitable for him.

Fun Facts

* Robert would leave suddenly from a performance, and sometimes even during breaks in his set. This was unheard of during his era, due to the fact that performers would interact with their fans during this time, thanks to paparazzi not rearing its head

*Due to his relationship with satan some fans thought that he had the "evil eye". Actually, he suffered from a small cataract.

*In certain southern communities, it was a well-known notion that one could go to the crossroads and sell one's soul to the devil. The concept dates back to African Folklore. When deity Esu was believed to be the guardian of the crossroads, and was the liaison between the gods and humans.

*When Christianity was brought to African Culture, these pagan gods were labeled as being similar to the devil. Hence, the concept that one

Reference List (can edit later)

- (1)<http://presbyterianblues.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/robert-johnson-2.jpg>
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- (8) Elijah Wald - Escaping the Delta: Robert Johnson and the Invention of the Blues.