

# Staging the Blues: From Tent Shows to Tourism

The blues is a genre of music that originated in the African-American communities of the Deep South in the late 19th century. It is characterized by its use of the blues scale, which is a minor scale with a flatted third, fifth, and seventh notes. The blues is also typically played on a guitar or piano, and often features lyrics that deal with themes of love, loss, and hardship.



## Staging the Blues: From Tent Shows to Tourism

by Paige A. McGinley

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

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The blues has had a profound impact on American popular music, and has been adapted and adopted by a wide range of artists, from Muddy Waters to Eric Clapton. In recent years, the blues has also become a major tourist attraction, with cities such as Memphis and Clarksdale, Mississippi, hosting annual blues festivals that attract thousands of visitors from around the world.

## The Tent Show Era

The blues first emerged as a popular form of entertainment in the early 20th century, when traveling tent shows toured the rural South. These shows featured a variety of performers, including blues musicians, singers, dancers, and comedians. Tent shows were a popular way for rural audiences to experience live entertainment, and they helped to spread the blues to a wider audience.

Some of the most famous blues musicians of the tent show era include W.C. Handy, Blind Lemon Jefferson, and Robert Johnson. These musicians played a key role in shaping the sound of the blues, and their songs continue to be performed and recorded today.

## **The Urban Blues**

In the 1940s and 1950s, the blues began to move from the rural South to the urban North. This migration was due in part to the Great Migration, which saw millions of African Americans leave the South for better economic opportunities in cities such as Chicago, Detroit, and New York.

The urban blues was a different style of music than the rural blues, and it reflected the experiences of African Americans in the city. Urban blues musicians often sang about the challenges of urban life, including poverty, crime, and racism.

Some of the most famous urban blues musicians include Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, and B.B. King. These musicians helped to popularize the blues among white audiences, and they played a key role in the development of rock and roll.

## **The Blues Revival**

In the 1960s, there was a renewed interest in the blues among white audiences. This interest was due in part to the British Invasion, which saw British bands such as the Rolling Stones and the Beatles incorporate blues elements into their music.

The blues revival helped to introduce a new generation of blues musicians to a wider audience. These musicians included artists such as John Lee Hooker, Otis Rush, and Buddy Guy.

### **The Blues Today**

The blues is still a popular genre of music today, and it continues to be performed and recorded by artists around the world. The blues has also become a major tourist attraction, with cities such as Memphis and Clarksdale, Mississippi, hosting annual blues festivals that attract thousands of visitors from around the world.

### **The Commodification of the Blues**

The blues has been commodified and institutionalized in a number of ways. This process began in the early 20th century, when traveling tent shows began to feature blues musicians. These shows helped to spread the blues to a wider audience, but they also began to commodify the music.

The blues has also been commodified through the recording industry. In the 1920s, record companies began to record blues musicians, and these recordings helped to further popularize the music. However, the recording industry also led to the commodification of the blues, as record companies began to control the way in which the music was produced and distributed.

In recent years, the blues has been further commodified through the tourism industry. Cities such as Memphis and Clarksdale, Mississippi, have invested heavily in blues tourism, and they now host annual blues festivals that attract thousands of visitors from around the world.

### **The Institutionalization of the Blues**

The blues has also been institutionalized in a number of ways. In the 1970s, the National Endowment for the Arts began to provide funding for blues musicians and organizations. This funding helped to support the development of blues education programs and festivals, and it also helped to legitimize the blues as a genre of music.

The blues has also been institutionalized through the creation of blues museums and halls of fame. These institutions help to preserve the history of the blues, and they also provide a place for people to learn about the music and its creators.

### **The Authenticity of the Blues**

The commodification and institutionalization of the blues has raised some concerns about the authenticity of the music. Some critics argue that the blues has become too commercialized, and that it has lost its connection to its roots. Others argue that the blues is still a vital and authentic genre of music, and that it continues to reflect the experiences of African Americans.

The debate over the authenticity of the blues is likely to continue for many years to come. However, there is no doubt that the blues is a powerful and enduring genre of music that has had a profound impact on American culture.

Staging the Blues: From Tent Shows to Tourism is a comprehensive examination of the history of the blues, from its humble beginnings in tent shows to its current status as a major tourist attraction. The book explores the ways in which the blues has been commodified and institutionalized, and how this has affected its authenticity and vitality. Staging the Blues is a must-read for anyone interested in the history of the blues or in the ways in which popular music is produced and consumed.



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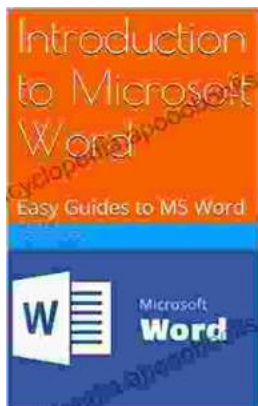
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