

New Roads

The Blues Meets the Cello

A Thesis Submitted In Partial Fulfillment of the Degree of
Master of Music in Contemporary Performance (Production
Concentration)

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I. Introduction

When one speaks of ‘the blues,’ they enter into a unique space in the story of Western music and culture, paying homage to both a monumental musical genre and a quasi-indescribable feeling of mystique and etherealness. While the average listener will associate the music with sadness – just as the everyday speaker will use the expression with melancholy – the music and its culture hold something that reaches much deeper. Unmistakably rooted in the African-American South, the music covers everything from everyday misfortunes, social inequality, and even a reckoning with the afterlife. Music enthusiasts and journalists, although disagreeing on minutiae, have concocted theories concerning the origin of the genre. But the soulful sound, the painstaking story, and the rich culture seem historically consistent and somewhat omnipresent.

A white, educated, and admittedly privileged cellist such as myself does not seem to have a place in this story. Or so I thought a year ago. The only connection I had to this mystical music was the fact that I grew up in the South. But even then, my unmistakably urban upbringing in Atlanta was a far cry from the rural and hallowed grounds of the Mississippi Delta that saw the rise of Charley Patton, Son House, Robert Johnson, and Muddy Waters. However, my soul has always yearned to communicate the honest and sensitive sounds of the blues that resonate deeply within me, even despite the chasm between my world and that world.

Now I stand in the wake of the collision course of my Culminating Experience journey. I took the blues head-on, immersing myself in the music as much as one possibly could without simply packing up and moving to Mississippi. In short, the purpose of my project was to incorporate the sound of the blues into my own sound. The first stage of my project involved extensive academic research and included overview of texts, videos, and recordings. Through

such a process I sought to become an academic expert in the history and evolution of the genre. But for the second stage of my project (and more importantly for my development as an artist) I searched for a new musical voice, primarily on the cello (but also as a vocalist). After many hours of trial and error, I discovered new ways to play my instrument that better reflected the unadorned raw emotions of the music. And following that, I recorded five songs (two original compositions and three adaptations) that covered five different subgenres of the blues and properly documented my newfound sound.

The concept of the project was confusing to many upon first interaction. Oftentimes, when mentioning ‘blues’ and ‘cello’ in the same sentence I received a puzzled look. Some have gone so far to offer their doubts about the combination. And in all fairness to the doubtful, the combination is relatively unexplored. My rebuttal is quite simple, though, in that the cello is my vessel of musical expression. And to express the music within me, I must find a way to utilize the vessel. I have learned to play guitar and sing, both more traditionally associated with the blues, but it was important to me to apply this music to the instrument I have played ever since I was three years old. Thus, after ten months of this project, I have taken the deepest emotions and sounds of the blues inside of me and placed them on the cello.

II. Blues Evolution & Corresponding Recordings

Through research, listening, experimentation, and recording, I am now able to play the cello in an entirely different way that more authentically expresses the blues. Thus, I consider the breadth of my Culminating Experience to be a resounding success in my development as a musician. There are certainly times when my tone reverts back to my classical training. But nevertheless, by giving myself benchmark subgenres to imitate in my recordings (after thoroughly researching and listening to them beforehand), I have ventured into new territory for

the instrument. But in order to properly present my musical development, I must also detail the historical evolution of the music that I followed throughout my Culminating Experience. That research will now be presented alongside analysis of my recordings for chronological consistency.

a. The Shrouded Origins of the Blues

Aligning properly with the mystique of the genre, no scholar can state with certainty how exactly the blues evolved into a musical idiom. By analyzing where most musicians first heard the blues, it seems that the music started to take shape between 1890 and 1910 in the American South.¹ In the second decade of the 20th century, W.C. Handy and other composers began to pen ‘titular’ blues such as “Memphis Blues” (1912) and “St. Louis Blues” (1914), the latter of which demonstrated the now-standard twelve bar harmonic progression.² But in the words of revered Texas-turned-California bluesman T-Bone Walker (regarding “St. Louis Blues”), “That’s a pretty tune, but it’s not the blues. You can’t dress up the blues.”³ Instead, the general consensus of scholarship is that Mamie Smith’s 1920 recording entitled “Crazy Blues” was the first proper blues recording.⁴ Incidentally, that song also launched the race record industry, focusing on African-American music as a commercial product.⁵ Other ‘classic blues’ vocalists such as Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey would follow the release of “Crazy Blues,” but this vaudeville-inspired subgenre would decrease as the Great Depression hit. The stereotypical ‘bluesman’ image of a guitarist sitting on his porch became cheaper to record,⁶ and that – combined with increased

¹ Francis Davis, *The History of the Blues: the Roots, the Music, the People* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2008),

² Ibid, 58-59.

³ Ibid, 60

⁴ Ibid, 57.

⁵ Ibid, 62.

⁶ Ibid, 83.

interest in field recordings from folklorists such as John and Alan Lomax – helped launch the era of what is often called ‘country blues.’⁷⁸

b. The Mississippi Delta: Spiritual Slide Kings

While the Texas wanderer Blind Lemon Jefferson became the first acoustic blues musician to achieve commercial success,⁹ it was in the Mississippi Delta that the blues were most strongly incubated.¹⁰ The area itself, located in the northwestern corner of the state,¹¹ was unsettled until after the Civil War, when an early migration of African-Americans to fertile soil occurred in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s.¹²¹³

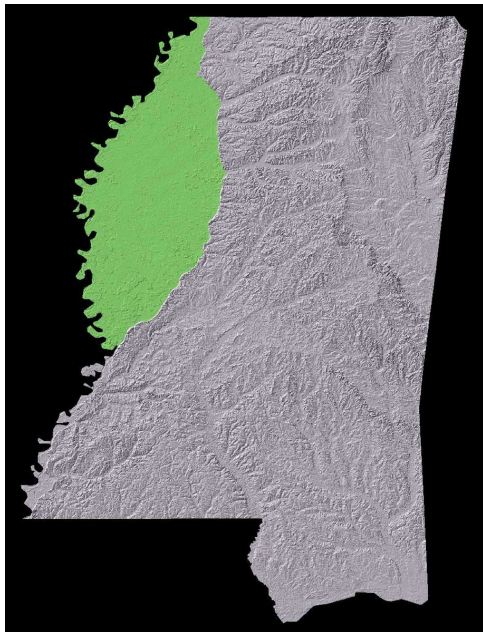


Figure 1: The location of the Mississippi Delta within the state (shaded green). “Mississippi Yazoo Delta” from Wikimedia Commons.

⁷ Ibid, 33.

⁸ I find that ‘country blues’ takes on a wide variety of connotations, but for the most part I associate the term as a larger subgenre containing blues music of only acoustic instruments and oftentimes only one performer.

⁹ Lawrence, Cohn, ed., *Nothing But the Blues: The Music and the Musicians* (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1993), 37. Jefferson’s song “That Black Snake Moan”, recorded in 1926, helped open up the recording industry to country blues artists (from Davis, *The History of the Blues*, 37 and 286).

¹⁰ Davis, *The History of the Blues*, 23-24.

¹¹ “Map of the Counties in the Delta,” *Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area*, accessed June 27, 2017, <http://www.msdelataheritage.com/counties/>.

¹² Davis, *The History of the Blues*, 33.

¹³ Ibid, 46.

Additionally, the popularity of players from that region, from Charley Patton and Son House to Robert Johnson, suggests something unique about Delta blues. And indeed, despite the geographical questions surrounding the truest origins of the blues, scholars often agree that it was in the Mississippi Delta where “the blues evolved from field hollers, work songs, spirituals, ragtime songs, country reels, and Anglo-Scottish ballads.”¹⁴ Francis Davis writes, “Something about the Delta inspired introspection on the part of men whose lives allowed little time for it. Folks there tell you it’s on account of something in the water, and that whatever it is, it also gave birth to the blues.”¹⁵ The Delta holds the greatest stake in the evolution of acoustic blues, and thus received the greatest weight of my acoustic research.

The first notable musician from the Delta was Charley Patton, a “mentor, role model, and waymaker for many other Delta bluesmen.”¹⁶ With a rough baritone vocal tone and a mastery of the guitar both rhythmically and as a knife-slide player, Patton helped launch the popularity of the Delta blues.¹⁷ Patton recorded over 50 songs between 1929 and 1934, and helped launch the careers of Willie Brown and Eddie “Son” House by bringing them along to recording sessions. Other virtuosic singer-guitarists such as Nehemiah “Skip” James and Bukka White (the uncle of B.B. King)¹⁸ rounded out the first generation of great Delta bluesmen, all setting the precedent for the subgenre by symbiotically combining rough and moaning vocal timbre with a pulsing and whining slide guitar.¹⁹ The second half of the 1930’s, though, was defined by a bluesman whose legacy has undergone a regrettable lack of tangible documentation, despite an unprecedented

¹⁴ Ibid, 23-24.

¹⁵ Ibid, 45.

¹⁶ Cohn, *Nothing But the Blues*, 41.

¹⁷ Ibid, 42, 47.

¹⁸ Ibid, 51.

¹⁹ Davis, *The History of the Blues*, 113-115.

popularity of portfolio. Armed with a voice somewhere in between joy and pain,²⁰ legend tells us that a year after being ridiculed by Charley Patton and Son House, this guitarist returned to the Delta scene as a virtuoso. His name was Robert Johnson, and he may or may not have sold his soul to the devil during that year off.²¹

c. “If I Had Possession Over Judgment Day”: Robert Johnson & Adaptation

Johnson’s catalog of recordings defined the Delta sound and eventually was adapted into some of rock n’ roll’s most famous songs.²² And as the champion of the most influential acoustic subgenre of the blues, Robert Johnson and his sound was one that I had to incorporate into my project. Throughout my period of research I found myself drawn to his song entitled “If I Had Possession Over Judgment Day.” Although the song appears to be an amalgamation of different Delta songs (particularly borrowing from Hambone Willie Newbern’s “Roll and Tumble Blues”),²³ Johnson’s original recording showcases many of the most notable musical aspects of Delta blues. His haunting, high-pitched vocals sit high above the constant rhythmic pulse of the guitar, while his manner of playing slide alongside dark lyrics and occasional extra beats give a timeless suspension to the mood of the song.²⁴ These musical intricacies are the challenges I faced in interpreting this song (and the sound of Delta blues) into my own playing.

The first step taken towards emulating this sound involved actually re-tuning my cello. Upon advice from my advisor Casey Driessen, I began to experiment with cross-tunings similar to those in Appalachian fiddle music. Eventually, I arrived at ‘Open D’ by raising the lowest two strings a whole step from the standard tuning of C-G-D-A to the new ‘judgment tuning’ of D-A-

²⁰ *Feel Like Going Home*, directed by Martin Scorsese, featuring Corey Harris (Seattle, WA: Vulcan Productions and Reinbek, Germany: Reverse Angle International, 2003), DVD.

²¹ Davis, *The History of the Blues*, 2.

²² *Ibid*, 133.

²³ *Ibid*, 100.

²⁴ Robert Johnson, “If I Had Possession Over Judgment Day,” composed by Robert Johnson, adapted from “Hambone” Willie Newbern “Roll and Tumble Blues,” recorded November 1936 – June 1937, on *The Complete Recordings* (Sony BMG Music Entertainment 4672462, 1990), Spotify.

D-A.²⁵ Then, the overall resonance of the cello revolved around a tonality just as the guitars of the Delta did, and it became easier to slide up and down the instrument while barring multiple strings at once. Rhythmically, I employed short (often down-stroke) bowings to get the chopping sound of Johnson's strumming, and tried different fills that could give further support and contour to the melody. In addition, in order to gain the accurate feel of the metric timelessness, I transcribed Johnson's rendition of extra beats and followed a similar pattern to give pacing to the vocal melody (Figure 2).

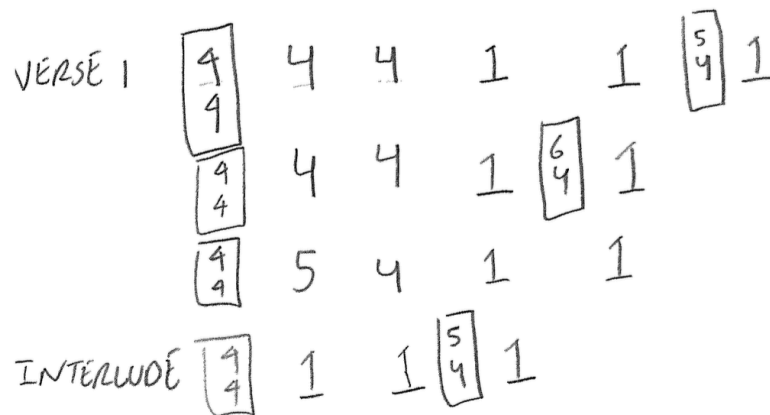


Figure 2: Transcription of a typical verse's meter in "If I Had Possession Over Judgment Day" and the eventual framework for my recording. Song is charted in the Nashville Number system. See full Nashville Number chart in Appendix.

Finally, when I recorded vocals for this song I was nearly shouting, trying to get the pain and character out of my voice that Johnson has. Overall, this cover was a fantastic gateway through which to enter the world of the blues and all the musical elements of the Mississippi Delta.

d. Piedmont Blues: Southeastern Fingerpickers

While the Delta will always be the best-known home of early acoustic blues, other regions had their own interpretations. One unique subgenre came from the coastal Southeastern region of Georgia and the Carolinas and is now referred to as Piedmont Blues. Taking more

²⁵ I have taken the liberty of naming the tuning, just as fiddle tunings are named, given that no precedent exists in the world of the cello.

influence from folk and ragtime music, this style featured a number of guitar virtuosos (such as Blind Blake and Blind Willie McTell) who deftly mixed complex fingerpicking patterns with simple blues form and harmony and a wistful mood.²⁶ Personally, I became interested in this genre both because of its roots in and around where I grew up (Atlanta, Georgia), and because the rhythmic applications of these grooves onto a bowed instrument would provide a rather interesting challenge.

e. “Police Dog Blues”: Blind Blake & Adaptation

Indeed, the groove proved to be the hardest adaptation of Piedmont blues onto the cello. For this case study I selected Blind Blake’s “Police Dog Blues” and sought to emulate both the rhythmic groove of the song and the juxtaposition of harmony between bouncing bass notes. I recorded multiple different grooves and edited the recording together to include an overall development of the rhythm, but in the future it is a cover that can be drastically strengthened by my incorporation of percussive bowing into the rhythmic structure.²⁷ The tune proved, once again, to adapt better to the cello when the instrument was cross-tuned, since Blind Blake’s original composition features open guitar tuning. Originally I experimented in my ‘judgment’ tuning of D-A-D-A, but the tonality felt too dark for both the tune and my voice. The lyrical content concerns a man who gets scared away from an affair because the girl has a mean police dog outside her house.²⁸ Thus, the slight playfulness felt more natural a half step up, despite the challenge of now not having any of the four strings tuned to my muscle memory. My cello was now tuned Eb-Bb-Eb-Bb (‘Open Eb’ or ‘holy tuning’²⁹ a half step above “If I Had Possession

²⁶ Ibid, 119-121.

²⁷ This technique on the cello is quite new for me and I intend to focus heavily on it upon leaving graduate school.

²⁸ Blind Blake, “Police Dog Blues,” composed by Blind Blake, recorded May 1928 – August 1929, on *Complete Recorded Works, Vol. 3 (1928-1929)* (Document 5026, 2000), Spotify.

²⁹ Unlike Judgment tuning, this name does not reflect the tune it was used in as much as the overall timbre of the tuning. I think that the tighter strings sound less ominous and more church-like.

Over Judgment Day”), and I greatly enjoyed the brighter and tighter timbre of the strings and my voice. And similar to my rendition of “If I Had Possession Over Judgment Day”, I used inter-lyrical riffs to enforce the groove and mood of the song. Overall, this song presented a tougher rhythmic structure to adapt to the cello, but nevertheless proved to be a valuable exercise in re-tuning and bowing patterns.

f. Gospel Blues: An Omnipresent Undertone

Entrenched in many early acoustic blues songs is an honest reckoning with spirituality, at a time where the African-American church was growing and “[embracing] eclectic musical expression.”³⁰ Many of the performers were either preachers-turned-rebels (Son House)³¹ or vice versa, but there were also a few performers who consistently combined the early roots of gospel with the grit of the blues. One such performer was Blind Willie McTell, mentioned previously as a leader of the Piedmont Blues movement. The Georgia 12-string guitar virtuoso combined the rhythmic bounce of Piedmont blues with passing chords that occasionally more resembled Gospel music than a standard 12-bar blues.³²³³ However, the greatest of the gospel bluesman was Blind Willie Johnson, a Texas street preacher who utilized drones and slide technique to give a moaning interplay between his coarse voice and his guitar.³⁴³⁵ Johnson’s songs have influenced Led Zeppelin, Eric Clapton, and the Grateful Dead, and his wordless moaning dirge “Dark Was the Night, Cold was the Ground” has been called “the most soulful, transcendent piece in all

³⁰ Cohn, *Nothing But the Blues*, 108.

³¹ Davis, *The History of the Blues*, 108-109.

³² *Ibid*, 116 and 122.

³³ The song “Pearly Gates” exemplifies this, featuring a distinct “B” section to the melody in the lyric “This short life will soon be over / And my vision will be told.” Harmonically, all throughout the song McTell employs tonic chords in the first inversion to get to the subdominant. The harmony is more applied and fluid than a 12-bar blues (recorded in 1949, re-released Atlantic 82366-4, 1975).

³⁴ *Ibid*, 118-119.

³⁵ In the song “It’s Nobody’s Fault But Mine”, standard blues harmony is employed but always with the tonic in the bass. That harmony combines with the difference in register between Johnson’s voice and his thumbing bass notes to give the illusion of three different simultaneous voices (recorded 1927-1930, re-released Columbia/Legacy 65516, 1998).

American music” by Ry Cooder.³⁶ It was included on the Voyager Golden record alongside Bach and Mozart to represent “the diversity and culture of life on Earth.”³⁷

g. “Holy Again”: Original Composition of Gospel Blues in Modern Setting

Artists like Johnson and McTell have had an unmistakable impact on my life. Growing up in the southern church, I felt an instant connection with these musicians who could musically grapple with eternity all while maintaining the soul of the blues. Thus, as I sought to emulate this style of blues-gospel fusion, I wrote an original song entitled “Holy Again” which combines longing religious lyrical content with bass-walking harmony and the use of a drone. The song begins with a *rubato* rendition of the melody (largely suspended over the tonic)³⁸ and then employs a simple (yet not a 12-bar blues) harmonic structure. The groove of this tune was adapted into a relatively modern swing feel, but the elements of the gospel blues still form the foundation. The harmony is detailed in the lead sheet below.

Figure 3: A segment of the lead sheet “Holy Again.” Note measures 11 and 13 as divergences from standard blues harmonic structure. Full lead sheet is included in the Appendix.

³⁶ Shane Ford, *Shine a Light: My Year with “Blind” Willie Johnson* (lulu.com, 2014), back cover, accessed June 28, 2017. Google Books, <https://books.google.es/books?id=X4lGAgAAQBAJ&pg=PA181&dq=blind+willie+johnson+led+zepplin&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjw4rq19N3UAhXDFz4KHUYdDHgQ6AEINzAD#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Compositionally, this introduction was how I wrote the melody and implied harmony of the song.

Creatively, I am pleased with the way the song has developed, but it has since developed even further since recording. I have performed the song live with a band and now play it a faster tempo with a modulation at the end. This version carries more momentum and contrast for listeners. This change reveals the need for a longer workshop stage on my songs before I record them, but I also believe that both the recorded and the live versions represent an engaging way to present acoustic blues music on the cello to a modern audience. The biggest challenges of this song were arranging the groove and the moving parts of a band into a concrete, full arrangement, but fortunately that challenge is always surmountable with excellent musicians in tow. This was, interestingly enough, the first song I recorded as the lead singer of my own music this year.

h. Early Chicago Blues: Preparing for Amplification and Ensemble

While both the Piedmont and Gospel blues subgenres remain somewhat external to the oft-trodden path of blues history, each presents an interesting fusion of typical acoustic blues with elements of other traditional genres. Thus, each case study was a useful exercise for me to develop newfound sounds and styles for my instrument and voice. But as time passed in the history of the genre, the music moved north towards Memphis and Chicago alongside African-American urban inter-war migration.³⁹ There, the music eventually gained amplification and a band. It was only fitting that I follow the same path with my project.

Historically, the origin of ‘urban blues’ or ‘electric blues’ or ‘Chicago/Memphis blues’ is not as clear as some might think. Popular thinking seems to pit the 40’s as the decade where the blues hopped aboard a northbound train from the Delta and all of a sudden became an electric genre. But truthfully, the seeds of a future urban market for the blues were already growing during the golden age of country blues. Tampa Red’s “It’s Tight Like That” may have sounded

³⁹ Davis, *The History of the Blues*, 8.

very ‘country’ in size and sound, but it was actually recorded in Chicago in 1928 and achieved commercial success.⁴⁰ Tampa Red seemed to have one foot in each of the ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ doors, and indeed many other artists and songs were similarly positioned.⁴¹ In fact, Francis Davis states that it is quite difficult to draw definitive distinctions between urban and rural sounds after 1928 because the two worlds were mixed,⁴² concurrent with the evolving migration.

In addition, other influences were certainly at play in the development of an urban sound, especially the piano. The development of blues piano styles was undoubtedly more limited to cities due to the static nature of the instrument, and certainly one can trace the stylistic evolution of the instrument to its eventual inclusion in electric blues bands. Barrelhouse-style players Memphis Slim, Champion Jack Dupree, and Roosevelt Sykes all laid the groundwork for the boogie-woogie movement later championed by Meade Lux Lewis, Jimmy Yancey, and others.⁴³ And in addition to instrumental variety, the music found new manifestations outside of the South and Chicago. The exploits of bluesmen that moved out to California in the late 30’s (virtuosic entertainers such as T-Bone Walker and Lowell Fulson) had a far-reaching impact on the transition between acoustic solo country blues and electric ensemble urban blues.^{44,45}

i. McKinley Morganfield and My First Live Blues Performance

The path, though, that I followed along my research and recordings involved the blues’ foremost protagonists. In 1941, folklorists Alan Lomax and John Work ventured south looking for the legendary Robert Johnson and ended up recording a young man working on Stovall’s

⁴⁰ Ibid, 136-138.

⁴¹ Ibid, 138.

⁴² Ibid, 140-141.

⁴³ Ibid, 148-153.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 162-163.

⁴⁵ The evolution and history of both blues piano and blues from other regions certainly necessitates greater academic treatment but unfortunately extends beyond the scope of my five-subgenre focus. In addition to blues piano and Western blues, the state of Texas has had a strong impact on the development of the acoustic (and eventually electric) genre and only received occasional reference in the scope of my analysis and recordings.

Farms named McKinley Morganfield.⁴⁶ Two years later, Morganfield would uproot his farmhand life and move to Chicago. Morganfield became known as Muddy Waters, and then in 1948 his song “I Can’t Be Satisfied” became an overnight radio sensation on Aristocrat Records.⁴⁷ But even though the song was a huge commercial success and helped propel Muddy, Aristocrat Record (later Chess Records), and the entire Chicago electric blues movement to the next level, the song once again operates between the ‘country’ and ‘urban’ spheres. Twenty years after Tampa Red’s Chicago recording “It’s Tight Like That,” the standard for commercial success was still not full amplification.⁴⁸ Featuring only a hollow-body electric slide guitar and an upright bass, “I Can’t Be Satisfied” has a stripped-down feel. But the addition of the bass adds an unmistakable two-beat groove to the country feel.⁴⁹ Perhaps it is the addition of camaraderie and ensemble that propelled this single to commercial success in 1948 and helped prepare Chicago for an era of amplification.⁵⁰

Incidentally, “I Can’t Be Satisfied” also represents my first foray into the world of singing and playing the blues on the cello, at least in the chronological context of my academic year. During my fall Performance Forum class, I prepared a cover in November of this monumental song for myself to sing and play cello accompanied by a backing band. It was the first time I lead a band on cello, it was the first time I sang lead and played at the same time, and it was the starting point of developing a personal authentic blues tone. The song has now appeared in my live repertoire twice in Valencia. But this song represents only the beginning of the Chicago (and Memphis) urban blues movement. The music expanded greatly into the 1950’s

⁴⁶ However, Johnson had already passed away in 1938. Ibid, 126.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 175-179.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 138.

⁴⁹ Muddy Waters, “I Can’t Be Satisfied,” composed by Muddy Waters / McKinley Morganfield, recorded in 1947, on *His Best 1947 to 1956* (Interscope/MCA/Chess, 1997), originally released in 1948, Spotify.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 179.

to include drums, bass, piano, guitar, and often harmonica. With the steadiness of a band, blues vocalists now had much more freedom to be virtuosic and expressive, and instrumentalists were also able to freely improvise without having to self-accompany. The result was a sound that would lay the groundwork for most popular genres of the second half of the 20th century.

j. “Last Goodbye”: Steadiness of the Ensemble and Corresponding Freedom on the Cello

The band framework of the 1950’s saw a much clearer evolution of the blues into the urban electric sound that has become widespread listening material even today. And after three recording experiences in country blues styles, I sought to record an original song in the slower style of ‘soulful electric blues.’ This would be my fourth subgenre, despite being quite a wide subgenre. Inspiration came from the simple but powerful guitar lines of B.B. King in “3 O’Clock Blues”⁵¹ and the reflective and emotional vocal tone of Howlin’ Wolf and Duane Allman on both of their renditions of “Goin’ Down Slow.”⁵²⁵³ Both songs are relatively straight-ahead 12-bar blues harmonically, with a slow and heavy swing that conveys more of a 12/8 meter than 4/4. Consequently, I wrote a song entitled “Last Goodbye” to emulate the 1950’s steady swing sound of Chicago and Memphis blues bands. The lyrical content of the song deals with a man on his deathbed saying goodbye to his faraway lover, and the steadiness of the band allows the piano and the cello the space to emotionally respond to vocal lines. Also, vocally I had more freedom to improvise in between phrases (and during the cello solo). This allowed me to experiment with my voice to find ways to moan and hum improvisations in between lyrics. Compositionally, there are harmonic substitutions to the general 12-bar

⁵¹ B.B. King, “Three O’Clock Blues,” composed by Lowell Fulson, 1946, recorded in 1952, on *Ladies and Gentlemen...Mr. B.B. King* (Universal 5339086, 2012), Spotify.

⁵² Howlin’ Wolf, “Goin’ Down Slow,” composed by James Burke Oden, recorded in 1961, on *Howlin’ Wolf (“The Rockin’ Chair Album”)* (Vogue 600111, 1962), Spotify.

⁵³ Duane Allman, “Goin’ Down Slow,” composed by James Burke Oden, recorded April 1968- October 1971, on *Duane Allman: An Anthology* (Mercury/Virgin EMI, UMC 663, 1972), Spotify.

harmonic structure (see Figure 4) but overall the form is a straight 12 bar. It was a challenge not to play the cello too classically, since there is quite a lot of space for a slow, emotional solo. In the practice room I had to constantly teach myself to allow each note to speak for itself before vibrating, as a way to offset the classical tone. In addition, mixing the acoustic cello against drums and an electric bass was challenging. But overall this was a great exercise in how to use the cello sparsely but effectively next to my voice with the backing of a band.

Figure 4: The verse’s harmonic structure of “Last Goodbye”, from bar 5 to 16. Full lead sheet appears in the Appendix.

k. Commercialization and Spread of the Genre in the 1950’s

As urban blues continued to develop, the genre began to reach farther than anyone could have imagined. Both Chicago and Memphis saw the rise of powerful aforementioned artists such as Muddy Waters, Howlin’ Wolf, and B.B. King, and cultivated a place for harmonica players as the leaders of blues bands after the virtuosity of Little Walter, Sonny Boy Williamson I and Sonny Boy Williamson II.⁵⁴ Eventually, these cities (specifically Chess Records in Chicago and Sun Records in Memphis) would foster the impetus for rock n’ roll after each label

⁵⁴ Davis, *The History of the Blues*, 186, 193, and 195.

respectively signed Chuck Berry and Elvis Presley.⁵⁵ Those particular blues offspring moved the American public towards rock n' roll in the late 50's and early 60's, and it would then take genre enthusiasts and purists to keep the blues alive in the mid 1960's. These blues fans sought to revitalize the roots of what was becoming increasingly unrecognizable from the blues' Delta roots.

1. Revival and Transatlantic Interpretation in the 1960's

Before revival was ever intentional, though, the semi-acoustic country blues torch was carried by Lightnin' Hopkins and John Lee Hooker in the 1950's and 60's,⁵⁶ who often performed loose solo shows in the style of their predecessors. But effort was additionally made in the middle of the 1960's to actually go find the Delta musicians that had such an impact on so many later bluesmen. In fact, both Skip James and Son House were rediscovered on the same exact day in 1964, and quickly re-debuted at the Newport Folk Festival after around 25 years away from music.⁵⁸ But across the Atlantic Ocean, the blues was just beginning to take hold in the United Kingdom. After visits from American bluesmen on quick European tours, British blues took root in social forums such as the Flamingo Club. There and elsewhere, young Brits that would go on to play in Cream, the Yardbirds, the Rolling Stones, Fleetwood Mac, and the Spencer Davis Group would gather together to learn the blues idiom and apply it to their own voices.⁵⁹ Incidentally, this subgenre of British blues is the avenue from which I was first introduced to the blues. British classic rock artists filled much of my listening discography as a

⁵⁵ Ibid, 209.

⁵⁶ Hooker and Hopkins occasionally played electric or hollow-body electrics, but it was the sound of the music which felt quite stripped down and the most direct relative of the Delta.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 216-219.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 213.

⁵⁹ *Red, White & Blues*, dir. Mike Figgis (Seattle, WA: Vulcan Productions and Reinbek, Germany: Reverse Angle International, 2003), DVD.

teenager, and through them I began to learn the roots of where their music came from. Thus, I thought it fitting that the fifth recording for my project would come from this British school.

m. “The Mayall Medley”: Adapting the Harmonica to the Cello for British Blues

The bulk of my British blues listening focused on *Bluesbreakers with Eric Clapton*, a monumental album featuring Clapton and the bandleader of the Bluesbreakers, John Mayall. The record features songs originally by Robert Johnson and Little Walter, but also includes original material. Overall, Mayall’s harmonica is a driving force, and the band plays in a manner that pushes the lead instruments further forward. This contrasts with the American 1950’s urban style of bands laying back on the beat to give the leader space. From the Bluesbreakers album, though, I selected “Another Man” and “Parchman Farm” as case studies to adapt. The songs largely take place in static harmony, and have somewhat of a jam-rock form that supplements the players’ undeniable blues language. “Another Man”, in the original recording, features only Mayall singing and playing harmonica in call-and-response, each voice on the same simple melody while the band claps along.⁶⁰ Then, “Parchman Farm” has an uptempo swing feel that largely takes place over one chord. The whole tune is given structure by a riff that introduces the song, fills between each vocal phrase, and signals the end of the harmonica solo.⁶¹ Additionally, the song holds historical continuity in the function of my project since Parchman Farm is the nickname of the Mississippi State Penitentiary in the Delta, where all the original bluesmen spent considerable time.⁶²

⁶⁰ John Mayall & the Bluesbreakers, with Eric Clapton, “Another Man,” composed by John Mayall, recorded in April 1966, on *Bluesbreakers with Eric Clapton* (Decca 8448272, 1966), Spotify.

⁶¹ John Mayall & the Bluesbreakers, with Eric Clapton, “Parchman Farm,” composed by Mose Allison, recorded in April 1966, on *Bluesbreakers with Eric Clapton* (Decca 8448272, 1966), Spotify.

⁶² “Parchman Farm,” *Mississippi Blues Trail*, accessed July 3, 2017, <http://msbluestrail.org/blues-trail-markers/parchman-farm>.

For the recording, I placed these two songs together as a medley, and recorded the whole song live with a band. This represented a significant accomplishment for me, given that all of my other recordings have the voice and cello recorded separately so that I could have better editing control. But for this one, the recording necessitated the wild and loose feel of a live studio recording. In order to emulate Mayall's harmonica parts, I tuned my cello D-G-D-G in order to have better control over thirds on the top strings. This tuning ('Open G' or 'Parchman tuning') became the fourth different tuning that I utilized in my five-song recording package (including standard tuning). But for Parchman tuning, the fourth (as an interval) exists on the two outside pair of strings as opposed to only one pair in the middle. This was a much more difficult muscle memory to develop than Judgment or Holy tuning. Furthermore, I tried to bow extra-harshly in order to imitate the drag and pull of a harmonica. Finally, I also transcribed Mayall's harmonica solo from the original recording as inspiration for the undertaking of a monochord solo. The development of motivic ideas alongside the overall emotional and energetic development of the band was a difficult concept to get just right in the recording, but the success of Mayall's solo served as useful inspiration.

These harmonica imitations were my final stop on the journey of the blues. Obviously there are many more performers and subgenres that I could also have interpreted. But these five (Delta, Piedmont, Gospel, Electric/Urban, and British) were selected for their overall importance to the evolution of the sound and for their relevance to my journey. Overall, I covered a lot of ground throughout the history of blues music in its various incarnations around the United States and Europe. But each respective case study and corresponding experimentation on the cello showed me interesting ways to adapt the sounds to my instrument.

III. Reflection

When I listen back to audio recordings of me playing at the beginning of the year compared to now, there is an unmistakable difference in tone and how I convey the emotion of the blues. Simply put, I knew I loved this vast collection of music a long time ago, but I was not able to effectively convey such emotions. My training has always been rooted in classical music, and thus has not translated well to blues. Upon reflection, I am not there yet, tone-wise. But I can confidently state that I am much closer to where I want to be. There are intricacies of my tone that occasionally revert back to my classical upbringing with too much vibrato and not letting individual notes speak. And additionally, there are elements of the blues that I found to be quite difficult to apply to the cello. Given that I am usually imitating guitarists, I have much less overall harmonic support for my voice (when playing solo) than the guitarist-singers of my reference recordings. A bowed instrument with four strings is less effective than one with a pick and six strings. Challenges such as this were roadblocks in my yearlong journey to apply the genre to my instrument, but I will continue to face these challenges head-on.

Nevertheless, I am very thankful for this undertaking because I believe that I have laid the groundwork for where I want to go as a musician. I have gained a considerable wealth of knowledge about this music after the extensive undertaking of research. Having studied and listened to hundreds of blues songs from all different periods and places, I now see the progression of the music and how different sounds and styles will work on the cello. The recording process of the five different subgenres has given me new tools to work with, such as cross tunings, harmonica imitations, and soloing techniques. In addition, learning to sing this music and emulate certain intricacies of different singers (for me, B.B. King, Robert Johnson, Blind Blake, and John Mayall) has given greater character and versatility to my voice. I have gotten closer to my ideal sound in all aspects of my musicianship.

Another interesting factor of my project, though, has been production, recording, and mixing. Before this Master's course I had no experience in production or industry-standard DAW's. But for this project, I decided to test the amount of progress I have made by completing the bulk of the mixing process myself. This was quite a challenge, and it proved difficult to retain perspective about the overall mix (when certain elements of the tracks are quite personal to me). However, as I continue to develop new sounds and techniques with which to play my cello there is still work to be done to figure out how to record and mix the instrument stylistically. For instance, my instinctual reaction for many of my songs was to oversaturate the space with reverb, so as to make the cello sound the way I am accustomed to hearing it in recital halls. This was the most challenging in my original compositions "Holy Again" and "Last Goodbye." Thankfully, my peers and mentors noticed this and helped steer me in a more fitting direction. Lessons such as these will prove very useful for the future. Similar to my overall sound and playing technique, the production aspect of this music is one where I have progressed considerably over the year, but still need to focus on improving moving forward.

IV. Next Steps

Now that the research and recording is complete, I hope to continue pursuing the underlying vision of the project with even more momentum after leaving Berklee, while adding in more contemporary versatility and creativity to my sound. While this project involved a fair amount of experimentation, it was not for the sake of innovation itself, but rather to lay a base for my future artistry and sound. Throughout the year, in addition to my Culminating Experience work, I have begun to perform in this style with a band. This is something I will continue to explore. And as I prepare to move back to the southern United States, I intend to market myself as an artist who simultaneously sings and plays the cello, specializing in blues and roots rock. I

am now armed with a repertoire that I can perform either solo or with a band, and I hope that live performance can become a focal point of my musicianship. However, it will be imperative to start writing more music. My experience with songwriting is far too narrow, as it is something that I have not dedicated much time to throughout my life. And although the blues is a genre where musicians constantly borrow from one another, it is quite plain to see just how much Robert Johnson and Howlin' Wolf's music is influenced by their own artistry and creativity. I am interested to see how my artistic identity and sound will develop as I start writing and arranging more from within as opposed to solely reinterpreting existing material.

Hopefully as I move forward, though, the blues will continue to become the foundation of my playing. Clearly it is a type of music that resonates deeply within my soul, and I want my sound to be most recognizable as that. However, I would also like to invigorate my playing with a touch of other styles as well, such as gospel, rock n' roll, bluegrass, and jazz, to give further dimension to my playing. The blues will be the center of it all, but the best artists are ones who do not allow genre conventions to restrain them. Also, one must consider the archaic nature of the blues. I do not envision my music successfully reinvigorating such an old genre in its original form (though I would like to), but I do hope that with the interpretation onto another instrument (as well as an added flair of different styles), this music can still affect today's listeners.

Finally, as regards to the actual work and recordings that were created for this project, I intend on adding it to my portfolio as a way to showcase my newfound sound. It will not be a full-scale commercial release, as the project has been far more academic than creative for me, but I do intend to place it on SoundCloud and direct interested parties (both from the industry side and the listener side) through my Facebook artist page.

V. Professional Contribution

The aim of this project, when considered in the wide spectrum of music, was about artistic development. But I also hoped to make a professional contribution to (primarily) the cello and (secondarily) the blues. But, as stated previously, I remained conscious throughout the entire experience of not marrying the cello and the blues for the sake of innovation. Innovation for the sake of innovation does not make a meaningful artistic statement. Thus, my focus throughout this experience was on my own musical voice and how to bring two distant musical items in unison with another to successfully develop that voice. Nevertheless, it is my hope that if this sound continues to grow, both the world of the cello and the world of the blues will be impacted.

For the cello, this represents a foray into a new genre for the instrument. Recently, the instrument has seen a tremendous growth in contemporary music, from the hard rock-classical crossover sound of Croatian duo 2Cellos to the folk songs of singer-cellist Ben Sollee and the rhythms of experimental bluegrass cellist Rushad Eggleston. I hope to continue to develop my sound and thereby place blues cello on the list of viable alternatives to classical music for cellists everywhere. In addition, for the blues itself this project offers a fresh take. Perhaps the most notable use of string players in the blues was the Delta group Mississippi Sheiks,⁶³ featuring authentic blues fiddling on tunes such as “Sitting On Top of the World.”⁶⁴ But by adding the cello to that idiom, the possibilities of a sustained bowed instrument with a lower, more supportive harmonic ability could be a useful asset for the genre. Thus, the collateral effect of this project (in addition to its impact on my own artistry) could indeed serve both the instrument’s versatility and the genre’s instrumentation.

VI. Conclusions

⁶³ Cohn, *Nothing But the Blues*, 48.

⁶⁴ Mississippi Sheiks, “Sitting On Top of the World,” composed by Lonnie Chatmon and Walter Vinson, recorded in 1930, on *Stop and Listen* (Yazoo YAZCD 2006, 1992), Spotify.

From the very beginning, it started and ended with a sound. Before the research and the recordings, my goal was to take the music that resonated the most internally and apply it to the musical medium that was the most natural externally. The project itself was certainly not the smoothest road, as the marriage of these polar opposite worlds took patience and constant experimentation. But after a long period of listening and research, with concurrent recordings and experimentations with live performances, I am confident in the future of the blues cello. From singing songs about life and death all by my lonesome just like the Delta bluesmen that I revere so fiercely to leading a band in classic electric blues standards, this entire journey has resulted in a transformation that I could not have foreseen when I enrolled in Berklee. I now believe in the idea more fervently than ever, and I believe much more strongly in myself as an artist. It will be a proving ground next year for me when the blues cello has to compete in the actual music industry. But I am quite grateful for the encouragement that I have received from mentors and peers along the way, and I am brimming with excitement to see the future of the blues cello and my own artistry.

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IX. Appendix: Charts and Transcriptions

Full Nashville Number Chart for personal arrangement of "If I Had Possession Over Judgment Day"

IF I HAD POSSESSION
OVER JUDGMENT DAY

Robert Johnson

(adapted from "Rollin' and Tumblin'" - Hambone Willie Newbern)

Key

D

INTRO 4
4 1 1⁷/7 4/3 4-3
1 1⁷/7 4/3 4-3
1 slides 1 5
4 1
walkdown

VERSE 1 4
4 4 4 1 1 5
4 1
4
4 4 4 1 6
4 1
4
4 5 4 1 1

INTERLUDE 4
4 1 1 5
4 1

VERSE 2 = VERSE 1

SOLO 4
4 4 4 1 1
4 4 1 1
5 4 1 5
4 1

VERSE 3 = VERSE 1

INTERLUDE 2 = INTERLUDE 1

VERSE 4 = VERSE 1 (but last bar 5
4)

VERSE 5 = VERSE 1

OUTTRO IMPROV

Full Nashville Number chart for personal arrangement of "Police Dog Blues"

POLICE DOG

Traditional - Blind Blake

key
E^b

Harmony - Verse & Solo

1	4	1 ⁷	1 ⁷
4 ⁷	4 ⁷	1 ⁷	1 ⁷
5 ⁷	4 ⁷	1 ⁷	1 ⁷

Intro

1 1 5⁷ 4⁷ 1⁷ 1⁷

Form

Intro

V1

V2

Solo 1

V3

V4 - quiet

Solo 2

V5

V6 - groove change

Outro Improvised

Full lead sheet for "Holy Again"

FORM
 SLOW INTRO OVER A
 8 BAR INTRO G7 (IN TIME)
 A - VERSE 1 & 2
 B - BRIDGE
 A - VERSE 3 & PIANO/CELLO SOLO
 B - 2ND BRIDGE
 A - VERSE 4 (PIZZ) & VERSE 1 w/ TAG

HOLY AGAIN

VERSE 1 (A)
 OH LORD, BE MY ROCK, MAKE ME
 HOLY AGAIN
 HOLY AGAIN, AND TAKE AWAY MY
 SIN
 OH LORD, BE MY ROCK, MAKE ME
 HOLY AGAIN
 TAKE THIS WORLD FROM MY HAND
 AND MAKE ME WHOLE

SCOTT PETERS
VERSE 2
 OH LORD, BE MY LIGHT, GUIDE
 ME SAFELY ON
 TO THE LAND, WHERE JOY SHALL
 NEVER END
 OH LORD, BE MY LIGHT, GUIDE
 ME SAFELY ON
 GUIDE THIS WORLD SAFELY ON
 TO OUR HOME

A GOSPEL BLUES $\text{♩} = 80$ G7

5 C7 G7

9 G7 G7/B C7

13 Eb7 D7 1. G7

17 2. G7 G7/B C7 **B**

STOP SECOND TIME

21 G7 C7

25 D7 FIRST TIME C7

29 G7 C7

33 A7 D7 DA CAPO

BRIDGE (B)
 DOWN HERE (WAITING ON YOU LORD, PRAYING JUST FOR
 MORE
 OF YOUR LIGHT IN OUR LIVES TO GUIDE US ON
 MAY THIS SONG BE OUR CRY TO LET OUR OLD SELVES DIE
 WITH YOU OH LORD WE CAN RISE

VERSE 3
 DRAW ME NEAR, DRAW ME NEAR, CLOSER UNTO THEE
 UNTO THEE, OH LORD, IN YOUR PRESENCE I AM FREE
 DRAW ME NEAR, DRAW ME NEAR, CLOSER UNTO THEE
 DRAW US NEAR AND MAKE US HOW WE SHOULD BE

VERSE 4
 BE OUR PEACE, BE OUR PEACE, BRING US TO OUR KNEES
 WHERE WE SEE THINGS CLEAR, WE'RE ALL JUST SINNERS
 HERE
 BE OUR PEACE, BE OUR PEACE, BRING US TO OUR KNEES
 WHEN YOU COME BACK OH LORD I WILL BE THERE

Full lead sheet for "Last Goodbye"

Last Goodbye

INTRODUCTION

Scott Peters

Chords: E7, F#7, B7/F#, G#7, C#m7, F#(sus4), B7, E7, B7, E/B, B7, E7, E7, F#7 (v. 1 & 3), B7, B7/A, G#7 (not in solo), C#m7, F#7, F#7(#5), B7.

FORM

- Intro
- V1 (cello fills, TA: B7 G#7 C#-7 F#sus)
- V2 (pno fills, TA: B7 D7 G7 F#sus)
- Solo TA: Walkdown
- V3 (stops on first 3 bars, all B7)(TA: B7 E7/B B7 F#sus)
- V4 (TA: B7 B7/A G#7 then TAG last vocal line)
- TAG: Pno walkup from C#-, band out on F#sus
In on B7 E B7(drum cue)

Verse 1

My time has come, and I never had
the chance to say goodbye
My time has come now, and I never
had the chance to say goodbye
The world done pulled us away, and
I can't find the reason why

Verse 2

She gave me a good life, and I never
ever seen her cry
She gave me a good life, and I never
ever seen her cry
Maybe she'll remember me sweetly,
until the day she dies

Verse 3

The world is smaller now
When I am looking down
Watching over my baby
And always asking how this came
to be
How did my time come so soon?
Now I'm just a faint old memory,
for my baby to hold on too

Verse 4

I will be waiting, for my woman
to join me over there
I will be waiting, for my woman
to join me over there
Oh don't you seek on after me,
Our time will come by and by
(2x)

Full transcription of John Mayall's harmonica solo in "Parchman Farm", transposed to G Major

Parchman Farm

John Mayall Harmonica Solo, 1:03-2:07

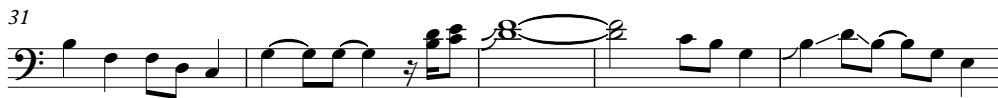
Composed - Mose Allison

Transcribed - Scott Peters

Transposed up a semitone from original F# Major

$\text{♩} = 250$

Swing



2

54

Musical notation for measures 54-60. Measure 54 starts with a bass clef and a key signature of one flat. It features a sequence of chords: a triad of G2, Bb2, D3, followed by a dyad of G2, Bb2, then a dyad of G2, D3, and finally a triad of G2, Bb2, D3. Measures 55-57 each begin with a dynamic marking 'v' (accents) over a dyad of G2, Bb2, followed by a dyad of G2, D3. Measure 58 starts with a dynamic marking 'f' (forte) over a triad of G2, Bb2, D3. Measures 59 and 60 continue with the triad of G2, Bb2, D3.

61

Musical notation for measures 61-65. Measure 61 begins with a bass clef and a key signature of one flat, containing a sequence of chords: G2, Bb2, D3, G2, Bb2, D3, G2, Bb2, D3, G2, Bb2, D3, G2, Bb2, D3. Measures 62-65 continue with similar chordal patterns, including dyads and triads of G2, Bb2, D3.

66

Musical notation for measures 66-68. Measure 66 starts with a bass clef and a key signature of one flat, featuring a sequence of chords: G2, Bb2, D3, G2, Bb2, D3, G2, Bb2, D3, G2, Bb2, D3. Measures 67 and 68 continue with similar chordal patterns, including dyads and triads of G2, Bb2, D3.

69

Musical notation for measures 69-72. Measure 69 begins with a bass clef and a key signature of one flat, containing a sequence of chords: G2, Bb2, D3, G2, Bb2, D3, G2, Bb2, D3, G2, Bb2, D3. Measures 70-72 continue with similar chordal patterns, including dyads and triads of G2, Bb2, D3.

Chart of form arrangement for recording of John Mayall Medley

PARCHMAN FARM

Uptempo Swing

♩=250

MOSE ALLISON

as played by John Mayall & the Bluesbreakers

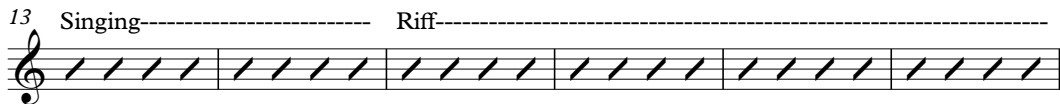
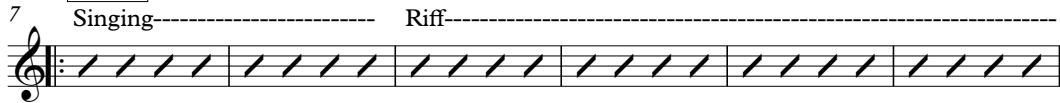
INTRO

Band IN

G⁷



VERSE



INTRODUCTION : *ANOTHER MAN* (J. MAYALL) FORM

(melody not charted) ♩=125

Instrumental - claps 2 & 4

V1 "another man"

V2 "from the county farm" add bass

V3 "i don't know his name" add shaker

Instrumental, add double-time feel

PARCHMAN FARM FORM ♩=125

Intro

V1 "sittin over here on parchman farm"

V2 "puttin that cotton"

Monochord Solo Cue w/ Riff

V3 "sittin over here on #9"

V4 "gonna be here for the rest of my life"