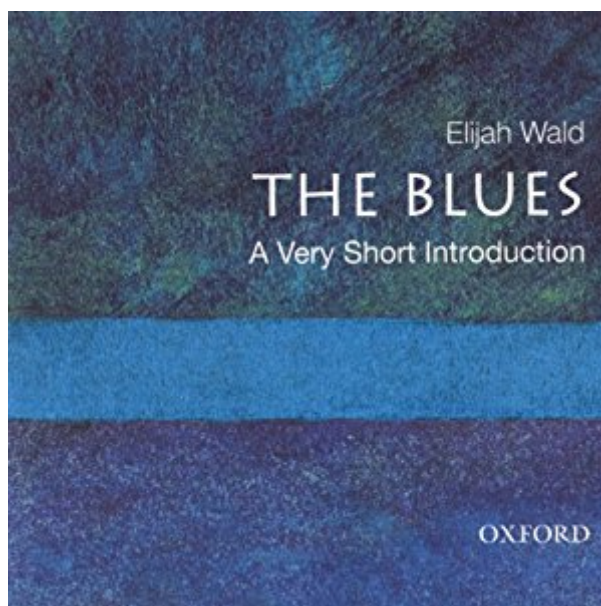


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# The Blues: A Very Short Introduction



## Synopsis

Praised as "suave, soulful, ebullient" (Tom Waits) and "a meticulous researcher, a graceful writer, and a committed contrarian" (New York Times Book Review), Elijah Wald is one of the leading popular music critics of his generation. In *The Blues*, Wald surveys a genre at the heart of American culture. It is not an easy thing to pin down. As Howlin' Wolf once described it, "When you ain't got no money and can't pay your house rent and can't buy you no food, you've damn sure got the blues." It has been defined by lyrical structure, or as a progression of chords, or as a set of practices reflecting West African "tonal and rhythmic approaches", using a five-note "blues scale". Wald sees blues less as a style than as a broad musical tradition within a constantly evolving pop culture. He traces its roots in work and praise songs, and shows how it was transformed by such professional performers as W. C. Handy, who first popularized the blues a century ago. He follows its evolution from Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith through Bob Dylan and Jimi Hendrix; identifies the impact of rural field recordings of Blind Lemon Jefferson, Charley Patton, and others; explores the role of blues in the development of both country music and jazz; and looks at the popular rhythm and blues trends of the 1940s and 1950s, from the uptown West Coast style of T-Bone Walker to the "down home" Chicago sound of Muddy Waters. Wald brings the story up to the present, touching on the effects of blues on American poetry, and its connection to modern styles such as rap. As with all of Oxford's Very Short Introductions, *The Blues* tells you - with insight, clarity, and wit - everything you need to know to understand this quintessentially American musical genre.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 4 hours and 24 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Audible Studios

Audible.com Release Date: May 6, 2013

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B00CHQ8FMA

Best Sellers Rank: #155 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Musical Genres > Blues

#234 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Arts & Entertainment > Music

## Customer Reviews

The author does an outstanding job, within the 125-page limit prescribed for Oxford University Press's "Very Short Introduction" series, of presenting a thorough overview of American blues. His history stretches from West African call-and-response traditions up to the present day. Along the way he gives concise but clear and illuminating coverage to:- The 1920s "blues queens" (notably Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Mamie Smith, Ethel Waters)- 1920s-1930s country blues (with separate sections devoted to each of the three major regional styles: Texas (Blind Lemon Jefferson), Piedmont (Blind Willie McTell, Blind Blake), and Mississippi Delta (Charlie Patton, Robert Johnson))- Prewar "urban blues" (a mostly piano-based style associated with juke joints and the emergence of boogie-woogie; Leroy Carr, Roosevelt Sykes, Peetie Wheatstraw)- 1940s jump blues (Louis Jordan); "West Coast" blues (T-Bone Walker, Nat King Cole); and rhythm & blues (Big Jay McNeely, Ike Turner, Little Milton)- 1950s Chicago-style electric blues (Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Elmore James)- 1950s rock'n'roll (Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Elvis Presley)- The 1960s folk-blues revival (Mississippi John Hurt, Reverend Gary Davis), and- 1960s blues rock (The Rolling Stones, Eric Clapton, Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix)And that's only the first half of the book. In the second half, the author devotes one chapter to the relationship between blues and jazz; one chapter to the influence of blues on country music; and a final chapter to the language and poetry of the blues. The author's deep knowledge of and passion for the subject come across throughout the book. I can't imagine a better-constructed brief overview of blues music. And as icing on the cake, the book contains both a useful guide to further reading and a thorough index.

A very important book for someone who knows very little about The Blues. Clear and well-written, the author has opened up a music genre as well as provided an accessible and serious insight the history of the USA I felt enlightened from reading it!

Excellent, concise but comprehensive history of "old" blues up to modern pop music. Couldn't put it down.

This was a shockingly good overview, clear and concise. Highly recommended.

Excellent book.

Short, concise, and thoroughly enjoyable...

The book is quite informative to give some introduction about the blues.

As in the title, the only fault if this book is that it's almost too short. While others have said that it is repetitive and offers nothing new, it's a great book whether viewed as a primer or a "Cliff's Notes" of the blues, and well-written and free of pontification to boot!

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