Sweet Home Chicago:
The Geography of the Blues

Pre-trip presentation

Presented by
Brian and Michelle Tomaszewski
Penn State
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What is the Blues?

“the very act of singing of one's sorrows provided a partial release from them but at the same time such singing also provided entertainment” (Rowe 1975:15)

“A good man's way of feeling bad”
Heritage

- African Americans, Slavery/post-Civil War

http://hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/SlaveTrade/collection/large/NW0341.JPG
Heritage

- Mixing with other styles, ethnic groups

Sol Hoopi - Hawaiian Style

“Black Ace” - Blues played Hawaiian Style
The Geography of Blues Styles

- “Delta”
- “Piedmont”
- “Texas”
- “County” - rural regions
- “Urban” - electric, other styles
The Blues comes to Chicago

- Migrations from the south to the north started early as 1915 – people, mainly African Americans, brought the music with them.
- 1940’s – agriculture becomes mechanized, farm laborers out of work.
- Move to Chicago for jobs - steel mills, stockyards, foundries, packing-plants.
- Later, come to join relatives, exponential.
Modes of Migration

- Ease of transportation via roads and trains links the Mississippi Valley to Chicago
- Illinois Central railroad
- Highway 61
Transportation Network Generalization

- Chicago is main rail hub
- Numerous links
- Easy for people from rural regions to come to Chicago
Migrating the sound... Migrating the sound... Rural to Urban – acoustic instruments to electric

http://www.muddywaters.com/art/record.gif

“County Blues”
Muddy Waters
Stovall, Mississippi, 1941

http://www.muddywaters.com/photos/gallery8.html

“I Can't Be Satisfied”
Muddy Waters
Chicago, 1947
The “Urban” Sound

- Adds drums, bass, piano, heavy harmonica
- Less individualistic
- More drive, “raw sound”

“Smokestack Lightnin’”
Howlin’ Wolf

“Sloppy Drunk”
Jimmy Rogers
Black Neighborhoods in the 1950s

- Biggest population was on the South Side
- Lots of blues clubs in this area

Rowe 1975: 210
Chicago’s Historic Club Scene

- State St., where we’re going, was main thoroughfare
- Many record studios were here as well
Other Blues Outlets: Maxwell Street

Jim Brewer, 1980, Maxwell Street
http://www.wirz.de/music/brewer/grafik/brewer14.jpg

Maxwell Street, 1982
http://www.tribo.org/marcokempner/maxwellst.jpg

Maxwell Street, 1982
http://www.suntimes.com/special_sections/bluebros/images/day3_4.jpg
Geography of Record Studios

- Race recording studios
- Early on, record studios sent talent scouts to the south and then brought popular artists to record in Chicago studios
Record Row (1960’s)

- Where we are going
- Hot-bed of recording from late 50’s to 60’s
- Blues, Soul, Jazz
- Mostly forgotten today

http://www.modchicago.com/nf/archive/recdrow.html
Chess Records

- Brothers Leonard and Philip, Polish born immigrants, settled in Chicago in 1928
- Owned bars on the predominantly Black south side
- Muddy Waters one of first recording successes
- Prompted them to look for other Country Blues artists

Rowe 1975: 64-65
Blues Today and Tourism

- Corporate operations: e.g., House of Blues (Dan Ackroyd)
- Local clubs: Checkerboard Lounge, Kingston Mines, B.L.U.E.S. – sell souvenirs, sell the “ambiance”


http://maroon.uchicago.edu/photos/11.4.05-jack-checkerboard.jpg
Maxwell Street Today

- University of Illinois at Chicago re-developed old neighborhood – effort was made to preserve but failed
- “New” Maxwell Street Market on Canal Street
- Still has blues music

http://www.hpzs.com/images/UIC%20Maxwell.JPG
http://www.suntimes.com/special_sections/bluebros/images/day3_1.jpg
Other Blues Outlets

Chicago Blue Festival (City and Corporate sponsorship)
CHICAGO BLUES ARCHIVES (CBA)

Archives History | Blues Books | Chicago Blues Archives Brochure
Download Honeyboy | Speakin' of the Blues | Use of Archives

Compiled by librarians at the Music Information Center, Visual and Performing Arts Division of the Harold Washington Library Center, home of the Chicago Blues Archives. To ask a blues question or make an appointment, call 312-747-4850.
Bibliography


Time to head out to Chess records...

- Stay together
- Taking bus