



Delta Blues: The Life and Times of the Mississippi Masters Who Revolutionized American Music

By Ted Gioia

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“The essential history of this distinctly American genre.”?Atlanta Journal-Constitution

In this “expertly researched, elegantly written, dispassionate yet thoughtful history” (Gary Giddins), award-winning author Ted Gioia gives us “the rare combination of a tome that is both deeply informative and enjoyable to read” (*Publishers Weekly*, starred review). From the field hollers of nineteenth-century plantations to Muddy Waters and B.B. King, *Delta Blues* delves into the uneasy mix of race and money at the point where traditional music became commercial and bluesmen found new audiences of thousands. Combining extensive fieldwork, archival research, interviews with living musicians, and first-person accounts with “his own calm, argument-closing incantations to draw a line through a century of Delta blues” (*New York Times*), this engrossing narrative is flavored with insightful and vivid musical descriptions that ensure “an understanding of not only the musicians, but the music itself” (*Boston Sunday Globe*). Rooted in the thick-as-tar Delta soil, *Delta Blues* is already “a contemporary classic in its field” (*Jazz Review*). 38 illustrations

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Gioia (*The History of Jazz*) succeeds admirably in the daunting task of crafting a comprehensive history of the art form known as the blues, depicting the life story of the music from its cradle in the Mississippi Delta all the way to its worldwide influence on contemporary sounds. His sweeping examination focuses on the legends in detail, including Charley Patton, Son House, Tommy Johnson, Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker, Howlin' Wolf, B.B. King and many more. He often deconstructs myths, such as the story that both Tommy Johnson and Robert Johnson made midnight deals with the devil at the crossroads, and digs deep to clarify many murky stories, including untruths and wild speculations about the life and early death of Robert Johnson. His narrative follows the northern migration of the blues to Chicago, where Muddy Waters recorded for Chess Records, and along the way he analyzes the influence of Delta blues on Elvis, the Rolling Stones and other rock 'n' roll icons. Gioia dissects many songs, but he doesn't write beyond the understanding of general readers, creating the rare combination of a tome that is both deeply informative and enjoyable to read. (*Oct.*)

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From [Booklist](#)

A decade after *The History of Jazz* (1997), Gioia is back with some blues history. Even casual fans know the tales of deals with the devil in which the supplicant bargains for preternatural musical talents. Gioia merrily dissects those and other myths while, for all intents and purposes, comprehensively updating Robert Palmer's *Deep Blues* (1981). Applying sound research methods, Gioia addresses the contention that the blues masters weren't trying to create great art but merely trying to eke out a living by pointing out that the artistry latter-day fans decry results from their dedication as performers, regardless of aesthetic intentions. Adherence to internalized stock artistic conceits, amplified by cultural isolation, eventuated in a body of art almost in spite of the fortunes of the individual performers. And speaking of individual performers, Gioia updates the biographies of blues players from legendary dealer-with-the-devil Robert Johnson to B. B. King, according special attention to less-celebrated musicians, such as Reverend Robert Wilkins, whose "That's No Way to Get Along" became the Rolling Stones' "Prodigal Son." --Mike Tribby

Review

"...the passionate blues singing of Mississippi's steamy cotton fields ultimately gave rise to rock'n'roll. Ted Gioia expertly traces its colourful history and heroes." Books of the Year 2008, *The Economist* "[A] rich and illuminating study... Gioia, who has researched thoroughly and listened carefully, does a splendid job of telling the story on a broad canvas..." Mick Brown, *The Daily Telegraph* "Gioia's depth of research is breathtaking...The author's sheer passion for the music comes through on every page, and you can almost hear those old shellac 78s as you read his descriptions." *thebookbag.co.uk* "He uses original research, interviews with reliable sources and his own calm, argument-closing incantations to draw a line through a century of the Delta blues." *International Herald Tribune* "Gioia's intermittently brilliant and always compelling investigation of the blues is marked with a musician's ear for the form and a fan's enthusiasm for both the recordings and the artists." *The Herald*

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