

# FOLK ROCK MUSICIANS BORROW FROM BLUES, TOO

By CRAIG MODDERNO  
Tribune Staff Writer

"Rock is like a battery," says Eric Clapton of Blind Faith, one of the leading blues guitarists. "It always has to go back to blues to get recharged, to restore its energy."

The musical sounds of country, basic hard rock and electrified blues are taking over today's rock-pop music scene.

The Beatles' country-flavored "Get Back," Bob Dylan's debut album as a country singer, "Nashville Skyline," and the recent popularity surge of Johnny Cash and Glen Campbell demonstrate the financial acceptance of what pop arts once laughingly referred to as hillbilly music.

But the big change in the rock field is the rebirth of the blues. Once the lifeblood of jazz trumpeter Louis Armstrong and the big bands of Duke Ellington and Woody Herman in the 1920s, the blues background is the Mississippi Delta and its form is a simple three-line verse structure.

When The Beatles, Dylan, The Rolling Stones and The Animals emerged on the rock scene, their strong background in the blues was a

widely overlooked part of their music. Now the artists who influenced these rock groups — Bessie Smith, Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker and Jimmy Reed — are once again hearing their music through the songs of Canned Heat, Ten Years After and Steppenwolf.

Today's blues singers are experiencing an enormous popularity at dancehalls and their music keeps the cash boxes ringing. Blues artists no longer are confined to small nightclubs; they now perform in huge — and crowded — ballrooms, often with the smell of marijuana seeping through their over-amplified sounds.

Blues artists such as Chuck Berry, B.B. King, Lightin' Hopkins, Elvin Bishop and Albert King receive standing ovations when they headline shows at Fillmore East and West. The current blues revival also has brought quick success to such relative newcomers as the Steve Miller Blues Band and blues singer **Johnny Winter**.

Winter said in a recent Newsweek article of this \$300,000 record contract: "I went from total nothingness to



**JANIS JOPLIN—BLUES FOR FUN AND PROFIT**  
Former singer with Big Brother . . . etc.

"Minglewood Blues" and "Viola Lee Blues," and provided them with the dynamic electric beat that is a forerunner of the blues today.

Janis Joplin, 26-year-old former lead singer with Big Brother and the Holding Company, belts the blues for fun and profit.

"When you sing a song that means something to you," Janis says, "you turn everything back inside yourself and just sort of explore."

Mississippi-born B.B. King, 43-year-old undisputed champion of the blues, says, "Janis Joplin sings the blues just as hard as any black person."

But Steve Katz, lead guitarist of the jazz-blues Blood, Sweat and Tears, wonders how Miss Joplin's success in the rock field has affected her feelings for her music.

"When you're making \$10,000 a night, you can't sing of hard luck and trouble," says Katz. "Janis is selling something she no longer is. How can you be a blues superstar? It's such a contradiction in terms."

The music of the Creedence Clearwater Revival best demonstrates the fusion of rock and blues today. Their songs describe life amongst bayous, green rivers and small obscure towns.

Cast in country settings of the Delta area, songs describing the pain of the blues, "The Working Man" and "Penthouse Pauper," are delivered through a hard, driving rock beat of three guitars and drums.

"I guess all the time I've been living on the bayou in my head," explains El Cerrito's John Fogerty, leader-songwriter of Creedence and perhaps the best of the male rock-blues singers.

"When I used to get super uptight at the world, I used to drive on the freeway and open my lungs and scream," he says. "That's what singing the blues is all about."

It's impossible to predict how long blues will stay in the rock spotlight. But now the rock music fan has been exposed to this foundation of American popular music. Whatever music style evolves, the blues will be a major contributor.

everything. I'd been put down for years for singing the blues and suddenly everyone liked me and wanted to hear me."

When Duke Ellington was asked what types of music exist, he replied: "There are only two types of music — good and bad music."

Paul Butterfield of the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, one of the first American rock musicians to play the blues, says, "Blues is any kind of music that comes from feeling."

Soul music has been described to this writer by Smokey Robinson as "the inward emotion or feelings of anybody as expressed in a song."

If soul and blues are not the same musical expression, then the great singing of Ray Charles, James Brown and the late Otis Redding combines the two musical forms to create their own unique singing styles.

For years the blues have been expressed only through the cadences of black men and women whose songs generally described the aches and pains of living in the Mississippi Delta. One of the best

black blues singers, 44-year-old Albert King disagrees on their limitations.

"Anyone can have the blues," says King. "A little baby, crying in his crib for his bottle; if he doesn't get it, he's got the blues."

Blues singer-guitarists Eric Clapton and John Mayall from England, Paul Butterfield and Mike Bloomfield of Chicago, and Canada's David Clayton-Thomas received critical acclaim in the rock music industry for their records before the current blues demand.

The Grateful Dead and the Jefferson Airplane, the last remaining San Francisco groups from the psychedelic rock splurge in 1967, recorded some blues songs in their earlier albums.

While the Airplane's "Young Girl Sunday Blues" and "Blues From an Airplane" seem rock-oriented, the group's lyrics and vocals project a strong identification with the blues.

The Dead, however, took a modern blues favorite, "Good Mornin' Little School Girl," and two original tunes, "New



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