

Elements of Blues Style

Melody

The blues began as a lamentary chant with irregular phrase structure and free rhythm. Gradually, it developed into a simple repetitious twelve-bar melody, consisting of three brooding descending phrases with a driving rhythmic accompaniment. Each musical phrase corresponds to one line of the three-line blues stanza, with an instrumental interlude.

bar: I've got a girl — she's al - right with me, Lord, if she quits me I'll throw my-self a way. —

Often one or more initial eighth notes precede the phrases in the form of an upbeat.

etc.

In order to follow the changing harmony, the musical phrases can be altered chromatically (a), or transposed to another pitch above or below (b).

I IV I IV V

The melodic line of the blues cannot be judged in the same way as that of a classical piece, or even in the same way as another kind of popular melody. It furnishes only the framework for creative improvisations and ceaseless embellishments; the performer being more or less the spontaneous composer.

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