

PLAY GUIDE



LOW DOWN DIRTY BLUES

BY RANDAL MYLER & DAN WHEETMAN

— INCLUDING THE GREATEST HITS OF —

**MUDDY WATERS, MA RAINEY,
HOWLIN' WOLF, MAE WEST,
PEARL BAILEY, SOPHIE TUCKER**

...AND MANY MORE!



CELEBRATE THE BAWDIER
SIDE OF THE BLUES AT

BIG MAMA'S

TUCSON

MAR. 10-31

2017



2018



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Low Down Dirty Blues Play Guide by Katherine Monberg, with contributions from ATC Learning & Education staff.

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ABOUT ATC

Under new leadership, and now celebrating its 51st season, Arizona Theatre Company boasts the largest subscriber base of any performing arts organization in Arizona, with more than 130,000 people each year attending performances at the historic Temple of Music and Art in Tucson, and the elegant Herberger Theater Center in downtown Phoenix. Each season of carefully selected productions reflects the rich variety of world drama – from classic to contemporary plays, from musicals to new works – as audiences enjoy a rich emotional experience that can only be captured through the power of live theatre. Touching lives through the power of theatre, ATC is the preeminent professional theatre in the state of Arizona. Under the direction of Artistic Director David Ivers in partnership with Managing Director Billy Russo, ATC operates in two cities – unlike any other League of Resident Theatres (LORT) company in the country.

ATC shares the passion of the theatre through a wide array of outreach programs, educational opportunities, access initiatives, and community events. Through the schools and summer programs, ATC focuses on teaching Arizona's youth about literacy, cultural development, performing arts, specialty techniques used onstage, and opens their minds to the creative power of dramatic literature. With approximately 450 Learning & Education activities annually, ATC reaches far beyond the metropolitan areas of Tucson and Phoenix, enriching the theatre learning experience for current and future audiences.

Mr. Ivers and Mr. Russo continue to work on strategic planning, creative thinking, and adventurous programming all aimed at serving the current mission:

To inspire, engage and entertain - one moment, one production and one audience at a time.

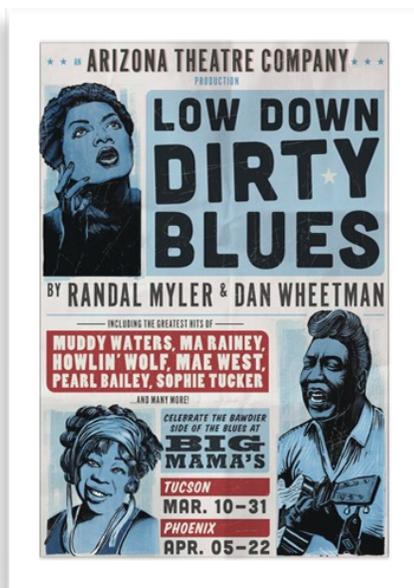


The Temple of Music and Art, the home of ATC shows in downtown Tucson.



The Herberger Theater Center, ATC's performance venue in downtown Phoenix.

INTRODUCTION TO THE PLAY



Show art by Esser Design.

LOW DOWN DIRTY BLUES

By Randal Myler and Dan Wheetman

Directed by Randal Myler

The club may be closed, but the party is just heating up! This sizzling musical revue finds a group of veteran blues musicians assembled for an after-hours jam session to swap stories and share their favorite low down dirty tunes, pulled from the greatest hits of Muddy Waters, Mae West, Ma Rainey, Sophie Tucker, Howlin' Wolf, Pearl Bailey, and many others. Featuring nearly two-dozen smokin' songs filled with passion, soul, and a love of life, these hot rhythms celebrate the bawdier side of the blues and are guaranteed to keep the theatre sultry and steamy from the first note to the last. The creative team that tore down the house at ATC with *It Ain't Nothin' But the Blues* and *Love, Janis* turns up the heat with this uniquely rousing, raucous musical event!

SONG LIST

Act I

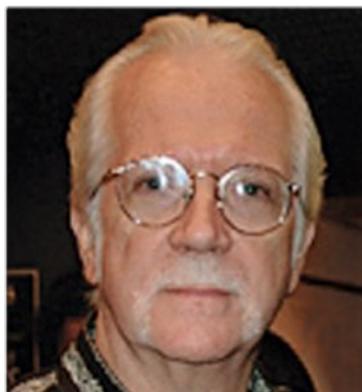
"They Call Me Big Mama" Felicia, Steve, Calvin, Chic
 "Rough and Ready Man" Felicia, Steve, Calvin, Chic
 "Crawlin' King Snake" Chic, Felicia
 "Come on in My Kitchen" Chic
 "My Stove's in Good Condition" Felicia, Steve, Calvin, Chic
 "Born Under a Bad Sign" Felicia, Steve, Calvin, Chic
 "Rub My Back" Full Cast
 "Don't Jump My Pony" Felicia, Steve, Calvin, Chic
 "Mojo Hand" Chic, Shake
 "I Got My Mojo Workin'" Full Cast
 "You Bring Out the Boogie in Me" Chic, Steve, Calvin
 "Big Leg Woman" Full Cast
 "If I Can't Sell It" Full Cast
 "Baby What You Want Me to Do /
 Rock Me All Night Long" Full Cast

Act II

"How Dare You" Chic, Shake, Calvin, Steve
 "Hey Baby" Chic, Calvin
 "I'm Not That Kind of Girl" Full Cast
 "Shake Your Money Maker" Shake, Steve, Calvin, Chic
 "Spoonful" Shake, Steve, Chic, Calvin
 "I'd Rather Go Blind" Felicia, Steve, Calvin, Chic
 "Death Letter" Shake, Calvin, Chic
 "Good Morning Heartache" Felicia, Shake, Calvin
 "Change is Gonna Come" Chic, Shake, Calvin
 "Lord I Tried" Felicia, Steve, Calvin
 "Nobody's Fault But Mine" Full Cast
 "Every Day I Have the Blues" Full Cast



MEET THE CREATORS



Creator and director Randal Myler.

Randal Myler (Writer and Director) ATC: *Ring of Fire*, *Hank Williams: Lost Highway*, *It Ain't Nothin' But the Blues*, *Love, Janis*, *The Immigrant*, *Touch the Names*, *Woody Guthrie's American Song*. Broadway: *It Ain't Nothin' But the Blues* (Tony® nomination). Off-Broadway: Lincoln Center, Brooklyn Academy of Music, Little Shubert, Promenade, Manhattan Ensemble, New Victory Theatre, Village Gate, B.B. King's, New World Stages. Regional Theatre: Bucks County Playhouse, Kennedy Center, Mark Taper Forum, Arena Stage, Denver Center, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Geffen Theatre, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, Northlight Theatre, Crossroads Theatre, San Diego's Old Globe, Seattle Repertory Theatre, Alley Theatre, Laguna Playhouse, Dallas Theater Center, Grand Ole Opry, Cleveland Play House, Virginia Stage Company, Kansas City Repertory Theatre, California Theatre Center, TheatreWorks, Portland Center Stage, Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Bay Street Theatre, Arkansas Repertory Theatre, Meadow Brook Theatre, Zach Scott Theatre, San Diego Repertory Theatre, Vineyard Playhouse, Tacoma

Actor's Guild, Houston Stages, Rubicon Theatre, Ensemble Theatre Company, PCPA TheatreFest, Barter Theatre, Blowing Rock Theatre, The People's Light Theatre, Ivoryton Playhouse, Virginia Stage Company, Florida Studio Theatre, Coconut Grove Playhouse, Marine's Memorial Theatre, and others.



Creator Dan Wheatman.

Dan Wheatman (Writer) is a multi-instrumentalist singer, songwriter, and playwright. Previous ATC credits include *Woody Guthrie's American Song*, *It Ain't Nothin' But the Blues*, and *Hank Williams: Lost Highway*. Mr. Wheatman has received several awards for his musical direction, including LA Critics Drama-Logue Awards, Bay Area Critics Award, and a Tony® nomination for the book of *It Ain't Nothin' But the Blues*. His plays have been produced in several regional theatres around the country, such as the Denver Center Theatre, Lone Tree Performing Arts Center, Geffin Playhouse, Meadow Brook Theatre, Milwaukee Rep, and Stages Theatre, among others. He was a member of John Denver's band for eight years, wrote a song for Kermit the Frog, and recorded a 78rpm record with the cartoonist R Crumb and the Good Tone Banjo Boys, and plays in the band Marley's Ghost.



MEET THE CHARACTERS



Performer Shake Anderson, who plays Shake in ATC's production of *Low Down Dirty Blues*.



Performer Felicia P. Fields, who plays Big Mama in ATC's production of *Low Down Dirty Blues*.



Performer Calvin Jones, who plays Bass in ATC's production of *Low Down Dirty Blues*.



Performer Steve Schmidt, who plays Keyboard in ATC's production of *Low Down Dirty Blues*.



Performer Chic Street Man, who plays Jelly in ATC's production of *Low Down Dirty Blues*.

HISTORY OF THE BLUES

The blues is a musical genre that is deeply tied to American cultural history, particularly the African-American experience. The blues first emerged from the sharecropper economy of the American South near the end of the 19th century, where slaves and ex-slaves composed and sang to accompany the intensely demanding work of growing and harvesting cotton and vegetables on southern plantations.

The term “blues” has several possible origin stories, though many are related to the concept of feeling “blue” as in sad or melancholy. A state of sadness was often described prior to the 1800s as having “blue devils,” which is thought to have originated in Britain as a description of the vivid hallucinations that can accompany severe alcohol withdrawal. By the 1800s, the term was generally used to describe a state of depression or agitation, and was widely associated with drinking alcohol; “blue laws” are still active in certain states in the U.S., which prohibit the sale of alcohol on Sundays.

Most blues music is generally comprised of a specific series of notes known as a blues scale, as well as common, recognizable chord progressions such as the 12-bar blues. Blue notes, also known as “worried notes” are usually thirds or fifths that are flattened in pitch, forming an easily recognized aural element that is augmented by a repetitive rhythm effect known as the groove.

Blues music is also associated with certain lyric, bass, and instrumentation patterns. Traditional blues verses from the early days of the genre frequently consisted of a single lyric repeated four times, and progressed in the early 20th century to an AAB pattern consisting of a single line that is repeated twice, followed by a longer, different concluding lyric.

Early blues also often told stories as loose narratives, and is noted for particular musical elements including the use of blue notes and a common call-and-response format. The style itself is generally noted for its evolution from African spirituals and chants, work songs, field hollers, country dance music, revivalist hymns, and folk music.

After the legal dissolution of slavery, continuing racial discrimination and Jim Crow laws continued to enforce racial segregation, leading to the development of juke joints as places for African-American communities to socialize. Juke joints became instrumental in the further popularization of the blues, which came to be a highlight at the informal social establishments which also featured food, drink, dancing, and sometimes gambling.

Though the blues first originated in the Mississippi River Delta, as the style was popularized, unique geographies added their own influences to create regional variations. The first published appearance of blues sheet music was in 1908, and has since evolved into a wide variety of subgenres and styles, including country blues like the Delta blues and Piedmont blues, and more urban styles like Chicago blues and West Coast blues. World War II marked the first introduction of the electric blues, and expanded the blues to a wider international audience.



Exterior of a juke joint in Belle Glade, Florida, photographed by Marion Post Walcott in 1944. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.



Blues Around the World

West African Heritage

The blues first emerged as a chronicle of hardship, love, and religion in the time of American slavery. Songs took on traditional West African forms such as work songs, call-and-response, and spirituals, and were usually passed through oral tradition and accompanied by a wide variety of simple, easily available instruments like harmonicas, horns, and clapped percussion. As the blues evolved and spread throughout the U.S., pianos and guitars became the most popular accompaniment, especially when musical recordings became popularized.

Mississippi Delta

The Mississippi Delta blues is regarded as the original American blues, evolving from the musical traditions brought to the U.S. – and particularly to the Mississippi Delta – from Africa through the institution of slavery. First noted as a unique style in the 1800s, Mississippi Delta blues often included spoken rather than sung lyrics, featured irregular rhyming patterns, and was associated with melodic simplicity and loose vocal phrases, as well as solo musicians with perhaps a single accompanying instrument. Mississippi Delta blues is still associated with authentic and raw vocal stylings, the presence of slide guitar and harmonicas, and an intense sense of rhythm.

Chicago and Detroit

Beginning around 1920, a massive migration of people began to move toward urban centers, where industrialization had cultivated more jobs and the development of cities. Blues in these cities was often performed by bands and noted for general amplification of the style, both in volume and the emotional charge of song lyrics and performances.

Louisiana and Texas

Louisiana and Texas gave rise to numerous blues styles, incorporating the musical influences also brought to the region by immigrants from France and Spain, as well as Creole and Cajun migrants. This regional blues style often included a piano as the central instrument, and often featured horns.

Memphis and St. Louis

During the Great Migration in the 1900s, during which time more than 6 million African-Americans left the rural South for more urban centers elsewhere in the U.S., blues musicians brought the blues styling of the Mississippi Delta to new geographies, where it blended with other regional styles. The blues music of Memphis and St. Louis is noted for its smooth, soulful, rich, and upbeat qualities, and incorporated elements from country music and gospel to form the foundation of future rock and roll. Duo performances were common in this part of the country as were jug bands, featuring makeshift instruments such as jugs or washboards.

WHO'S GOT THE BLUES: REFERENCES IN THE PLAY



Bessie Smith, c. 1936.
Photograph by Carl Van
Vechten.

Bessie Smith

Bessie Smith is generally regarded as the most popular female blues singer of the 1920s and 1930s. Known as the Empress of the Blues, she was first hired as a dancer with the a small traveling troupe that featured well-known singer Ma Rainey, eventually signing with Columbia Records and beginning her own recording career in 1923. She became the highest-paid black entertainer of the 1920s, and continued performing on Broadway and in film even after the advent of the Great Depression decimated the recording industry.



Big Mama Thornton, c. 1955.

Big Mama Thornton

Willie Mae “Big Mama” Thornton was known for her deep, powerful voice and her strong, independent personality. She was known for a new kind of blues that was being popularized in the clubs of Texas and Los Angeles in the 1950s, characterized by jumpy rhythms, wisecrack lyrics, and lots of brass, and is best known for her 1952 recording of “Hound Dog,” re-recorded just a few years later by Elvis Presley.



The only known photograph of
Blind Lemon Jefferson, c. 1926.

Blind Lemon Jefferson

Lemon Henry “Blind Lemon” Jefferson, known as the “Father of the Texas Blues,” was one of the most popular blues singers of the 1920s. He was noted for his distinctive, high-pitched voice and his highly-skilled guitar playing, and became known for his “old-fashioned” sound, musical confidence, and impressive vocal range.



Howlin' Wolf, c. 1972.

Howlin' Wolf

Chester Arthur Burnett, known as Howlin' Wolf, was a Chicago blues singer, harmonica player, and guitarist from Mississippi. His booming voice and impressive stage presence made him one of the best-known blues artists of Chicago, and was named by *Rolling Stone* in 2011 as one of the 100 Greatest Artists of All Time.



Junior Wells, c. 1996.

Junior Wells

Amos Wells Blakemore Jr., known as Junior Wells, was a Chicago blues vocalist and harmonica player known for his pioneering of the amplified blues harp-style that came to be associated with Chicago. His signature song "Messin' with the Kid" and his 1965 album *Hoodoo Man Blues* were his best known works, and he helped popularize the blues to rock audiences when he toured with the Rolling Stones in the 1970s.



Muddy Waters, c. 1975.

Muddy Waters

McKinley Morganfield, known as Muddy Waters, is often regarded as the "Father of Modern Chicago Blues", and is credited with recording many works now considered to be blues classics, including "Hoochie Coochie Man" and "I'm Ready." His use of amplification in performance is often regarded as the link between Delta blues and rock and roll, and he is noted as one of the greatest influencers on later American music like rock and roll, hard rock, jazz, and country music.

Sunnyland Slim

Albert Luandrew, better known as Sunnyland Slim, was a blues pianist who moved from the Mississippi Delta to Chicago, and was integral to the development of the Chicago blues style and scene. He is noted for a blues style with heavy bass, vamping chords with the left hand, tremolos with the right hand, and a loud, declamatory style.

GLOSSARY

Ambitious: Having or showing a strong desire and determination to succeed.

Astor's Horse: An idiom meaning "ostentatious," a reference to Mrs. William Astor of late 19th century New York society, who was noted for lavish wealth and sparing no expense on sumptuous and well-known gala parties. Anyone who appeared dressed up beyond normal was ridiculed as "Astor's plush [or pet] horse."

Boogie: A Blues style played on the piano with a strong, fast beat.

Bronzeville: A Chicago neighborhood.

Burgundy: A deep red color, like that of burgundy wine.

Cadillac: A large luxury car, the most prestigious General Motors brand.

Checkerboard Lounge: A historical blues nightclub on the south side of Chicago, established by L.C. Thurman and Buddy Guy.

Chess Records: An American record company founded in Chicago in 1950, and specialized in blues and R&B.

Depression: Reference to the Great Depression, the major economic crisis that began with the stock market crash of 1929 and continued through much of the 1930s.

Ed Sullivan Show: An American television variety show that ran from 1948 to 1971, hosted by Ed Sullivan and which showcased many famous comedians and musicians of the time.

Gardenia: A tree or shrub of the bedstraw family, with large, fragrant flowers often white or yellow in color.

Jockey: A person who rides in horse races, especially as a profession.

Lennon Sisters: An American vocal group of sisters from the 1950s and 1960s.

Mojo: A magic charm, talisman, spell, or power.

Shirk: To avoid or neglect a duty or responsibility.

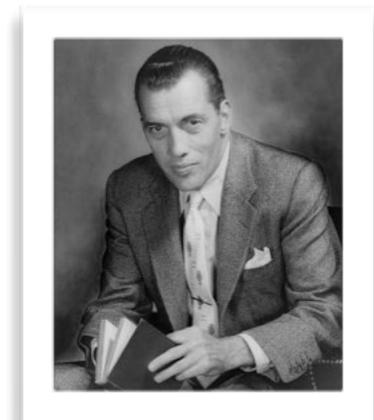
Tempo: The rate or speed of motion or activity, especially used in reference to the pace of a passage of music.

The Lawrence Welk Show: American televised musical variety show hosted by big band leader Lawrence Welk from 1951 to 1971.

Trifling: Unimportant or trivial.



Mrs. Astor, the ostentatious wife of businessman William Astor.



Ed Sullivan, c. 1955.



The Lennon Sisters.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES

Discussion Questions

1. Research origin stories for the Blues genre and discuss its global and cultural history. How does the genre's evolution map the African-American experience?
2. How does music tell a story? Discuss storytelling through music and choose a song that might be representative of you and your own personal story. The song can be from any genre and era. Dive deeper and try breaking down each era or genre of music to select one song that represents you from each - see how these tunes compare or contrast. What does this personal musical timeline look like? What does it say about you?
3. What moments or anecdotes told by the characters/musicians informed your understanding of blues history? How did they use their "jam session" to open up history for you?
4. Which character(s) from the play did you connect with the most and why?
5. Which song(s) from the play did you connect with the most and why? Had you heard these songs before?
6. What production elements from the show were your favorite? Why?
7. Dive into the lives of the Blues Pioneers mentioned and referenced throughout the show. Research their stories and discuss as a class how music influenced their lives and how their music influenced others.

Classroom Activities

1. Print out lyrics to one of the songs in *Low Down Dirty Blues* for each of your students. Each student will analyze the structure that these lyrics follow and the story in the song. Start by identifying how the song conforms to the AAB blues format, with the first two lines in the verse being the same and the third, different; the A line presents an issue, while the B line presents the conclusion. Then have them discuss the story in the song.
2. Using the blues format (three lines of four measures each with the rhyme scheme of A A B), students will compose a blues song or poem. Give students a few minutes to brainstorm a short story about which to write their own blues song. Topics might include asking someone out on a date, completing a homework assignment, or performing in a school event. Students can work individually or alone and should present their work to the class when finished.
3. Have students research a particular blues artist and prepare a presentation for the class complete with biographical information. In addition, music or theater students should prepare a performance in the style of this artist.



4. Much that became rock 'n' roll was borrowed from the blues, both in terms of the music and the lyrics. To have students consider the lyrical legacy of the blues on popular music, ask them to complete a side-by-side comparison of blues song lyrics and popular song lyrics from the same era, taking examples from the 1950s, 1970s, and today. Some of the points they might compare would be the kind of social or personal message in the lyrics, the grouping of stanzas, repetition of lyrics, use of slang and whether or not the song tells a story.
5. Blues music has a vocabulary all its own. Terms such as bottleneck slide, diddly-bow, field hollers, blue note, urban blues, juke joint, "Lucille," etc., may not be familiar to students. Have your students construct a Blues Vocabulary Guide and illustrate it along with their definitions.
6. Have your students research the history and influence of blues music in America. As a class, create a blues timeline from the early 1900s through today. Include references to different states or geographical areas that have been especially relevant to the generation of blues music at different times.