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Early Blues: The First Stars Of Blues Guitar



Synopsis

Winner of the 2016 Living Blues Award for Blues Book of the Year Since the early 1900s, blues and the guitar have traveled side by side. This book tells the story of their pairing from the first reported sightings of blues musicians, to the rise of nationally known stars, to the onset of the Great Depression, when blues recording virtually came to a halt. Like the best music documentaries, *Early Blues: The First Stars of Blues Guitar* interweaves musical history, quotes from celebrated musicians (B.B. King, John Lee Hooker, Ry Cooder, and Johnny Winter, to name a few), and a spellbinding array of life stories to illustrate the early days of blues guitar in rich and resounding detail. In these chapters, you'll meet Sylvester Weaver, who recorded the world's first guitar solos, and Paramount Records artists Papa Charlie Jackson, Blind Lemon Jefferson, and Blind Blake, the "King of Ragtime Blues Guitar." Blind Willie McTell, the Southeast's superlative twelve-string guitar player, and Blind Willie Johnson, street-corner evangelist of sublime gospel blues, also get their due, as do Lonnie Johnson, the era's most influential blues guitarist; Mississippi John Hurt, with his gentle, guileless voice and syncopated fingerpicking style; and slide guitarist Tampa Red, "the Guitar Wizard." Drawing on a deep archive of documents, photographs, record company ads, complete discographies, and up-to-date findings of leading researchers, this is the most comprehensive and complete account ever written of the early stars of blues guitar—an essential chapter in the history of American music.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Jas Obrecht eloquently describes the pioneers and shows how they defined the sound of blues guitar for future generations." — William Ferris, author of *Give My Poor Heart Ease: Voices of the Mississippi Blues* "Jas Obrecht has long been recognized for his writing on the blues and he shows a keen grasp of both the music of these guitar masters and the life experiences that shaped their blues. No other book has been written with this particular focus, and Obrecht offers material that will be new even to readers who have been familiar with this music for many years." — Jim O'Neal, founding co-editor, *Living Blues* magazine "Early Blues: The First Stars of Blues Guitar shines a light on an era of blues history that warrants historical and critical examination. Obrecht does not disappoint; he has delivered a tightly focused and meticulously researched study of the first generation of blues guitar heroes." — *Living Blues Magazine* "If you have the slightest interest in blues, guitar, or traditional American music, do not hesitate and purchase this book as soon as you can. It is a textual and visual treat, something that all too seldom comes our way and Jas Obrecht, as expected, has done a brilliant job. You'll not only be proud to have this volume on your bookshelf, you will undoubtedly wear out the pages by constantly referring to it for the endless amount of information and enjoyment that it provides." — Lawrence Cohn, producer of Grammy-winning *Robert Johnson: The Complete Recordings* and author of *Nothing But the Blues* "If you love the blues you owe yourself a journey into its primordial years. No question, *Early Blues* is a fine place to begin exploring this rich, complex American music." — *Vintage Guitar* "Blues aficionados will find the material familiar and inspiring and it will prompt one to reference recordings perhaps long unheard. For the serious blues novice as well as long time fans." — *Cadence Jazz & Blues Magazine* "It's not merely a book for guitarists, though any serious guitarist would benefit greatly from Obrecht's depth of knowledge and the superb detail he provides regarding guitar models, tunings, chord progressions and the like for each of his chosen subjects. His erudition on such matters illuminates and entertains in a way that few books of this sort do." — *Vivascene* "Any reader can count on a well-written, well-researched and very readable account of the ground it covers, thoroughly worthy of attention on that basis." — *Blues & Rhythm* "This book is a must for anyone serious about the blues." — *CHOICE* "[An] excellently researched book that will delight blues fans." — *Jive Talk*

Jas Obrecht is an award-winning music journalist and former editor of *Guitar Player* magazine. He has written for *Rolling Stone*, *Living Blues*, *Blues Revue*, and many other publications. His books

include Rollin' and Tumblin': The Postwar Blues Guitarists and Blues Guitar: The Men Who Made the Music.

Mr. Obrecht provides us with short biographies on nine prolific musicians that contributed to the development of American Blue's music. This compendium covers the lives of: Sylvester Weaver, Papa Charlie Jackson, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Blind Blake, Blind Willie Mctell, Blind Willie Johnson, Lonnie Johnson, Mississippi John Hurt and Tampa Red. When I finished the book, I had a desire to further learn about each musician and their music. I think this book is perfect for new and long time fans of Blues Music and the convenience of this 222pg book is that it is easy to get through on a lunch break or bus ride, allowing one to modify a playlist for work or a glass of bourbon at night. Bottom Line: This book is a portal into the world of early Americana and if you have an interest or know someone with an interest in Blues or music alone, I would highly recommend it!

My old colleague, Jas Obrecht, has written a definitive history of the first blues guitar stars who emerged in the 1920s or earlier, including Sylvester Weaver, Papa Charlie Jackson, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Blind Blake, Blind Willie McTell, Blind Willie Johnson, Lonnie Johnson, Mississippi John Hurt, and Tampa Red. Obrecht has been a blues scholar for more than 40 years. His reputation and writing as a Guitar Player magazine editor and freelance work with Living Blues magazine, among others, has given him face-to-face access to the most articulate and knowledgeable blues scholars and musicians in the world, including Ry Cooder, Samuel Charters, Paul Oliver, Gayle Dean Wardlow, Peter Guralnik, Jorma Kaukonen, Rory Block, John Hammond, John Lee Hooker, B.B. King, Stefan Grossman, Jim O'Neal, Johnny Shines, Johnny Winter, Keith Richards, Billy Gibbons, and Robert Palmer. Each guitarist has his own chapter where Jas brings them to life with anecdotes and stories from their contemporaries, those who have researched their lives, and a historical look at the impact of their music on culture. His detailed descriptions of each player's style, their instruments, and influence on those who followed is sure to delight any guitarist and repeatedly send you to YouTube if you don't yet have their music in your collection. Published by the University of Minnesota Press, the book is meticulously footnoted and indexed and represents a significant contribution to the history of the blues.

I really enjoyed this book, especially after the last four or five books on early Blues musicians were so disappointing. Obrecht does a nice job of telling you what he knows. And if he is not sure, he mentions that as well (unlike other authors who wildly speculate about the lives of these musicians.)

And finally the author's style is easy to read.

At long last, a definitive and beautifully written book on this era of American musical culture.

This is a great biography of a few of the early blues guitar players.

I have only just begun reading this book, and am almost half way through. It is very exciting to read about the history of blues music from it's roots, including the early blues masters who are still relevant today. This book is a wonderful passageway back in time, and leaves me imagining what it must have been like to be in Chicago, (just one of the key places), during the birth, and shaping of the blues. I am eager to get back to reading this book. My husband and children are all avid readers who will snatch this book up when I'm finished, and it will be a great topic for conversation. The list of benefits from reading this book is endless. This is a must have book for a blues collector!

Jas concisely brings together innumerable primary sources, newspaper articles, author interviews/correspondence with top researchers/artists, Living Blues articles, official artist records, liner notes, etc. into an enjoyable, eclectic, and meaningful analysis of pre-war blues. Jas traces the origins of blues music through a commercial, social, and musical lens. He has successfully written a thorough analysis of prewar blues, with emphasis on 9 pre-war blues guitars (listed below). The book is filled with rare photos, illustrations, early advertisements, and 78rpm label images from repositories and private collectors alike. Anyone without it has an incomplete understanding of prewar blues. Of great interest for blues enthusiasts, completionists, and musicians alike! The First Stars of Blues Guitar provides concise chronologies of the following 9 prewar blues guitarists: Sylvester Weaver, Papa Charlie Jackson, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Blind Blake, Blind Willie McTell, Blind Willie Johnson, Lonnie Johnson, Mississippi John Hurt, Tampa Red.

Jas Obrecht has a deep love and knowledge of early blues, and all things guitar, that runs through these pages. The fluid writing style is characteristic of his extensive body of work, well known to his longtime fans. I love this music and the book captures it beautifully. Here's to the next installment and decade!

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