

The Classic Blues or Classic Female Blues were an Urban Blues form that originated with the mixing of commercial compositions with authentic folk material and nascent jazz in the acts of southern stage performers and Black vaudeville artists, primarily women, who toured widely. The first recording was Mamie Smith's landmark, "Crazy Blues" in 1920, also the first blues of any kind recorded by an African-American. By 1923 songs like Bessie Smith's "Gulf Coast Blues" / "Down Hearted Blues" were selling close to 800,000 copies. Other major Classic Blues artists included "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, Ida Cox, and Trixie Smith. Ma Rainey claimed to have first heard this 'strange sound' in 1902, and that she offhandedly named it 'the blues.'

Accompaniment was piano driven, sometimes with a jazz combo having brass, woodwind and kit drum. Bessie Smith's accompanists were the cream of the jazz crop, including Fletcher Henderson, Coleman Hawkins and Louis Armstrong. The vocal delivery in a classic blues was strong and full voiced, lyrics usually about a man "who done her wrong" or a tide-turning woman-in-control theme, usually humorous and littered with double entendres.

These sophisticated Classic Blues recordings by dance band orchestras and female vocalists actually precede their source material, as the folk male blues were not actively recorded until 1926 beginning with Texan Blind Lemon Jefferson.

By 1932 the depression ostensibly ended the recording of both Southern Country and Classic Blues artists. The era for 'race' records ended as fewer and fewer people had money to spend, and musicians joined a general migration North in search of work. Some Classic Blues vocalists, like Alberta Hunter, lived long enough to reach new audiences through the folk revival of the 1960s.

<i>other names or sub-genres :</i>	<i>Classic Female Blues Female Blues</i>
<i>era :</i>	<i>1920s - 1930s</i>
<i>place :</i>	<i>Chicago New York Kansas City North America USA</i>
<i>meter :</i>	<i>duple 4/4 most common</i>
<i>tempo :</i>	<i>Slow - moderate mid-tempo</i>
<i>instrumentation:</i>	<i>piano or piano, trumpet or coronet, clarinet, kit drum sometimes bass</i>
<i>player or group configuration :</i>	<i>solo piano accompaniment small jazz combo</i>
<i>vocalization :</i>	<i>solo voice</i>
<i>lyric content :</i>	<i>woman's point of view bold empowered ribald double entendre sex metaphors love gone bad physical love revenge</i>
<i>authenticity :</i>	<i>modern</i>
<i>song or music structure or form :</i>	<i>commercially composed jazz and ragtime influenced lyric song lament</i>
<i>song or music sound description :</i>	<i>acoustic unamplified melancholy powerful heart-felt tragic urban</i>
<i>gender :</i>	<i>female</i>
<i>remember :</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UPFRONT FEMALE VOCALIST • JAZZY BLUES PIANO OR SMALL COMBO ACCOMPANIMENT • STRONG WOMAN'S POINT OF VIEW • DONE HER WRONG LYRICS • RIBALD

<i>artist</i>	<i>song</i>	<i>specific keyword</i>
<i>Mamie Smith</i>	<i>Crazy Blues</i>	<i>New York</i>
<i>Alberta Hunter</i>		
<i>Bessie Smith</i>	<i>Down Hearted Blues</i>	<i>New York</i>
<i>Ida Cox</i>	<i>Graveyard Dream Blues</i>	<i>Chicago</i>
<i>Sippie Wallace</i>	<i>Up the Country Blues</i>	<i>Texas</i>
<i>Victoria Spivey</i>	<i>Black Snake Blues</i>	<i>Texas</i>
<i>Ma Rainey</i>	<i>BoWeavil Blues</i>	<i>Chicago</i>