

# Moving the delta blues' gained public recognition[1]. he

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Moving forward into 1930s, Robert Johnson (1911 - 1938), also known as the 'King of the Delta Blues' gained public recognition<sup>1</sup>. He became famous not only because he could play a wide range of guitar styles such as country blues and jazz<sup>2</sup>, but he has also mastered very complex guitar styles. He is said to have adapted the 'piano's lush chordal complexity' to the guitar<sup>3</sup>. To elaborate, one of Johnson's style is the ability to sound like couple men are playing guitar at the same time, where one guitar plays the bass notes and the other plays melodies on higher notes<sup>4</sup>. He achieves such an effect by using a thumb pick for lower strings and fingerpicking the higher strings. 'Sweet Home Chicago' is one example that exhibits the style, illustrated by Figure 2 below.

The lower string is always played in constant while the higher string has a different melody, creating a sound similar to two guitars playing simultaneously. Figure 2 (Bar 4 and 5 of 'Sweet Home Chicago')<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, it can be noticed that the melody on higher notes are usually descending while the bass notes remain constant in the first two bars. Many of his songs have this pattern such as 'Crossroads Blues' and 'Kind Hearted Woman Blues', This also gives the effect of a guitar duet. Another complex guitar style by Robert Johnson is the use of a slide, a technique derived from playing the diddley bow. The player wears a metal/glass tube (slider) to slide over the strings from one fret to another to create a glissando effect. <sup>5</sup> 'Travelling Riverside Blues' requires this technique after Johnson sang '... barrelhouse all night long'<sup>6</sup>. Note that the sliding technique was used after Johnson sings a line of verse in the above example ('Travelling Riverside Blues') as a response to the high-pitched vocals.

The practice of singing a line a verse and then playing the guitar (not necessarily a slide) imitates the call and response style, which is featured in many of Robert Johnson's songs. Johnson also uses a technique named 'corner loading'. If possible, he plays the guitar towards a corner wall that is right-angled to each other. This increases the bass response as well as the ambience in the room<sup>7</sup>.

To conclude, Blind Lemon Jefferson's style is built around his singing, which can be seen by his unique melody structure (I-IV-IV) and silent gaps. He has also adopted the string bending extensively. On the other hand, Robert Johnson's style emphasizes on technical skills of the guitar, such as sliding and alternating picking patterns that sounded like there were multiple guitars being played.

Despite having different styles, they both were great guitarists from the 19th Century that brought significant influences to the world of music. <sup>1</sup> Edward Komara, *Encyclopedia of the Blues*, vol. 1 (New York: Routledge, 2006). <sup>2</sup> Elijah Wald, *Escaping the Delta: Robert Johnson and the Invention of the Blues*, 1st ed. (New York: Amistad, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Tom Evans and Mary Anne. Evans, *Guitars: From the Renaissance to Rock* (London: Paddington Press, 1979). <sup>4</sup> Andy Aledort, "Robert Johnson Lesson: Unlock the Guitar Mysteries of the Delta Blues Great," *Guitar World*, May 08, 2017, accessed January 20, 2018, <https://www.guitarworld.com/lessons/deep-unlocking-guitar-mysteries-delta-blues-great-robert-johnson>. <sup>5</sup> Rick Batey and Frank Explicit, *The American Blues Guitar: an*

Illustrated History (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard Corp., 2003). 6 "" Travelling Riverside Blues - RobertJohnson."" AZLyrics, accessed January 20, 2018, <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/robertjohnson/travelingriversideblues.html>.

7 Allan Moore, *The Cambridge Companion to Blues and Gospel Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).