

Part 4

You are going to read an extract from a book about music. For questions 34–40, choose the answer (A, B, C or D) which you think fits best according to the text.

Mark your answers on the separate answer sheet.

Folk Music & Blues Music

The most crucial, as well as the most frequently overlooked, point about 'folk music' is that the constituency whom it most truly represents doesn't consider it to be 'folk music', but simply their music. 'Folk music' is, invariably, a term applied from outside the cultures and communities to which it refers. In terms of theory, 'folk music' – the traditional set of forms, styles and songs indigenous to a people, a culture or a locale – is radically distinguishable from 'art' music, of both the classical and avant-garde varieties, and from 'popular' music, mass-produced for and mass-marketed to a mass audience. In practice, it's getting harder and harder to tell them apart.

Before the advent of recording, distinctions between categories of music were not so much based on the music itself as on who it was by and for. Such distinctions were a reflection of the class system, which is not surprising since these are essentially European definitions, and reflect prevailing European social structures. European classical music operates according to a strict hierarchical structure, with the composer (the monarch, so to speak) at the top. The composer's wishes are interpreted and enforced by the conductor (the general) and carried out by the orchestra (the troops). During their lifetimes, the great composers often also functioned as the featured soloists, but after their deaths their music became fixed and formalised; those who succeeded them rarely inherited their licence to improvise.

The classic model of 'folk' is the similarly formal tradition of the Anglo-American ballads, with their fixed musical structures and set narrative lines. To perform one of these ballads, a singer is by definition required to preserve intact both its storyline and its musical setting. The Anglo-American use of the term 'folk' music implies that such music exists, simply and solely, to fulfil the needs of a particular community. They develop it by and for themselves over a period of centuries as part of a single collective process, only slightly more personal to any given individual than the shaping of a rock by water. Through oral transmission, it filters down through the generations, serving both as a touchstone of the community's history and values, and as an index of how its communal life has changed. It is this latter attribute which many traditionalists find alarming or repugnant. For them, the key element is the preservation of a piece's pure and unsullied essence, and the imposition of an alien style onto a traditional piece is deemed an act of presumption

verging on outright heresy: at the very least, it effectively amputates the piece from its native roots.

In the blues world, the picture is far more complex. Blues obeys a different set of imperatives and simultaneously holds the following truths to be self-evident: yes, there is a strong and very clearly defined tradition, and, yes, its practitioners are expected to improvise freely within it, recreating it anew to meet the immediate needs of both performer and audience. There are set themes, and there are specified functions: dance songs, work songs, celebrations, laments, love songs, hate songs, and so forth. The tradition is unfixed; indeed, it demands to be freshly reinvented with each performance, recreated anew to reflect the changing needs and circumstances of its time and place. Blues artists both ancient and modern have worked from a 'common stock' of folk materials: instrumental motifs and vocal tics, melodies, lyrical tags, chord progressions and even complete songs are derived directly from the tradition, and some of them long predate the era of recording, let alone the conventional mechanics of publishing and copyright laws. What counts above all in the blues is individuality: the development of a unique and unmistakable voice, the ability to place an ineradicable personal stamp on those 'common stock' materials freely available to all. While instrumental dexterity, vocal facility and stylistic versatility are heartily respected within the blues community, what distinguishes the truly great from the merely professional is the fully realized man (or woman)'s communicated essence of self; the ability to serve as a conduit for the full gamut of human emotion, to feel those emotions with sufficient depth and intensity to reach out and touch listeners in places that those listeners might not even have known that they had. Without exception, every blues singer who has managed to pull ahead of the pack or haul himself (or herself) from the hordes of hopefuls chasing the blues-lovers' dollar has this quality. Any competent blues artist should have the ability to entertain – those who don't should simply find another line of work before they starve to death – but the measure of true mastery, from the 1920s pioneers to the contemporary brand leaders, is the scale on which performers are capable of being themselves in public. And, by extension, the depth and complexity of that self. To serve as a neutral transmitter simply doesn't cut it here.

- 34 What point does the writer make about the term 'folk music' in the first paragraph?
- A It is no longer possible to be clear about what it covers.
 - B It has become totally outdated.
 - C It is resented by certain people.
 - D It is sometimes wrongly applied to certain types of music.
- 35 Which of the following does the writer say about European classical music?
- A Criticism of its rigid structure is commonplace.
 - B Too much respect is paid to composers while they are alive.
 - C It could not function without the obedience of those involved.
 - D The system by which it operates affects its quality.
- 36 The writer uses the image of a rock to illustrate
- A the role that 'folk' music plays in people's lives.
 - B the strength of the tradition of 'folk' music.
 - C the process by which 'folk' music is created.
 - D the unchanging nature of 'folk' music.
- 37 The writer says that certain people disapprove of some kinds of 'folk' music on the grounds that
- A it fails to exploit the music's true spirit.
 - B it misrepresents the way their community lives.
 - C it combines styles which do not sound good together.
 - D it shows disrespect for the traditions of the music.
- 38 The writer repeats the word 'yes' near the beginning of the fourth paragraph to
- A underline that he really means what he is saying.
 - B emphasise that contrasting beliefs co-exist within blues music.
 - C anticipate the reader's questions about blues music.
 - D convey his personal enthusiasm for blues music.
- 39 What does the writer imply about the 'common stock' of materials in blues music?
- A Some artists are less keen to make use of it than others.
 - B Certain themes within it vary in popularity from time to time.
 - C It is difficult to prove who wrote songs contained in it.
 - D It is unlikely to maintain its popularity.
- 40 What does the writer imply about individuality in blues music?
- A It is more highly regarded than great musical ability.
 - B It involves drawing on experiences unique to the particular performer.
 - C It includes the expression of a surprising combination of emotions.
 - D It is more likely to be conveyed vocally than by the playing of an instrument.