



BLACK DOG BLUES

BLACK DOG BLUES and other pieces

Edward Lee writes:

This is the second album being released in 2020 which contains edits and remixes of music I first created with the group CMU until the breakup of the original line-up in 1971.

In the first collection (*Gulf Stream*, <https://edwardlee.bandcamp.com/album/gulf-stream>) I suggested that it could be lightheartedly be subtitled “jazzish”, because “in deference to the (presumably disappearing) race of jazz fans who are defensive of the purity of the form, I do not claim this to be jazz”. For similar reasons this album could be called “rockish”.

Music, like all arts, does not lend itself to rigid boundaries, but I think these pieces are examples of where I crossed into that other country. But there are important points where the music moves on from being clearly within what can be called “rock”. There are elements which can be seen to develop in later work, all available on Bandcamp (<https://edwardlee.bandcamp.com>) and at the Elm Village Arts website (<http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk/>).

Again, my aim in the current project has been to realise this music in recorded form, in some cases for the first time. Modern technology makes it possible to show what the music was like, or what I would have wished it to become.

James Sings Out

The rhythm has a touch of the “Spanish strut” which I used first in Bolero Blues, but unlike the latter, the time is 4/4 and the theme is a long soaring one. We abandoned that project and with it this piece, but later I felt that it could illustrate a process which has long interested me. This is where the elements of a composition appear in sequence, not concurrently, so that at first there is a puzzle – we think “Where is this all leading?” Then gradually the relationship between the parts emerges. At the same time, this creates a climactic effect, another musical process to which I have constantly returned. Notation and mp3 files of a MIDI version are available in the booklet *Gross Ideas* on sale at <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk/music.php>

Past Midnight

When James Gordon joined CMU, I wrote a special three section work for him. This is an instrumental version of one of section. The others were *There was a Man* (which appears on the *Gulf Stream* album) and *James sings out*.

Again it reflects my interest in fusion. This is basically a slow shuffle blues, but the harmonies are more folk inspired and the tremolo effect is from good old 50s pop /rock and roll. It is an example of my belief that all sound sources are potentially valuable to a composer. When I came to make this recording , I saw that there was scope for an interplay between two guitars, reflecting my longstanding linear interests. There is even a little “imitation” in the Classical sense. At times, following a technique sometimes used in free jazz, the two guitars briefly perform the same phrase.

Polish Jig

The main rhythm is a powerful rock triplet beat, probably inspired by certain jazz and rock drum solos, but there is a release into a solid heavy four. The title came from James Gordon, who in trying to characterise the piece said it seemed to him like “a sort of mad Polish jig” !

Black Dog Blues

This is a composition which again links different aspects of music. To a heavy shuffle rhythm and a bluesy theme is added a repeating riff - but the harmony line which is added constantly changes. The guitar solo explores the various modes which are implied by this changing progression of thirds. The “Black Dog” is not an animal but an 18th Century phrase meaning “depression”. Other versions can be heard at <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk/free-downloads/the-leeds-concert.php> and at <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk/free-downloads/sounds-like-at-garnett-college.php> (Track 15)

Strut

This comes from another attempt at creating a three section work, analogous to the Classical three movement structure. I had made various sorties into this area, starting with the Oxford University Big Band (<http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk/free-downloads/oxford-university-big-band.php>). The CMU version was *Three Part Work* which can be heard at <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk/free-downloads/the-leeds-concert.php>. Though the group had abandoned this musical direction, my interest remained, and so when I had the opportunity through multitrack recording to create such a work in the way I imagined it, I did so. The other sections of this work were *Peace* (which can be heard on the *Bonny Street* album <https://edwardlee.bandcamp.com/album/bonny-street-remix-2019>) and *Rondo* (see below).

I have always seen unity as a defining element of the great works of art, and so have always striven to make my own works unified. This ties in with an abiding interest in melody and formal development. The result is that the form is clearly perceptible in a way not normal in rock, but I believe that the piece does not lose a rock-pop excitement.

The title explains the piece. This is the proud young man, aiming to impress, in all his fashionable finery – this was looking back to the time before the young put aside dressing up in favour of a more casual style.

Disintegration

It is common for composers to take inspiration from existent works of others, but in this case, my inspiration is myself!

At the time of CMU I felt that as a composer I needed to explore darker emotions - my pieces had typically been very lyrical up to that point.

I created a piece called *Slow and Lonesome Blues*. This evolved into a form which I very much wanted to keep and work in when I was able to control the content through recording.

It is said that if you put a frog into cold water, and then boil the water, the creature does not jump out, because its system, unlike ours, does not recognise what is happening until too late. Whether this is so or not, I have long found it an analogy to many of our experiences in life. This piece sets out to create a gradual increase of tension, so that you do not realise that you are in Hell until you find yourself there. My other aim was to express the tension of modern life, and especially city life. Thus the piece leads to an impression of an ambulance siren hurrying to an accident.

When I came to create the present album it became clear that the copyrights of the *Slow and Lonesome Blues* theme and the recording by CMU are held by Universal Music Publishing. Thus, though I would like to have used the original theme, for the pleasure of those who heard it in the past, I was unwilling to pay to use my own composition! However, copyright applies to the theme, and particular realisations, and not to forms. I therefore created a new piece with a new theme. And the need to have a new title allowed me better to reflect the content and aim of the piece.

Rondo

This was the lively finale to the work of which *Strut* is the first section. The title refers to the form, in which a repeating section alternates with new ideas. Again the aim has been to retain a po-rock excitement, which creating lines which are accessible and easily followed.

The cover picture is again by Moira Jarvis <http://moirajarvis.co.uk/>