



VOCABULARY

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EXPRESSIONS

...

PRONUNCIATION

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

READING

Bart's Blues

Blind Reverend Bart is now a legend, but he was barely famous to his own mother the night I saw him in Baton Rouge. This must have been 1924 or 1925. Why I was in Baton Rouge I have never been able to remember, but I know I wandered into a place called the Bell Room, which turned out to be literally one room in the black section of town (remember this was the Jim Crow south). I made my way to the front, just in time for a dainty little old woman to step up to the small wooden platform in front of us and announce the next set of Blind Reverend Bart.



Now, "Blind Reverend Bart" was something of a misnomer. Like so many other bluesmen, Bart had adapted a stage name. Or maybe he inherited it from someone else. Regardless, Bart was neither blind nor a reverend. He could see in a physical sense, and his music made it clear that he could also see into your soul. And no one could live like Bart did and be ordained as a minister! He was wild, like something out of another time, a more primitive and freer era. The man came out in a ragged denim shirt and pants, carrying just an old acoustic guitar. A smallish, average looking young black man stood at the foot of the stairs with no spotlight on him, the definition of unassuming. From his appearance, I figured that I would not remember this concert. But when he started to play, it was clear that his appearance did not reflect his talents.

Bart only played about a half hour that night, plucking at his guitar and singing in a deep baritone, slightly off key at times. I cannot say I remember all the songs themselves, even as the sounds they made resonate in my soul to this very day. Bart's music reminded you of your own experiences yet also elevated them. The sorrow in his voice reminded you of your own blues but also made you joyous to be alive. It was a paradox, to find life's splendor only by hearing and being reminded of the pain in the world. "Hard times, I know them," Bart sang, and you knew that he more than knew them. He was hard times.

A few years after I saw Bart in Baton Rouge, he was murdered by a jealous husband in Vicksburg. No one recorded the exact date of Bart's death, just as I did not record the date of his performance. That's how the blues work though. They have a certain timelessness about them, as the experience of the music transcends all. For me, seeing Blind Reverend Bart was as close as I ever came to experiencing salvation on the face of this Earth.

1) As used in paragraph 2, the word **misnomer** is most nearly defined as

- A. a historic inaccuracy
- B. an error in judgment
- C. an inaccurate name
- D. an adopted identity
- E. a missed opportunity

- 2) The second paragraph implies that the narrator was
- A. planning on leaving the Bell Room after hearing a couple of songs
 - B. seeking a specific performance when he entered the Bell Room
 - C. interested in seeing Blind Reverend Bart until he saw how the singer looked
 - D. inspired by the performance of Blind Reverend Bart
 - E. surprised by Blind Reverend Bart's performance because of his appearance
- 3) The narrator believes that blues music can make the listener
- I. transcend time
 - II. feel glad to be alive
 - III. remember his or her own pains
- A. I only
 - B. III only
 - C. I and II only
 - D. II and III only
 - E. I, II, and III
- 4) The narrator is unclear about what details of the Blind Reverend Bart concert he or she saw?
- A. where it was
 - B. how the singer looked
 - C. when it was
 - D. how long the set was
 - E. how the singer sounded
- 5) In this passage, the narrator
- A. recalls a blues performance and uses the performance to make a larger point about blues music
 - B. describes the experience of seeing a blues concert and compares it to the experience of being alive
 - C. argues that the blues were best played by Blind Reverend Bart and laments the singer's passing
 - D. remembers a concert from the past and uses it to introduce the biography of the concert's performer
 - E. describes in detail the concert Blind Reverend Bart gave in Baton Rouge and argues that it was the singer's best

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