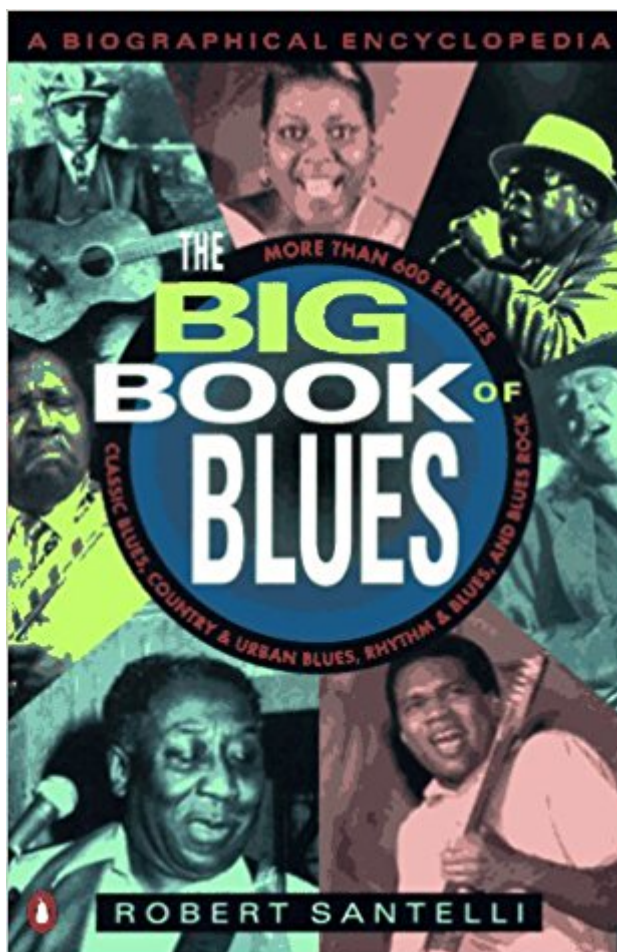


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# The Big Book Of Blues: A Biographical Encyclopedia



## Synopsis

This ultimate reference book for blues lovers is a comprehensive biographical encyclopedia with 600 entries profiling every known important blues artist from Bessie Smith, Charlie Patton, and Blind Willie McTell to Alberta Hunter, Robert Cray, and Stevie Ray Vaughan. Discography. 40 photos.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This ambitious biographical encyclopedia delivers the goods, listing over 600 entries from every era and style of the blues. Santelli's wide definition of blues music includes styles from folk to rock to zydeco. Important British artists like Eric Clapton and John Mayal are covered, and songwriters and producers also receive recognition. Some purists may quibble about the inclusion of Lucinda Williams and the absence of Koerner, Ray and Glover (the trio that introduced country blues to many white college students in the Sixties). Still, the concise, informative biographical data and the lists of essential recordings that follow each entry make this book essential for any comprehensive music collection. Highly recommended.- Dan Bogey, Clearfield Cty. P.L. Federation, Curwensville, Pa. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.

The blues seem to have been making a reference-publishing comeback in the past few years. The Big Book of Blues, by music-journalist Santelli, explores the lives of 650 blues musicians, with a few nonmusicians, such as the Lomaxes from the Library of Congress, mixed in. The biographical

essays open with the names of band members or individual artists, the real name or other performing nom de chanson, and birth and death dates. Entries cover the performers' career and include other musicians who influenced or played with them, hit records or singles, discussion of style, etc. Entries range in length from approximately 100 words for Eddie "Vaan" Shaw to more than 650 for Blind Lemon Jefferson. There are some discrepancies in dates between this and other sources for early blues performers, stemming mostly from unclear records. Unlike the recent Encyclopedia of the Blues by Herzhaft [RBB Ja 1 93], which had some entries by genre such as Female Blues Singers or White Blues, The Big Book of Blues is by individual or band name only, and as a result some performers have longer essays here than in Herzhaft (e.g., Sippie Wallace). There are cross-references to other performers within essays, but no references from real names or lesser-known nicknames to the entry under the best-known performing name. Profiles end with a brief discography. A bibliography of sources and a name index conclude the work. Libraries owning Blues Who's Who by Harris (Da Capo, 1981) and the Encyclopedia of the Blues may not need The Big Book of Blues unless they have an active blues audience. However, the book is well written, inexpensive, and current, making it an attractive purchase.

The book pictured was a newer version of the book that I received, I received the older version with a different cover. The description stated that the book was used, however, it was not stated that the book was a used library book. It still had the library card holder on the inside cover, it had clear tape to reinforce the outside binding, as libraries will sometimes do, and it had "New York Public Library" stamped all over the inside of the book. The description stated it was in good condition, so I bought it for a friend who really loves the blues. I would have been ashamed and embarrassed to give her this book as a gift. Lesson learned.

This is a great biographical guide to blues musicians and their careers, but it's time for an updated edition. The book contains 600+ entries with fairly detailed bio info in each, with musicians ranging from Bessie Smith to Robert Cray, and even including crossover groups like the Yardbirds. But the book predates the CD era somewhat, with the "essential listening" section for each musician lacking in CD listings. For some, this is a major omission (I'm thinking of the 1,000 or so Document CDs that could have been accessed with so many of the pre-war musicians). Books like this often impel people to go through them to note who was left out as well as who made it in. Some of the earlier female blues singers who recorded many important sides in the 1920s seem under represented: Viola McCoy, Josie Miles, Monette Moore, and Merlene Johnson (The Yas Yas Girl) were all left

out, though each recorded dozens of sides. Of course, artists who have come on the scene since 1993, when the book was published, are not included either (Keb Mo, Jerry Ricks, and Corey Harris to name just three come to mind). No book, obviously, that is documenting an on-going subject will ever be complete, but this one is valuable enough to warrant a revised edition. Hopefully one is in the planning stages. In the meantime, this is (along with Harris's *BLUES WHO'S WHO*, which also needs updating) an important reference book for lovers of the blues. A must-have book.

I recently picked up a copy of "The Big Book of Blues" by Robert Santelli at the Delta Blues Museum bookstore in Clarksdale Mississippi. Billed as "a biographical encyclopedia with more than 600 entries covering classic blues, country and urban blues, rhythm and blues, and blues rock", the author has achieved his daunting goal of creating a definitive reference for both the uninitiated and the true blues aficionado. Rather than a dry, vital statistics only type of approach, Robert Santelli's comprehensive reference presents a brief vignette of each artist's career and their influences, along with in depth discussion and subjective observations on their style of playing and songwriting. The entry for Robert Johnson is a great example of the folksy storytelling style employed by the author. It tells of Johnson's illegitimate birth in 1911 and his untimely death from poisoning by a jealous husband in 1938, and covers all the significant highlights of his short career including details of the infamous "crossroads" myth. The author also includes "essential listening" for each artist. These lists of recordings are not complete discographies as found in some references, compilation of which would take years for such a diverse group of artists whose recordings appear on the most obscure labels imaginable. Instead, the "essential listening" references cover the artist's major works and significant career milestones, and represent the best examples of the artist's style. From world renowned performers such as B. B. King and John Lee Hooker to more obscure local club players like Cripple Clarence Lofton, the author covers a lot of ground and has done extensive research into the lives and times of nearly every artist who ever played the blues. The author's extensive knowledge and resourcefulness is clearly evident in this informative, entertaining, and well researched volume, which appears to be a true "labor of love". I highly recommend this book.

The information provided in the biographical encyclopaedia is a good reference when reading other publications on the "Blues" or listening to recordings by a performer with whom you may not be familiar. Whilst the references are not complete, it is nevertheless a source of sound information on numerous blues performers from the 1890's to the present. (I found I had a number of recordings in my collection made in the 1920's and 1930's by individuals not referenced in the book.) The book is

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This is a great book to have in your collection if you're a fan of blues music and history. By far, it's not the ONLY book out there. There are a number of notable artists this book is missing. Hopefully, future editions of this book will begin to fill some of the gaps. That being said, this is a very good reference just the same.

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