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# Give My Poor Heart Ease: Voices Of The Mississippi Blues (H. Eugene And Lillian Youngs Lehman Series)



## Synopsis

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, folklorist William Ferris toured his home state of Mississippi, documenting the voices of African Americans as they spoke about and performed the diverse musical traditions that form the authentic roots of the blues. Now, *Give My Poor Heart Ease* puts front and center a searing selection of the artistically and emotionally rich voices from this invaluable documentary record. Illustrated with Ferris's photographs of the musicians and their communities and including a CD of original music, the book features more than twenty interviews relating frank, dramatic, and engaging narratives about black life and blues music in the heart of the American South. Here are the stories of artists who have long memories and speak eloquently about their lives, blues musicians who represent a wide range of musical traditions--from one-strand instruments, bottle-blowing, and banjo to spirituals, hymns, and prison work chants. Celebrities such as B. B. King and Willie Dixon, along with performers known best in their neighborhoods, express the full range of human and artistic experience--joyful and gritty, raw and painful. In an autobiographical introduction, Ferris reflects on how he fell in love with the vibrant musical culture that was all around him but was considered off limits to a white Mississippian during a troubled era. This magnificent volume illuminates blues music, the broader African American experience, and indeed the history and culture of America itself.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

For blues lovers who love their experience pure and strong, Ferris (Blues from the Delta) conducted more than 20 interviews of blues and gospel performers from the Mississippi Delta for his latest book. The author did much of this fieldwork as a graduate student during the 1960s and 1970s, capturing these singers close to where they grew up, chopping cotton and tending the farms during the day and prowling around the juke joints and roadhouses at night. From among the Delta locals of sacred and secular music, Ferris interviews such blues masters as James Son Ford Thomas, Willie Dixon and B.B. King, with their words accompanied by a stirring CD/DVD of their music. There is an intriguing section on the infamous Parchman Penitentiary in the Delta, where cruel overseers and defiant inmates battle each other. Joyous, powerful and authentic, this package is designed to both inform and entertain those willing to plunge into this audacious world. (Nov.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

The stories, collected during Ferris' travels in his native lands of the Mississippi Delta, are real, raw, passionate, at times ribald and rough and at others sweeter than tupelo honey.--Carrboro Citizen  
The DVD supplement. . . . Capture[s] images and actions that are seen nowhere else. . . . [They] may be Ferris's best and his most accomplished works.--ARSC Journal  
An incredibly powerful book. . . . The great strength of Give My Poor Heart Ease is that [Ferris] gets himself out of the way and lets other people do the talking.--BiblioBuffet  
The classic struggle between Saturday night revelry and Sunday morning appropriateness, the pain and joy in blues and gospel music, sermons and stories, are presented in print, and--luckily for us--on a CD and a DVD, compilations from Ferris's faithful work. The package is raw, unadorned, very funny, haunting, daring, and spellbinding.--Clyde Edgerton, Garden & Gun  
You feel as though you've been given the truest form of insight into a place. . . . First-person insight, presented in all its soulful glory.--Independent Weekly  
A treasure trove of primary scholarship. The numerous photographs and extensive bibliographies and discographies alone are worth the price of admission, but the truly uplifting community of voices in the book, as well as in the images, words, and music on the discs, is fascinating. . . . One hopes Ferris will continue publishing for years to come.--Journal of American Folklore  
[This] book takes readers, watches, and listeners as close as a book can take people into the homes, juke joints, and churches of Mississippians who made music.--The Southern Register  
Ferris . . . has given historians and music fans a gift.--Anniston Star  
Captures the cadences of [the musicians'] spoken voices and the stories of their lives, and the DVD and CD that accompany the book allow us to hear their music. . . . If the unhealed wound of injustice is everywhere present in these stories, many of the people telling them, like Ferris himself, have

refused to see their lives reduced to race and stubbornly resist despair.--Harper's Magazine Ferris eloquently captures the hearts of Mississippi artists, forever preserving their voices by way of manuscript, photography, video, and sound recordings. Ferris takes the reader right into the heart of Mississippi.--North Carolina Folklore Journal Most of Ferris' subjects never cut a recording, but their songs and their stories create an indelible portrait of strength in the face of poverty and prejudice. Like the black characters in Faulkner's novels, these people endured, and thus prevailed.--Wilmington Star News A must-have for anyone interested in the blues. . . . Provides a complete portrayal of blues culture. An accessible book that will appeal to anyone interested in American music and culture. . . . Highly recommended.--Choice For blues lovers who love their experience pure and strong. . . . Joyous, powerful and authentic, this package is designed to both inform and entertain those willing to plunge into this audacious world.--Publishers Weekly An autobiographical account and, more importantly a transcription of the recollections, which Ferris recorded in the 1960s and '70s. . . . The book comes with a set of Ferris' original field recordings on CD. . . . [and] a DVD that collects the documentary files Ferris shot.--Memphis Flyer This book, CD and DVD all contain living history as it rolled out thirty or more years ago, when blues music was part of rural black family life. . . and we have the unlikely opportunity to take a meandering ramble through and closely observe the lives of the tellers.--Blogcritics Delivers exactly what its title promises: the words and voices [Ferris] collected of Mississippians who had it rough and, in telling about it, changed American music forever.--Endeavors A captivating and diverse multimedia experience for fans and scholars of the blues and gospel music. . . . Highly recommended for anyone interested in the blues or Southern history.--Library Journal starred review A pretty damn impressive package, and an amazing resource of material on Mississippi folk culture.--Highway 61 Radio There is much to love about this collection. . . . Without doubt, this wonderful multimedia set is necessary for any comprehensive blues collection.--Arkansas Review Groundbreaking. . . . The summation of a life's work documenting and, in the process, lifting the music of a regional people who, from the depths of poverty, racism and centuries of struggle, have given the world one of its most enduring art forms.--Memphis Commercial Appeal Shelf Life Blog The invaluable narratives and stunning black-and-white photographs . . . would be enough to recommend this book as a must-have for anyone interested in the blues, but Ferris also includes a DVD of incredible film footage . . . and an audio CD. . . . Provides a complete portrayal of blues culture. An accessible book that will appeal to anyone interested in American music and culture. . . . Highly recommended.--Choice Brings to life the right heritage of the Mississippi blues tradition.--Valley Voices Ferris reaches beyond the dry, [dispassionate] cataloguing of regional history and traditions

to tell the very personal story of his own education and the lives of the remarkable teachers . . . that he met along the way.--GoMemphisThis magnificent and invaluable volume illuminates blues music, the broader African American experience, and indeed the history and culture of America itself.--SirReadaLot.orgThe ultimate multi-media collection of interviews, original music and film about the blues.--Delta MagazineA beautiful memorial to Mississippi African Americans and their lost world [and] a tribute to the folklorist who captured their stories and songs for posterity.--The Journal of Southern History[Ferris] is a hero for blues lovers and folklorists the world overâ |.There is much to love about this collectionâ |.Without a doubt, this wonderful multimedia set is necessary for any comprehensive blues collection.--Arkansas ReviewPersonal, anecdotal, lively and full of the same spirit that helps bring blues music to life. A great mix of stories from some renowned blues greats alongside people known only in their neighborhoods.--Publishers Weekly Indie Top 20 SelectionA book that will transport its readers, though it's meant to be experienced at a walking pace. . . . A multi-faceted portrayal of blues history that makes accessible a community and a genre of music with incalculable influence.--Inside Higher Ed BlogU[A] blues goldmine.--Carolina Arts & SciencesAn exceptional work, simultaneously one of the most beautiful and one of the most important that has ever appeared on the blues.--ABS MagazineTake a walk through people's lives. That's what the experience of exploring this combination book, CD and DVD is like. . . . The films are a treasure trove of information. . . . Were an anthropological writer [to] decide to, s/he could write a career's worth of books, papers and treatises from the content of just one package of book, CD and DVD.--BC: BlogCritics.orgThis multimedia package is a valuable addition to scholarship in the traditional arts . . . casual blues fans and lovers of Mississippi culture will appreciate its unpretentious presentation style.--The Clarion-LedgerFerris' fieldwork proves to be every bit as important and impressive as the now-famous Mississippi recordings made by John and Alan Lomax in the 1930s, '40s, and '50s. . . . Ferris' audio and video recordings . . . are unpolished gems, further preserving pieces of Mississippi's musical past that may have otherwise been forgotten.--The Vicksburg Post

Bill Ferris, the former director of NEH and a professor of History at the University of North Carolina, is a highly respected scholar in the field of Oral History. This book belongs on the shelf of every serious student of Folklore and ethnomusicology or anyone who likes music, especially the Blues. So well written and easy to read, the words slide off the pages and take you back to a time when great Blues singers were as common as Cottonmouths in the Mississippi Delta. Dr. Ferris shares his life and the lives of the seminal Blues musicians with his readers. This book is oral

history the way it should be written. Ferris spent many years of his life recording the interviews in this book with the all-time great Blues musicians, like B.B. King. From cover to cover it reads like fiction, but every inch of it is true. We all know that a storyteller like a good Blues singer never lies or "spins a yarn"! The CD and DVD that accompany the book are extra icing on the cake. I hear that if you get the IPAD version the print magically turns into video at critical junctures in the stories. The long list of Bill Ferris's accomplishments reads like a who's who of Delta scholarship. If you want to understand the Blues from Mississippi to Chicago to the present day, this is the book to read. Early in the first chapter the author fades into the shadows and allows the musicians to tell their own unique stories. The key word in the title is "Voices". The author's skill as oral historian is to allow the voices of so many truly exceptional musicians to shout and holler, weep and moan, blending into one powerful tradition that has entertained this nation as long as people have eeked out a living as slaves, tenant farmers and laborers in the great delta of the Mississippi River that Bill Ferris is proud to call his home.Â Give My Poor Heart Ease: Voices of the Mississippi Blues

William Ferris's book is a summary of 40 years of his field research, offering elegantly written portraits of the people and places he spent so much time amongst in the 1960's and beyond. His patch was, essentially, Mississippi and his self-defined brief was to capture the fast-dissapearing history of traditional blues and gospel by any means at his disposal. This included interviews, photos, taped performances and sound films. Unusual for the time, and now, four decades later, the five films are of especially great value. Moreover, they are all included here in DVD format, accompanied by a selection of field recordings on a CD, both packaged into the back of the book. So essentially you have a multi-media product to absorb; words, photographic images, sound recordings and films, including the one which, in my view, is the best single documentary about what the blues actually means. At 21 minutes, his 1975 color film "Give My Poor Heart Ease" is the ideal introduction to the real purpose and underlying meaning of the Blues as catharsis for its original community, rather than mass entertainment. There are no California Rayban-wearing harp players here, just honest folk playing honest music because they have to. Whatever your level of interest in the blues is, Ferris's new volume is one to get and absorb.

Kudos to William Ferris for this book. It is clearly a labor of love for him. I was drawn to this work after hearing Ferris in an 10 minute long NPR piece on "All Things Considered" (see/hear at [...]). As a young student Ferris visited backwoods towns along US61 from Memphis south to the LA border. He documents the unknown blues singers he met along the way. And he tells about his

long-standing friendship with the legendary BB King fantastic stories! The book is accompanied with a CD of collected music and a DVD documenting his finds. If you are a fan of Blues performed by the black inventors of the art form, then read/hear the NPR clip and I predict you will find this book to be a "must have"!

bought as a bday present and they loved it

I've known of William Ferris for at least a couple of decades, and his work in preserving the delta blues and honoring the bluesmen. This book lives up to expectations. It is well researched and a satisfying read. Thanks for making it available. Shipment was prompt and I received my copy well within the predicted time.

Good Book

This is an essential book for blues lovers. It traces the birth of Mississippi Delta blues, arguably the birthplace of American blues. There is an extended section on the influence of prisoners who were in Parchman Farm prison, made immortal by a song by Mose Allison years later. I highly recommend it.

This book is not an exciting read but it is interesting and very very informative about the early days and origins of Blues music culture. I haven't yet watched the included DVD but I expect it will be fascinating.

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