



## A SAMPLING OF THE BLUES IN CHICAGO

A long-playing record of tradition, innovation, and earthy appeal

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Fifty years ago Chicago's blues clubs were clustered on the South and West sides of the city. Patrons were African-Americans, typically recent arrivals in Chicago from the southern states who were looking for those down-home blues. (p. 5)



*Men's Journal* magazine named Lee's Unleaded Blues (7401 S. South Chicago) one of the six best juke joints in the country. The *juke joint* is an African-American creation with roots in the rural south. Because blacks had no clubs, they would gather in houses or barns or wherever they could find space. (p. 26)



From 1937 to 1938 the top floor (the Sky Club) of the 22-story Leland Hotel in downtown Aurora was used as a recording studio for some of the most influential blues in prewar Chicago. The makeshift recording studio consisted of a couple of chairs and microphones. The records were cut on wax because magnetic tape and reel-to-reel recorders were not yet in widespread use. (pp. 78–80)



Through the 1960s and early '70s, people tuned to WVON radio (1450 AM) to hear the blues and other African-American music. The station began in 1963 when Leonard and Phil Chess of Chess Records bought a 1,000-watt radio station, WHFC, and changed the call letters to WVON—"Voice of the Negro." (p. 109)



Blues clubs tend to be casual and intimate. In between sets, it's common for band members to hang out at the bar, give autographs, and chat with fans. Musicians often have their latest CD available for purchase. It's also common to see famous blues musicians in the house on days they don't have gigs themselves. (p. 8)



Restvale Cemetery, just southwest of the Chicago city limits, is the final resting place for more than a dozen legendary blues musicians. The grave marker of McKinley Morganfield (a.k.a. Muddy Waters), depicts his signature Telecaster guitar and the phrase "The mojo is gone . . . the master has won." (pp. 72–73)

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## TODAY'S CHICAGO BLUES

By Karen Hanson

