

Cross Road Blues (1936)

Robert Johnson

LISTEN FOR

- 12-bar blues (aab lyrics + harmonic changes), but flexible phrase lengths
- Rhythmic sophistication
- Emphatic strumming prefigures electric guitar styles in rock
- Expressive intensity of guitar (slides), voice
- Ambiguous lyrics with emphatic sense of emotional, spiritual loneliness

CREATION

Songwriters Robert Johnson (lyrics, music)

Label, Record Vocalion 03519

Musicians Robert Johnson (vocals, guitar)

Recording Gunter Hotel, San Antonio, TX; November 1936; mono

MUSIC

Genre Delta blues

Form Simple verse

Key B major

Meter 4/4

LISTENING GUIDE

| Time | Formal Section | Lyric Cue | Listen For |
|------|------------------|-------------------------|---|
| 0:00 | Introduction (4) | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Abrupt beginning, perhaps because tape recording started after he began playing. |
| 0:09 | Verse 1 | “Went to the crossroad” | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interplay of high and low guitar timbres• Bottle-neck guitar slides with emphatic strumming.• Flexible measure lengths• Ends with stop time. |

| Time | Formal Section | Lyric Cue | Listen For |
|------|----------------|-----------------------------|--|
| 0:42 | Verse 2 | "Yeee, standin'" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Largely as above. |
| 1:14 | Verse 3 | "Standin' at the crossroad" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More intense guitar slides at beginning. |
| 1:43 | Verse 4 | "You can run" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Largely as before. |
| 2:23 | Verse 5 | "And I went" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Largely as before. |

LYRICS

Went to the crossroad, fell down on my knees
 I went to the crossroad, fell down on my knees
 Asked the Lord above "Have mercy, now save poor Bob, if you please"

Yeee, standin' at the crossroad, tried to flag a ride
 Yeee, I tried to flag a ride
 Didn't nobody seem to know me, babe, everybody pass me by

Standin' at the crossroad, baby, risin' sun goin' down
 Standin' at the crossroad, baby, eee, eee, risin' sun goin' down
 I believe to my soul, now, poor Bob is sinkin' down

You can run, you can run, tell my friend Willie Brown
 You can run, you can run, tell my friend Willie Brown
 That I got the crossroad blues this mornin', Lord, babe, I'm sinkin' down

And I went to the crossroad, mama, I looked east and west
 I went to the crossroad, baby, I looked east and west
 Lord, I didn't have no sweet woman, ooh well, babe, in my distress