

BLUES LETTER



MARCH / APRIL, NO. 22, 1993

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BLUES LETTER

The Magazine of The St. Louis Blues Society

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View of the Blues

By John May



Blue notes ring in the air for all those that have passed as we work to bring you another year of great Blues. It seems that each issue brings sad news, another Blues great has gone. Beyond the words and pictures that remain, a legacy of their music calls our name, speaking to our very souls, the Blues, expressed by those who knew—to those that care.

The Blues can remind you that life can be unpredictable and sad, but they can also be uplifting through the simple comfort derived from knowing others share your deepest emotions, and communicate them via the common bond of all people. Music is that bond, and it flows through the City of St. Louis like a river, its water being the musicians joined in heritage and devotion to their art of expression.

The St. Louis Blues Society strives to make a difference in this city and will continue to do so. Each opportunity to bring Blues to the forefront of the cultural scene is a reciprocal gift to those having shared so much of themselves with us.

Support Blues musicians from coast to coast, because they search for you — to soothe your soul when you need it most. Even those that have already passed on.

Out of the Blue

By Terri F. Reilly



Springtime in St. Louis. Finally. A way too long winter has stepped aside for warmer ways and longer days and hot Blues music.

Harp Attack, our annual extravaganza of harp-blowing magic signaled the beginning of the Blues season. For those who couldn't make it down to the 14-hour jam, you can catch a glimpse of the festivities in this issue which features pictures of the event taken by our own Ron Edwards.

We're not done yet. On May 8, the Blues Society's tribute to the wonders of the Blues guitar will hold forth at Mississippi Nights when Guitar Masters '93 takes the stage. Read on for more info on the master of the guitar shows in this issue.

As you turn these pages, be on the lookout for two special stories by Mark O'Shaughnessy. One finds him and our legendary Henry Townsend on a recent trip to D.C. Neither Mark nor Henry bargained,

however, on getting stranded for three extra days on the east coast by the snow storm of the century which paralyzed the entire eastern seaboard.

On a very blue note, Mark also writes about the very recent passing of veteran Blues drummer Billy Gayles. It is a fine tribute to a musician who was well-loved and respected.

For those of you for whom Spring only means one thing — festival time — that New Orleans expatriate Orlando Peraza has once again treated us to a story about this year's Jazz Festival.

Part II of musicologist Glenn Gass' trip through the Mississippi Delta has space among these pages. And we've thrown in a few record reviews (well actually CD reviews) for your listening pleasure.

The near future holds lots for the St. Louis Blues lover. Be sure to mark your calendar for June 5 for what has become a real St. Louis tradition — Oliver Sain's Soul Reunion. And by now all of St. Louis knows, we hope they know, that this year's Blues Heritage Festival will be held on Labor Day Weekend on Laclede's Landing. You can count on us to keep you posted on it.

As always, we are most grateful for your continued support of the Blues Society and well as helping to keep Blues music alive in St. Louis. Hope to see you at Guitar Masters

Upcoming Events

APRIL 29

Paul Orta & The Kingpins
Off Broadway Nightclub

MAY 7

Smokin' Joe Kubek
Broadway Oyster Bar

MAY 8

Guitar Masters '93
Mississippi Nights

MAY 8

Chris Duarte
Off Broadway Nightclub

MAY 12

Bugs Henderson
Off Broadway

MAY 22

Big Bad Smitty
Off Broadway

MAY 28-30

Chicago Blues Festival
Grant Park

JUNE 5

Oliver Sain Soul Reunion
Mississippi Nights

JULY 24-25

Kansas City Blues & Jazz Festival
Penn Valley Park

SEPT 3-5

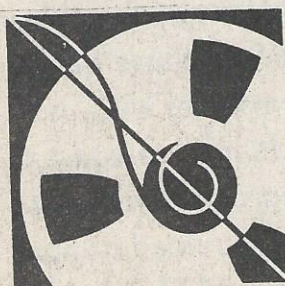
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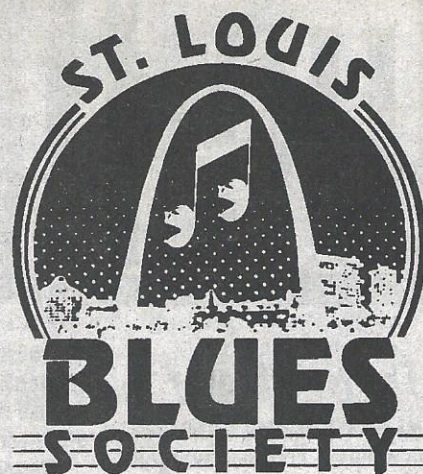
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The St. Louis Blues Society, a nonprofit Missouri corporation in its seventh year, is dedicated to preserving and perpetuating Blues music in St. Louis, to foster its growth and appreciation and to provide Blues artists the opportunity for public performance and individual improvement in their field, all for the educational and artistic benefit of the general public.

With a membership of 500 strong and a board of directors consisting of 19 devoted Blues lovers, the Blues Society actively participates in a number of ongoing projects, including the acclaimed "Blues in the Schools" program, the publishing six times a year of a respected newsletter titled "BluesLetter," the acquisition of Blues archives materials, and the producing of live Blues concert series throughout the year, which culminates in the annual St. Louis Blues Heritage Festival.

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Blue Notes

Welcome The New Mayor

The St. Louis Blues Society extends a true blue welcome to our new mayor, Freeman Bosley, Jr. We wish him much success and support as he takes on the job of making St. Louis a better place to live and work for us all.

And if we may be so bold, we like to suggest to his honor that after a long day at City Hall, there's nothing like the Blues to soothe the soul.

KDIX Needs Your Support

Ask any St. Louis Blues music lover which station is the best for Blues music and he or she can't deny its KDIX.

While KDIX FM-88 probably needs no introduction to most Blues lovers, the station that plays the Blues every weekday at drivetime and on Sunday evenings needs your support.

You can significantly help the non-commercial radio station by tuning in from April 30 to May 9 when KDIX will feature special programming every day.

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embraces both diatonic and chromatic harmonicas while covering a wide range of musical styles, including Blues, jazz, bluegrass, avant-garde and occasionally classical.

For more information, please write to:

Winslow T. Yerxa
Harmonica Information Press
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San Francisco, CA 94118-1007

Beale Street Music Festival Blues Symposium

Sponsored by AutoZone, Beale Street Music Festival Blues Symposium will be held on May 6, 7 and 8 in various venues on historic Beale Street, just steps away from the Memphis is May Beale Street Music Festival.

The three-day gathering will offer the public a chance to meet nationally recognized leaders in the Blues industry, as well as Blues performers.

Topics will include Recording the Blues, Teaching the Blues, Blues Societies, Women in the Blues and Blues Festival. Master classes will be offered in rhythm section, harmonica, guitar and piano/keyboard. And leading these sessions will be the likes of Bill Ferris, Dick Waterman, Roger Naber from our sister Blues Society in KC, Denise LaSalle, Early Wright and Peter Lee.

A special bus tour has been planned for May 7 and will include stops at The Blues Archives, the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, The Delta Blues Museum, Muddy Waters' home and the City Grocery in Oxford for lunch and live music, all in time to return to Memphis for an entire evening at The Memphis in May Beale Street Music Festival.

For more information call 901/525/4611.

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The St. Louis Blues Society is looking for people to help with the operation of Society activities. We offer a chance to become involved in the workings of the Society, including the festival, other events like our annual Harp Attack and Guitar Masters shows, the archives programs we do in conjunction with the Missouri Historical Society and The BluesLetter.

We are in need of writers and graphic designers to work on The BluesLetter, as well as people interested in helping distribute the magazine.

We also need people who are interested in events production, including stage hands, technical people who are familiar with music production such as sound and video.

We're looking for people who can lend support in the area of public relations, marketing and development.

Merchandising is another big area that could benefit from some help. There's always lots to do to get our T-shirts and posters out to the public.

What we have to offer in return is our deepest gratitude since we are an organization of volunteers. It's because of the dedication of our volunteers that the Blues Society is as strong as it is.

If you're interested in getting involved with the St. Louis Blues Society, please drop us a note with your name, address, phone number and area of interest to:

ST. LOUIS BLUES SOCIETY
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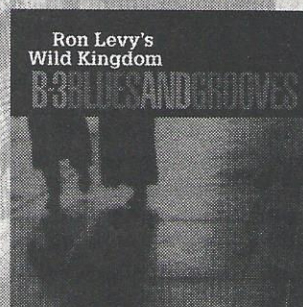
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Billy Gayles (1931-1993)

By Bill Greensmith

With the death of Billy Gayles on April 8th, St. Louis lost its third Blues artist within the last six months. Billy Gayles was a vocalist of considerable talent, capable of soaring, swooping runs, and an excellent drummer with real ability.

Billy's major claim to fame was as the vocalist on one of R&B's true classics, "I'm Tore Up," a regional hit in 1956 which was one step away from real success. What is perplexing is that for an artist of his capability, his recording opportunities were short lived and he only recorded sporadically throughout the rest of his career.

Gayles struggled to etch a halfway decent living from his music but, unfortunately, he never rose above the status of being a "local" musician and hence was doomed to the mediocre pay scale of local musicians. And like so many others before him who were to see lesser talents succeed, his career was ultimately a study in frustration. Even his death was largely ignored by the St. Louis media, with the exception of the St. Louis Post Dispatch, and only then did Billy Gayles warrant a few column inches in the obituaries, receiving no more attention than that of the passing of a local banker.

However, what was important was that Billy Gayles was a person of great pride and dignity and he had the friendship and respect of all those who came into contact with him.

Willie Gayles, the son of M.L. and Lee Jessie Gayles, was born October 19th, 1931, in Sikeston, Missouri. Living in the rural areas of southern Missouri/Illinois, the family farmed for a living. The Gayles family was deeply religious - his parents sang in quartets and frowned on the blues and Billy's earliest singing was confined to the church. "I was a grown man before I even talk about singing blues, let alone talk of playing. I didn't have no drums, but I always loved them because I used to beat out my mother's buckets and things. I got many a whoopin', boy. Everybody else out playing and I'm beatin' on buckets!"

By the late 1940's, Billy had developed an interest in the secular side of music and began sitting in with Robert Nighthawk in Cairo, Illinois. "I was a kid and I'd sneak off from home. That old dude, you know what he would have me doing? He had a tub when I first went there in the group. I would take that old tub and a broom handle and a string, put one foot on the tub and tighten that string and loosen it. I used to do that with Robert Nighthawk. Little head be ducking because every time somebody walk in the door I'd think my mother be coming and



Billy Gayles

throw a brick at me."

It was in Cairo that Billy first met guitarist Earl Hooker, joining his band as a replacement for the drummer Kansas City Red. It was with Earl Hooker that Billy first traveled to Clarksdale, Mississippi in 1951, where he met the artists who were to be his close musical associates for the following decade.

Following the debacle in the wake of "Rocket 88," the various members of The Kings of Rhythm had gone their separate ways, and it was Raymond Hill's group, The Jump's For Joy, that Billy first joined. Billy also layed down some roots in Clarksdale. He married a local girl and for the rest of his life often referred to Clarksdale as home.

During the summer months of 1951, Hooker and pianist Ernest Lane had a residency at The Stage Bar in St. Louis. Billed as The Midnight Rambler's Trio they were joined by Billy Gayles on drums and vocals. Ernest Lane recalled the period. "I didn't know Billy could sing until he come to St. Louis. He was getting pretty good on drums then. So one night he told me that he could sing, so I said, well let's see what you can do. Billy had a darn good voice - sing like a bird - that joker could sing." Billy and Earl eventually left for Chicago before returning to Cairo again for a job.

In 1952, Billy was back in Clarksdale working in a band that included Dennis Binder, Bob Prindell and Bobby Fields. "When I got shot that's who was working with me," Billy

remembered. "I got shot the same time Bobby Fields got shot. This was in a club in Mississippi, we were working and he (the owner) wouldn't give us our money. They were shootin' at me. That's why Bobby hopped - because they had to put a pin in his leg."

Ike Turner's Kings Of Rhythm was an exceptionally loose aggregation of musicians during this period. Ike, however, was not one to let good talent pass him by and Billy soon began working with The Kings of Rhythm as vocalist and occasional drummer.

By early 1954, Ike Turner had established a studio of sorts in Clarksdale and began recording all of his associates. Billy recorded four sides, two of which, "Night Howler" and "My Heart In Your Hands" were issued on Modern as by Billy Gale (sic). The remaining two songs from this session, "A Woman Just Won't Do" and "I'm Tired Of Being Dogged Around" saw light of day on the Ace anthology, "Talent Scout Blues."

During this time Billy also recorded for Sun Records. "Billy Emerson and me had been up there to Memphis. Billy Emerson was the one that introduced me to Sam Phillips, so I went and start recording for him." The Sun discography lists two unknown titles being recorded by James 'Billy' Gayles on June 13th, 1953, accompanied by Pat Hare, Houston Stokes, William Johnson and Charles Keel. However as Gayles states that it was Emerson who introduced him to Phillips and Emerson himself did not record for Phillips before January 11, 1954, the probability of James 'Billy' Gayles and Billy Gayles being one and the same seems unlikely.

Ike Turner and The Kings Of Rhythm relocated to east St. Louis in late 1954. Billy, along with Raymond Hill and Billy Emerson secured a club date on Chicago's southside. Eventually the club owner closed and Billy moved to Colp, Illinois, working with Junior Hatchett and saxophonist Billy Duncan. It was while on a visit to East St. Louis in mid-1955 that Ike persuaded Billy to join The Kings Of Rhythm as vocalist, a replacement for the recently departed Johnny O'Neal.

Ike was on the tail end of his Modern contract and one last session for them was recorded in St. Louis, of which the previously unissued "I Miss You So," which featured Billy's vocal, surfaced in 1985 on Ace Records "Ike Turner And His Kings Of Rhythm Vol 2."

For Billy's next session early in 1956, Ike used the pseudonym "Willie King," probably due to contractual obligations with Modern Records. The Rocking "Peg Leg Woman" which was

sed to Vita, was a remake of Johnny O'Neal's "Gly Woman," which had been previously recorded for Sun in 1953 (although at that time it remained unissued).

By the time Billy and Ike recorded for Federal their popularity in the St. Louis/East St. Louis area was secure. They were without doubt the city's most popular band, working every day with double bookings on the weekends. On March 12th, Billy, along with Ike and the Kings Of Rhythm, recorded the romping "I'm Tore Up," a song that all at once established his reputation.

Years later Billy recalled the session: "We'd been in that studio so long when I made the tune. I laugh about it myself because I was really drunk. I was drinking scotch during that session. Ike didn't want none of us drinking, so they had some of these acoustic boards pushed up against the wall and that's where we hid the whiskey. We'd sneak behind those boards every time Ike would run into the booth and then. I was so drunk I didn't know what to do." "I'm Tore Up" was not a national hit and perhaps did not sell as well as many people thought it did. However, it was a regional hit and St. Louis climbed to #2 on the Billboard chart weekly, remaining in the top 10 for nearly two months. A second session followed in September from which "Do Right Baby" also picked up some respectable sales, topping out at #8 in St. Louis in December 1956.

Federal at first tried to sign Gayles as a solo artist but, do in part to their friendship, coupled

with the fact that he'd signed a personal contract with Ike, Billy refused to sign. It was a decision he was later to reflect on. In December, 1956, and shortly before an important engagement in Chicago at The Crown Propeller, Billy's contract with Ike was about to expire. There had been a promise of an increase in salary that had not been forthcoming, and without an increase Billy refused to sign. However, he was prepared to make the Chicago trip with them. Ike to him to forget it and Clayton Love was drafted in as a replacement vocalist.

Billy Gayles' recordings for Federal represent the high point of his recording career. Apart from a couple of "Tore Up" sound-alikes, they really are an eclectic mix: from storming rockers like "Just One More Time" and "Sad As A Man Can Be"; through the country sounding "Take Your Fine Frame Home"; the vocal group sounds of "Let's Call It A Day" (with The Rockers) to the emotional Blues ballad "No Coming Back." "Everybody was under the impression that they were going to make some money during that time. It just went plop!"

Following his departure from The Kings Of Rhythm, Billy hit the road. Along with Larry Davis, the pair headed for Little Rock, Arkansas, where they picked up guitarist Charles McGowan and Ernest Lane and traveling via Dallas and Flagstaff, ended up in Los Angeles. Earl Bostic secured the band some jobs and for several months they worked in and around the Los Angeles area before Billy returned to St. Louis late in 1957.

Again Billy wasted no time in putting together a band that was to rival those of Albert King and Little Milton, which featured the considerable talents of Bennie Smith, Erskine Oglesby, Billy Duncan and Sam Rhodes among others. Lee Otis Wright and Bobby King, who was later to find a measure of fame in Chicago, also played in the Gayles band which held down residences at The Moonlight Lounge and The Havana for several years.

In 1958 Billy and his band accompanied the Chicago vocal group Seaphus Scott and The Five Masqueraders on a session in St. Louis for Gabriel's Joyce label.

Billy Gayles was not a person who bore grudges, and with their past differences set aside he and Ike traveled to Chicago, recording Ike's nonsensical, "Walking Down The Aisle" for Cobra Records. "Ike was playing the bass, piano and all that stuff on that record. I was just playing the drums. We didn't have any more musicians - just the two of us. We laughed when we got ready to go. . . we had plenty of fun." He said, "Well, you never know, we might have something that will do something. As far as I was concerned I thought it was a zero."

"Walking Down The Aisle" was credited to Ike Turner's Kings Of Rhythm, vocal featuring Ike and Billy. Several alternate takes of the song turned up on Flyright's Kings Of Rhythm album in 1981.

Text continued on page 10

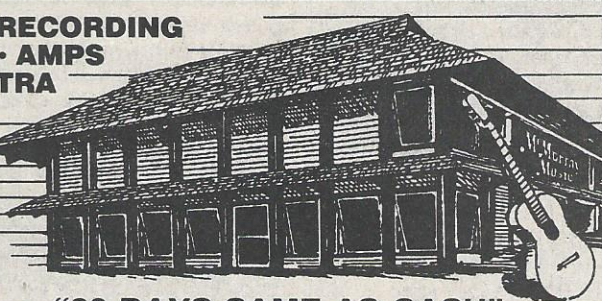
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Blizzard Blues from page 9

Following Ike and Tina's success with "Fool In Love," Ike formed a revue and began touring. In 1961 Billy joined the revue ostensibly for the purpose of recording but ended up staying with the revue for six or seven months. One single was recorded and issued on Shock, "I'm Hurting" is an excellent early 60's soul record that was coupled with the ballad "Dreaming of You."

Once again the question of money or the lack of it reared it's head. Former Kings Of Rhythm vocalist Jimmy Thomas recalled: "It was really sad because Ike was treating him badly, giving the cat a little pocket money and paying the hotel bill. It was bad because Billy was a great man." Billy Gayles also remembered the times well. "During that time I had a baby and my wife's worrying me about money. I'm out there trying to make it and he taking all my money, sitting up eating steaks and we was eating Ritz Crackers!" When the band reached Greensboro, North Carolina, Billy caught the bus back to St. Louis. "He snatched that record off the market simply because I wouldn't stay with the band."

The Shock sides, which sank without trace, would be the last single Billy would see issued under his own name (and even then his name was misspelled as Gales). Billy continued to grind away in St. Louis/East St. Louis fronting his own bands or working with others like jazz organist Terry Williams. And for a period of four or five months in 1968 he worked with Albert King's band.

By the 1970's Billy had sunk into relative obscurity but surfaced in early 1981 when he was recruited as drummer on his old friend Larry Davis' "Funny Stuff" album. In 1986 Billy was featured with The St. Louis Kings Of Rhythm, a band that consisted mainly of past members of Ike Turner's various bands. The band made a couple of trips to Europe where they also recorded a hurried and uneven album for Timeless Records. Billy is featured on four cuts, all reprises of past glories.

In recent years Billy Gayles has been quite active in St. Louis, working steadily with his own band, The Big Band. In 1992 he was one of the stars of Oliver Sain's Soul Reunion Show where he was once again reunited with Ike Turner. For those who were lucky enough to have been present it was an evening that will not be forgotten easily as Billy and Ike turned back the clock on "Tore Up," creating an excitement that one rarely witnesses.

Billy was admitted to the hospital earlier this year; a benefit concert was organized to help raise money to cover some of his medical expenses with dozens of the area musicians donating their services. Billy Gayles died on April 8, 1993, at St. Louis Regional Hospital. His wake and funeral, which was held April 13-14 at Ted Forter's Funeral Home on north Grand, was attended by just about every Blues artist in the St. Louis area, as well as his many friends, associates and relatives. A musical tribute was also held at The Tap Room on April 14th.

Billy Gayles Remembered

By Mark O'Shaughnessy

St. Louis R&B vocal legend Billy Gayles succumbed to inoperable cancer on Thursday, April 8, 1993 at St. Louis Regional Medical Center. He was 61 years old.

Billy is survived by his four daughters; Tamoi, Demetre, Marcualane and Veronica, sisters; Barbara, Sureatha, Sara Lee, Peggy Jean, Pearly Mae, brother; Marlon, and uncles; Jethro & Milton as well as his longtime girlfriend Phyllis.

His daughter Tamoi, with the help of Big Band Guitarist Steve Martin and other family members, arranged funeral services at Ted Foster & Sons Funeral Home on North Grand where a virtual who's who of St. Louis musicians gathered for his visitation wake on Monday, April 12. His interment at Friedens Cemetery in North St. Louis on Tuesday, April 13 was preceded by a touching burial service in the large chapel at Ted Foster's and featured songs by Margaret Bianchetta, Stacy Johnson and Doris Frazier as well as testimonies and remembrances by the Rev. Jethro Gayles, Fred Wills and Steve Martin.

On Wednesday, April 14, a memorial musical tribute occurred from 8 pm to 1 am at the St. Louis Brewery and Tap Room at 1221 Locust which helped to raise money (by donations and workers

tips) for the purpose of purchasing a headstone for Billy's gravesite.

Featured performers in that never-to-be-forgotten musical gathering included: The Big Band (Steve Martin, Rich Cotton, Eddie Boyd, and Dave Scott); Soulard Blues Band members (Jim McClaren, Art Dwyer, Kirk Grice, Brian Casserly as well as BlueHawk regulars John Wolff and John McHenry); Pianists Johnnie Johnson, Terry Williams & Marcel Boulicault; Vocalists Rondo Leewright, Stacy Johnson, Margaret Bianchetta, & Alonzo Love; Guitarists Tommy Bankhead, David Black, Dan Lee Taylor & Jesse Lewis; Harp player Doc Terry & Eric McSpadden; and Drummers Benet Schaefer and Theo Eldridge.

Billy's internationally reknowned anthem "I'm Tore Up" had several fitting renditions played during the course of the evening. First by Rondo Leewright, then by Dan Lee Taylor and finally by Stacy Johnson. Music ran from Jazz to Blues to Rhythm & Blues, and everyone who was there will carry the rich memories of the music and the musicians who pulled together to pay tribute to one of their own. The magic evening of comradery and love insured that Billy Gayles' presence as well as his music will live on forever.

New Orleans Jazz Fest- Looking Good for '93

By Orlando Peraza

Well, it's that time of year again. Our bones are slowly but surely thawing out from the winter chill, and, just on the ink of cabin fever, we longingly look forward the rites of spring: cold beer at a sidewalk cafe, Cardinal baseball at Busch, and a grimace down south to the New Orleans Jazz Heritage Festival. That's right. Get your mud-boof disposable shoes ready, it's Jazz Fest time again.

This year the music schedule looks about as well-balanced as ever between first and second weekend. I will point out a few menu items, just to whet your musical appetite.

First Weekend (April 23 through April 25) at Fairgrounds:

Beausoleil, Bob Dylan (Bob Dylan? yes, Bob Dylan), St. Louis favorites Marcia Ball, Anson Funderburgh & the Rockets featuring Sam Myers, Al Nathan and the Zydeco Cha Chas. There's Anton Marsalis, Johnny Adams, the Iguanas check out their hot new disk on Jimmy Buffet's Margaritaville label), Fats Domino (a rare live appearance by the Fat Man), Pete Fountain, Patti LaBelle, Sonny Rollins, Allen Toussaint (writer, producer, performer — the Oliver Sain of New Orleans), Charmaine Neville, Ernie K-Doe, Lemmy Brown, the Olympia Brass Band, James Rivers, Cyril Neville and the Uptown Allstars (the only second-line-reggae band in the world!), and Bo Diddley and the Wild Magnolias. As I mentioned, these are just a few. So first weekend looks pretty good, right? Well, before we make definite plans, better have a look at second-weekend lineup.

Second Weekend (April 29 through May 2) at the Fairgrounds:

Buddy Guy (also with a hot new album out), the Subdudes (hope you got a chance to catch them recently at Mississippi Nights), Nina Simone, Frogman Henry (for you classic R&B fanatics), Snooks Eaglin, versatile sax great Red Tyler, British piano virtuoso Jon Cleary, Leigh Little Queenie Harris, Deff Generation (Neville siblings that do brass-band-rap), Dr. John (his latest album was a blues Grammy winner), the Dirty Dozen Brass Band (let's bring 'em back to just jazz!), the funky Meters, Terrance Simien (another zydeco favorite of St. Louisans), Earl King (he wrote Big Chief and many more), Banu Gibson (veteran of St. Louis ragtime fests), jazz immortal Danny Barker, Wolfman Washington, Katie Webster (Queen of Swamp Boogie), the Dixie Cups, Wayne Toups, the Re-Birth Brass Band (Is this heaven? No it's Jazz Fest, we passed heaven on the way...), the Neville Brothers, the Radiators, Ellis Marsalis, Marva Wright, and the Zion Harmonizers at the Gospel tent.

Whew! And I haven't even mentioned the night concerts which include pairings like the Allman Brothers and the Fabulous T-Birds, Los Lobos and the Neville Brothers, Wynton Marsalis and the Duke Ellington Orchestra, Santana and the Meters. Hope you got your ticket in your hand and your room reservation made. For more info, you can call the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Foundation at (504)522-4786. See you there...

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LARRY DAVIS

Few instruments have defined and epitomized blues music quite like the guitar. From acoustic trail blazers like Robert Johnson and Charlie Patton, to veteran electric musicians like B.B. King and the late Albert King to the modern-day lightning-fast slingers like Stevie Ray Vaughan and Ronnie Earl, the guitar stands alone.

From down-home pickin' to the searing hot licks of an electric guitar, Blues music wouldn't be what it is today without this wonderful six-string instrument.

On Saturday, May 8, the St. Louis Blues Society will celebrate the role the guitar has played in Blues music by producing its annual Guitar Masters showcase at Mississippi Night from 6 p.m. to 2 a.m.

Guitar Masters is just that — a master show meant to highlight the talent of those St. Louis guitarists who have been honing their chops for many years.

As diverse as all the Blues style, the 10 guitarist who are featured on this year's show are a sampling of the wealth of incredible guitar talent that lives in our town. Featured St. Louis Guitarists on this year's Guitar Masters concert include:

Max Baker

(Marcell Strong, Mama's Pride)

Buffalo Bob

(The Bedroom Blues Band)

Larry Griffin

(The Soulard Blues Band)

Alvin Jett

(No Exit, Tommy Bankhead)

Jelly Jaw Johnson

(Acoustic Delta Blues)

Jimmy Lee Kennett
(The Joint Jumpers)
Tam Milano
(Patti & The Hitmen)

Q.T. Macon
(The Soul Band)

Steve Waldman
(Rondo's Blues Deluxe)

The Blues Society proudly
presents Larry Davis as this year's
special guest guitarist. Larry has
ties to St. Louis going back to the
70s when he performed regularly
at J.B. Hutto's.

About this year's headliner

Veteran blues guitarist-vocalist Larry Davis makes a rare St. Louis appearance at this year's Guitar Masters. Davis, who was born in Kansas City in 1946, was raised in Arkansas, where he began his musical career playing drums and then bass guitar during the 1950s with bluesmen such as Fenton Robinson, Charles McGowan and Billy Gayles, working in Little Rock, Memphis and St. Louis. It was during this time that Davis met B.B. King, Junior Parker and Bobby Bland, and it was Parker and Bland who brought Davis and Robinson to the attention of Duke/Peacock Records, for whom they recorded the blues classic "Texas Flood." This historic recording brought Davis much deserved acclaim, and he went on to record with B.B. King and Oliver Sain in the late 1960s before making the big switch from bass to guitar around 1970.



Photo By Ron Edwards

Larry Davis

Davis recorded some fine sessions in the 1970s, but many of these records remain unissued. It was Davis' 1981 recording, "Funny Stuff," produced by Oliver Sain, for which he won two 1982 Handy Awards (Contemporary Blues Album of the Year and Blues Single of the Year, "Since I Been Loving You"/"Walk Out Like a Lady"). The success of "Funny Stuff" brought Davis to the attention of European audiences, and a European tour soon followed. In 1987, Davis again recorded with Sain, resulting in the album "I Ain't Beggin' Nobody." Davis' newest LP is

"Sooner or Later" on the Bullseye Record label.

We thank once again, John McMurray for his support in providing stage equipment, and, as if this were not enough, our friends at McMurray Music have donated a brand new Fender Stratocaster to be given away as an added benefit to the show.

If you consider yourself a fan of the guitar and/or if you secretly desire to play like the masters, you won't want to miss Guitar Masters '93. Tickets are \$10 in advance through Dialtix and Mississippi Night and \$12 day of show (General Admission).

1st Annual Homeless Blues Benefit

By Tom Burnham

The public is encouraged to attend a benefit concert for Peter & Paul Community Services emergency and transitional shelter programs on Sunday, May 23, 1993 at St. Louis Casa Loma Ballroom (3354 Iowa at Cherokee) from 6:00 pm to 10:00 pm.

Peter & Paul Community Services is a private, nonprofit agency that for more than a decade has helped meet the needs of our neighbors in the St. Louis community, feeding those who are hungry and sheltering those who are homeless, helping in their transition from street to shelter to meaningful employment and self-sufficiency.

Henry Townsend, James Crutchfield & The Black & White Band, The Soulard Blues Band, and Tom Hall will perform. Noted author and Post Dispatch columnist Bill McClellan will serve as Master of Ceremonies. There will be a cash bar as well as a food concession by The Hard Shell Cafe.

About the artists performing at "Homeless Blues"

Henry Townsend is an elder statesman of the blues. Henry represents the last of the pioneer blues musicians instrumental in bringing the art-form into the forefront of American culture. A consummate musician with more than 70 years of experience, Townsend has the distinction of recording in every decade since the 1920s. He has

been associated with such blues greats as Roosevelt Sykes, Walter Davis, Big Joe Williams, Sonny Boy Williamson, Robert Nighthawk and Robert Johnson. Two of Townsend's more renowned recordings were the original versions of "Baby Please Don't Go," and "Every Day I Have The Blues." In 1985, Townsend was honored by the National Endowment for the Arts as an American "Master Artist," which included the presentation of the National Heritage Award. In 1993 he performed on Garrison Keillor's American Radio Company as well as at Wolftrap's Folk Masters Series for Radio Smithsonian.

The Soulard Blues Band with twelve years as a performing ensemble under their belt, is one of St. Louis' most exciting and enduring blues groups. They play a mixture of urban blues, rhythm and blues, zydeco, and their own hard-driving originals. The band has played throughout the Midwest, down South from Texas to Florida, and East to New York. Their current lineup includes; Art Dwyer - Acoustic & Electric Bass, Larry Griffin - Guitar, Kirk Grice - Drums, Jim McClaren - Harmonica, and Bryan Casserly - Trumpet, Trombone & Flugelhorn.

James Crutchfield & The Black and White Band. Pianist James Crutchfield spent years playing in Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas before arriving in St. Louis in 1948. A debut recording session on

an anthology in 1957 led to a stint in Gaslight Square before retiring from the piano. James was rediscovered in the early 1980's and has since toured Europe where he recorded first solo album. He is the recipient of the 1984 Miss Lillian Carter Award as an outstanding senior citizen preserving the St. Louis Blues tradition. In 1983 he was the featured solo blues artist at the prestigious Blues EstaFette Festival in Utrecht, Holland. Together with his new group "The Black & White Band" James is one of the hardest working performers on the local scene and will celebrate his 81st Birthday May 25.

Tom Hall has been on the St. Louis Blues music scene since the 1970's. A traditionalist in both the Piedmont and the Delta styles, Tom treats his audiences to the original country blues of greats such as Robert Johnson, Lightnin' Hopkins, Elmore James, Rev Gary Davis, and Blind Blake. He was voted #1 Solo Artist in the 1992 Riverfront Times Reader's Poll, and he has been featured on National Public Radio's "Good Evening America" as well as numerous concerts and benefits throughout the St. Louis area. Tom performs both solo and with bands (The Geyer Street Sheiks / Tom Hall & The Illusions).

Most of the performers at this benefit have played for the residents at Peter & Pauls' shelter.

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Thomas B. Burnham, producer

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Henry Townsend's Blizzard Blues

By Mark O'Shaughnessy

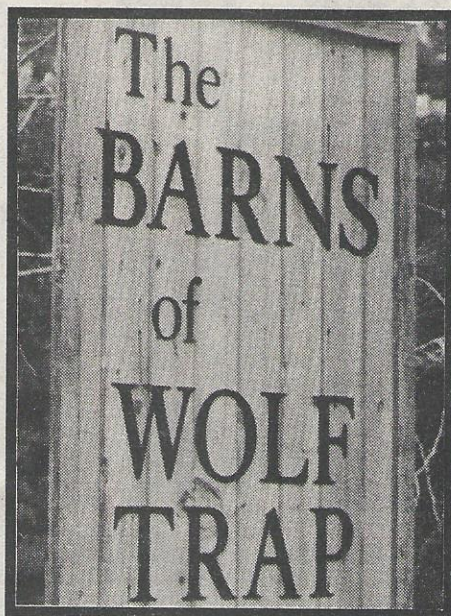
When St. Louis blues patriarch Henry Townsend, his wife Vernell and myself took off by car Wednesday, March 10 for a trip to The Barns at Wolf Trap, none of us suspected we would be driving into what would later be called "the blizzard of the century" and a forced stay at a motel which would bring us all closer to the featured artists on that bill.

Henry had received a contract to perform in the "Folk Masters Concert and Radio Series" at The Barns of Wolf Trap in Vienna, Virginia. The Wolftrap Foundation for the Performing Arts, in association with Radio Smithsonian and DC Radio Station WETA-FM, staged and recorded all the concert performances of this 13-evening concert series, which occurred on weekends between March 5 and April 10 of this year. I was told that over 200 radio affiliates of National Public Radio were to broadcast selected portions of the performances and interviews nationally; and although thousands if not hundreds of thousands would actually get to hear these performances, the live audience capacity at The Barns of Wolf Trap is only 350 people, which created a relaxed atmosphere for the performing artists and audiences alike.

Henry was scheduled to play in a segment titled "The Blues: Pianomen, String Bands and The Texas Jump Sound," also featuring country Blues string band Howard Armstrong & Nat Reese, and the Texas Jump Blues band Mel Davis and The Blues Specialists, featuring TD Bell and Erbie Bowser.

We arrived at Wolf Trap at about 3 in the afternoon on Thursday after a 15 hour drive. Henry was scheduled to play on Friday night, so after we were assigned our rooms and went out for a bite to eat, we all took a much deserved rest. The next morning at breakfast we met up with Bob and Nancy Vorel of the international publication - Blues Revue Quarterly (BRQ), who were working as road management for Nat Reese & Howard Armstrong. After initial pleasantries and exchange of room numbers, everyone there caught up on the current artists grapevine of upcoming events as well as reminisced about jobs which they had worked together.

Through one of the drivers at Wolf Trap, we were informed to get ready for a mid-afternoon rehearsal and soundcheck. Henry got out his guitar and amp and warmed up before pickup time with Vernell accompanying him on vocals.



Although Vernell has performed many times with Henry in the past, she wasn't contracted to accompany him on this concert set.

We were picked up at around 3 o'clock and taken by van to Wolf Trap where we were introduced to the other performers on the show as well as Nick Spitzer (the host and originator of this Folk Masters concert series), the production staff, and the backstage radio and recording crews. Backstage was quite abustle as Howard Armstrong, the legendary "Louie Blute" of 1985 movie fame, was displaying and selling his "world famous tikis" (one-of-a-kind, necklace amulets) made by this colorful, world-travelled musician and graphic artist. Almost every member of that night's production had purchased one, and every tiki purchased was being proudly displayed. Meanwhile, during the sound checks and band briefings, Vernell and I sat in the the virtually empty venue and were treated to the great music which these bands had to offer, feeling privy to a special kind of private concert.

After the soundcheck we were returned briefly to our motel to change and by the time we returned to Wolf Trap there was a capacity audience gathered. There was an air of electricity when Henry started the show off on guitar with a

1981 composition he released on the Nighthawk LP "Mule" called "Can't You See." Still on guitar, he next performed the Henry Spaulding original "Cairo Blues" recorded through the years by Townsend on the Folkways, Bluesville, Echo and Wolf Labels. The last of his three numbers on guitar was his 1935 composition "Sloppy Drunk Again" which has been released on no less than 5 blues LP's (Bluebird, Origin Jazz, Adelphi, Yazoo, and Wolf). The audience there was well aware of Henry's musical stature (Henry being no stranger to Washington DC) and they were an enthusiastic as well as respectful crowd. After the three guitar numbers there was a brief pause while Nick Spitzer walked to the podium to do an interview with Henry. He touched on Henry's youthful departure from home, his start in St. Louis, his experiences with Robert Johnson and other assorted points of St. Louis Blues history. Henry as always, was wise, sagacious and humble, although anyone could tell by listening to this man that besides being a treasure house of blues history, he was indeed one of the few remaining seminal masters of his art form.

During the interview, the topic of Blues being called by some church people "the devil's music" was broached and Henry's entertaining and philosophical reply went something like "...I sing the same truth about life as the church people do... and the truth is pretty touchin'... So I say to myself 'Henry, if the truth is gonna send me to hell... (he paused and smiled) ...then I guess I'm hellbound.' " After the laughter and the applause settled, Henry moved to the grand piano. He started with the St. Louis Jimmy composition "Goin Down Slow" which he had recorded with Vernell at a live performance in Austria in 1980 (Wolf LP, "St. Louis Blues"). I missed Vernell's familiar vocal styling with Henry, but if the audience was similarly disappointed they didn't let on, because as usual, Henry was superb. Next, Henry performed a tune by his old running partner Roosevelt Sykes titled "All My Money Gone," which he recorded for Sam Charters in 1961 on Folkway Records and was also later released by Bluesville. The third piano number Henry performed was an untitled slow blues in E. Much applause by this enthusiastic audience was followed by an encore of the standard "After

Text continued on page 22

Harp Attack Aftermath

Photos By Ron Edwards



Traveling The Blues History Road-Highway 61-Part II

By Glenn Gass

Editor's Note: Dr. Glenn Gass, a composer and musicologist, is a professor of music at Indiana University in Bloomington, where he teaches the history of rock 'n' roll. *The Bluesletter* is very pleased and honored to welcome such a distinguished music scholar as Glenn as our newest contributing writer. We look forward to publishing more of his work.

Back in Mississippi, the tiny river town of Friar's Point boasts a small museum honoring its own musical contributions, though judging from its present appearance it is, again, hard to imagine what could have compelled Robert Johnson to search it out and sing of it. (Muddy Waters saw Robert Johnson for the first and only time in Friar's Point; the town was also the birth place of Conway Twitty.)

Clarksdale, Mississippi, has done the best job of celebrating its rich blues history, though one should plan on arriving on a weekday or Saturday morning to avoid our disappointment of finding the county library's Delta Blues Museum closed. We drowned our sorrows with a lunch at the legendary Abe's Barbecue, near the junction of Highway 61 and 49 East, then headed for the remnants of Muddy Waters' home on the Stovall Plantation, where Alan Lomax recorded Muddy for posterity and the Library of Congress.

The tiny cabin is easy to find (ask for directions at Abe's or anywhere) and is marked with a simple roadside sign and another sign erected by the Sunflower River Blues Association aimed at discouraging the fans who feel they must take home a memento from the sacred site: "Please do not deface this site! Preserve this cabin as you see it for other blues fans. Removal of any 'souvenirs' is punishable by law. We will lay a BIG NASTY MOJO on you if you take anything." Don't take anything, but by all means stop, pay your respects and listen, if possible, to the Lomax recordings while pondering the long journey Muddy and the blues made from such humble beginnings. (Abe Lincoln had nothing on this).

In Tutwiler, about 15 miles down Highway 49 from Clarksdale, another plaque marks the spot of the train station where W.C. Handy made his remarkable discovery. From there, Highway 3 takes you past the infamous Parchman Farms penitentiary and on to Highway 8, where a short western jog brings you to the remnants of the Dockery Farms plantation on the Sunflower River, where Charlie Patton grew up and learned to play and, for all intents and purposes, the Delta blues was born. Several buildings still stand, including the barn with the Dockery Farms sign that is featured in many photographs. Howlin' Wolf grew up there as well, and the plantation was a key crossroads for the itinerant bluesmen, as Roebuck "Pop" Staples recalled:

"Charlie Patton stayed on what we called the lower Dockery place, and we stayed on the upper Dockery. On Saturday afternoons everybody would go into town and those fellows like Charlie Patton, Robert Johnson, and Howlin' Wolf would be playin' on the streets, standin' by the railroad tracks, people pitchin' 'em nickels and dimes..."

Robert Palmer, "Deep Blues" (NY: Viking, 1981) p. 61

We ran out of daylight on the way to Morgan City and our final destination: Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church, where a dignified memorial marks the spot where Robert Johnson might be buried. We found several guitar picks, cigarette butts, a roach clip and a lyric sheet for "Purple Haze"(!) that had been left by earlier pilgrims.

The church is located a few miles north of Morgan City, just to the east of Highway 7, an appropriate spot for a man who once sang "You may bury my body down by the highway side, so my old evil spirit can catch a Greyhound bus and ride" ("Me and the Devil Blues").

The darkness prevented a search for Payne Chapel in Quito and the Little Zion church near Greenwood where Johnson is also said to be buried, but we decided that if he wasn't buried in Morgan City, he ought to be, and let it go at that. We also left Johnson's birthplace in Hazlehurst, the site of his poisoning near Greenwood and other landmarks for another trip, though two days in the Delta would have been plenty of time to explore these and the many other spots.

We spent the next day in Memphis, kicked off at 11:00 a.m. by the bizarre parade of ducks into the fountain in the lobby of the Peabody Hotel, where they say the Delta begins. (The ducks emerge from an elevator at 11:00 each day, and exit the lobby at 5:00 p.m.)

The Memphis Music and Blues Museum, located just across from the Peabody and open seven days a week, pays tribute to the city's blues heritage, along with the Sun rockabilly and Stax soul that kept the city on the musical map. The artfully arranged exhibits feature vintage instruments, posters and other memorabilia and, best of all, a number of video monitors showing vintage performance clips.

Then there is Beale Street, of course, a living blues museum packed with clubs and shops, plenty of live music and hordes of people. It is great fun, the music is often wonderful and the celebration of the blues that it all represents is certainly laudable. Still, the theme park glitz makes it something of a blues Opryland and a rather empty celebration of the rich musical culture that once thrived there.

Appropriately enough, Beale Street is framed by two statues at opposite ends of the three-block area: one of W.C. Handy, the man who first commercialized the blues, and the other of Elvis Presley, who commercialized it beyond Handy's wildest dreams. (One could also say that Beale Street's fate was mirrored by Elvis' own trajectory from vibrant artist to gaudy museum piece). The Elvis statue is an appropriate nod to the King as well as his (and rock & roll's) debt to the blues.

There is a nice coherence to a combined trek through the Delta's blues and Memphis' rock & roll, which together sum up one of America's greatest and purest gifts to the world. It's a long way from Dockery Farms to Graceland, but then again, really not that far at all. In any event, it makes for a wonderful weekend.

Blues

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Sunday 8-9 AM, The Gospel Program, Reeder G

Sunday 6-7 PM, Bucket of Blues, Uncle Roy

Sunday 7-8:30 PM, Nothin' But The Blues,

Ron Edwards

Sunday 10 PM -2 AM, Gabriel

Monday 4-6:30 PM, The Soul Selector, Papa Ray

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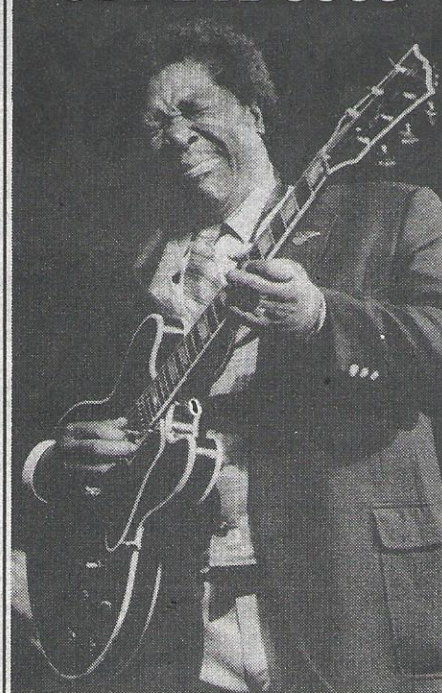
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SAFFIRE THE UPPITY BLUES WOMEN "BROADCASTING" (ALLIGATOR)

I gotta admit I've always been a sucker for female blues vocalists, from the forceful style of Bessie Smith to the more laid back manner of Billie Holiday. So it's no surprise that I was blown away a couple of years ago when I first heard the Handy-winning "Middle-Aged Blues Boogie" by Saffire the Uppity Blues Women. The song was a sassy expression of humor, blues, lust, and feminine independence, and the vocals and keyboard work were first-rate. I've been a fan ever since.

Saffire's latest effort, "BroadCasting" on Alligator Records, may be their best yet, in spite of the absence of long-time bassist and vocalist Earlene Lewis who left the group. Pianist Ann Rabson sounds better than ever on keyboard, playing in a style at times lyrical, at times down-right raunchy, but always with that blues feel. Her partner, Gaye Adegbalola on guitar and vocals, seems to have added an unprecedented depth of feeling to her songwriting and vocal work.

The material includes some inspired covers like Ida Cox's "One Hour Mama," Louis Jordan's "Is You Is Or Is You Ain't My Baby," and Little Charlie and the Nightcats' "Drop That Chump," among others.

Then there are the originals. The ladies deal with their favorite subject — middle-aged female sexuality and relationships — in cuts like "Dr. Blues," "Don't Treat Your Man Like a Dog," and "You'd Better Fly Right" all written and sung by Rabson.

Adegbalola's songs cover all sorts of emotional ground. There's the gospel feel of "It's Alright For A Man to Cry," the man-done-me-wrong blues of "Twisted Mind" where Adegbalola reveals a fine feel for the harmonica, the powerful social statement "If It Had Been A Dog..." and the rollicking set closer "Shake the Dew Off the Lily."

The arrangements are appropriately sparse throughout, but the Uppity girls still enlist a little musical help from their friends: Larry Gray on bass, Andra Faye McIntosh on mandolin and background vocal, Tony Zamagni on organ, and Steve Freund on guitar. All in all there is over one hour of music in "BroadCasting" and every minute is mighty satisfying.

— Orlando Peraz

STRIKE A DEEP CHORD - BLUES GUITARS FOR THE HOMELESS (JUSTICE)

Though just a couple of years old, Justice Records has been making waves in the jazz world, putting out a number of quality releases including the latest by jazz guitar legend Herb Ellis. Now Justice is expanding its catalog into other types of "roots" music with the signing of artists like young blues guitarist Tab Benoit and New Orleans jazz trumpeter Kermit Ruffins (co-founder of the Re-Birth Brass Band).

Justice's first release in the non-jazz genres certainly gets them off on the right foot. It's called "Strike A Deep Chord - Blues Guitars For the Homeless," and it's a collection of blues-oriented material featuring Dr. John, Ronnie Earl, Gatemouth Brown, Johnny Copeland, John Campbell, Tab Benoit, Sue Foley, Smokin' Joe Bonamassa, and folk singer Odetta. One quarter of the profits from the recording will be donated to the National Coalition for the Homeless; all artists involved donated their time — blues with a cause.

The set opener is a stunner — a version of the Depression-era standard "Brother Can You Spare A Dime," with Dr. John on piano and sharing vocals with Odetta. In the hands and voices of these musicians — John Campbell on guitar, Rufus Reid on bass, Living Colour's Will Calhoun on drums — the sixty-year-old song's original poignancy is powerfully recaptured. And the lyrics are especially relevant in the "big-business-downsizing" Nineties.

In "Blues After Hours" Ronnie Earl once again proves that he is the most

tasteful blues guitarist on the planet.

"Bone Pickin'" and "Nice and Warm" both show-case in fine style Justice Records' own rock 'n' blues man Tab Benoit.

Clarence Gatemouth Brown's live recording of his "The Drifter" features maybe the most heartfelt singing I've ever heard from this eclectic blues giant. Brown also plays guitar and fiddle (Hee-Haw) on the almost ten-minute cut.

Dr. John does the honors on "Broke, Raggedy and Hungry," written by the underrated, late New Orleans bluesman Cousin Joe Pleasant. The Doctor makes a nowadays-rare appearance on guitar, rather than his customary piano.

Then we go to Texas as Johnny "Clyde" Copeland sings and plays his distinctive guitar on his own "Ghetto Child." Part of the endangered blues-shouter species, Copeland is another bluesman that deserves wider recognition.

Smokin' Joe Bonamassa is just 15, but he's been playing his guitar in clubs since age 9. Here he plays on Johnny Winter's probably autobiographical "Self-Destructive Blues," with Jeff Gordon on vocals.

Another fine young guitarist (though not quite as young as Bonamassa), Sue Foley, plays Earl Hooker's syncopated "Guitar Rhumba."

The set ends, fittingly, in a bitter-sweetly uplifting note as Odetta sings "America the Beautiful." Dr. John contributes a gospel-style piano, enhancing Odetta's vocals every step of the way. Not since Ray Charles' version has this song packed such emotional potency, a potency further intensified by all the music preceding.

I once heard Wynton Marsalis say that "the blues is affirmation in the face of adversity." This album is about the adversity faced daily by thousands of homeless Americans, and its songs offer a musical affirmation of these Americans' courage and endurance — a little musical tonic for that great disease of our nation.

And here we have a chance to join these musicians and help out, and actually enjoy doing it! You can order your copy of "Strike A Deep Chord" by calling (800)533-5878 and, not only forever relish an exceptional group of blues performances, but also do your part in curing homelessness in America. CDs are \$15.00, cassettes \$10.00. Place your order now!

— Orlando Peraza

SIPPY WALLACE "WOMEN BE WISE" (ALLIGATOR)

Born Beulah Thomas, Sippy was one of 13 children of a deacon of the Shiloh Baptist Church. On November 11, 1898 she came into this world in Houston, Texas.

One of the "Classic Era" Bluesicians, Sippy was one of the better noted women "shouters." Her style of music led to a popularity within the Blues world of her time since her first recording in 1923 with Eddie Heywood on the Okeh label.

This Alligator reissue, the first on an American label, appeared first on the Danish Storyville label in 1966. Mind you, while you listen to this woman belt the Blues, she was 68 years young at the time of recording "Women Be Wise".

Joining her on these all original 14 tunes are Little Brother Montgomery (piano on 7 cuts) and Roosevelt Sykes (piano on 6 cuts). She shouts, she cries and she sings the Blues, taking you back to the 20's and 30's reminiscing the Blues' second step to it's modern day style.

It is very difficult for me to pick out any few outstanding cuts on this release, as each and very one is outstanding. Opening up side one is the title cut "Women Be Wise" a song that has been covered by many others, but even at 68 she tops them all. Her voice strong and the words giving you women a bit of insight to listen to, not from a man's aspect, but from a woman who knows.

She travels on down the beaten path and then stops for more insight to what life was like for a woman back when. She belts out her troubled life in her relationship. For a time when a woman was to listen and accept life as it is, she cannot take it and let's you know how she feels in "Murder Gonna Be My Crime." It was a social statement then and one now.

The road is a lonely gig, possibly inspiring "I'm A Mighty Tight Woman." Maybe she just wants a man to love, or a man who loves her. No matter what the case is, her love is expressed in this cut.

"Women Be Wise" is another of the continuing reissues from Alligator Records, a label that has strived for 21 years now to keeping the Blues alive. This release is one of the best 1992 reissues, as it is not electric Blues, but Blues at one of it's earliest stages, The "Classic Era." It's full of social issues that are still alive and going today. It makes many statements and the means through which Sippy Wallace expresses them in her music will awaken you. Her music is lifelong, her style a pleasure to listen to.

Byther Smith

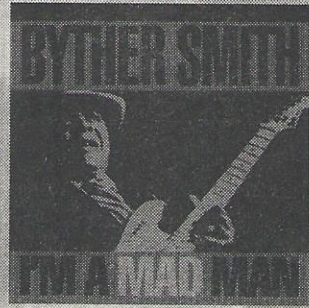
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Blizzard Blues - Cont'd

Hours". It was a great set by the great St. Louis blues legend, who at 83 shows the continued stamina musicians half his age would envy and the showmanship which earned him the unequivocal title of Patriarch of the St. Louis Blues music scene.

Next up were fiddler/mandolinist Howard Armstrong with guitarist Nat Reese. Eighty-four year old Howard Armstrong is a man of music, words, and visual arts. As previously mentioned, his famous "Louie Bluié tikis" were on all the production personnel. Late of the famous group Martin, Bogan & Armstrong, in the last few years Howard has joined with West Virginia guitarist and singer Nat Reese. Nat's eclectic guitar stylings reflect a combination of refined jazz and blues influences. One of the highlights of his set was the Reese theme song "Just A Dream", where Nat sings of a privileged meeting with the President at the White House and during a congratulatory exchange, awakens, realizing it was all "just a dream." Their set was well paced and thoroughly entertaining and as Henry, Vernell and myself stood in the backstage wings with their manager Bob Vorel, I regretted not being in the audience so I could see them better. At the end of their set Henry was called back to sit in on piano where they did a fine impromptu Blues in G.

The third act of the evening was the Texas Jump band Mel Davis and The Blues Specialists, featuring TD Bell and Erbie Bowser. The 71 year old guitarist Bell and 75 year old pianoman Bowser, (a duo whose experience together spans nearly forty years) are both seasoned veterans of the Texas Jump Blues style. They were very capably joined by next generation of Texas Jump greats "The Blues Specialists" which featured Mel Davis on vocals and harp, Reggie Crawford on sax, Len Nichols on bass and Donald "Duck" Manor on drums.

During this set, Henry, Vernell and I moved to the Green Room, where we were told the storm was on its way (originally figured at 1-2 feet), and a short trip outside confirmed the start of snow. Because the weather had been fairly good the day before when we were coming in to DC (sunshine though cold) we were tempted to doubt the ominous weather predictors. Several of the production people in the green room joked about the possibilities of being snowed in.

After the last set featuring the Texas Jump band, all of the artists converged on the stage for photo ops with a couple of minor things being re-recorded for the radio producers. As Henry and Vernell were busy signing autographs, Bob Vorel took me over to the Wolf Trap merchandising table where he gave me a couple of back issues of Blues Review Quarterly and I was introduced to Ron Weinstock, an officer of the Washington DC Blues Society. People were shuffling out slowly because of the bad weather but by the time we

were to be shuttled back to our motel the snow was coming down hard. Our driver mentioned 2 inches per hour.

Henry, Vernell and several of the artists were in the first van out. As it takes musicians a while to wind down after a successful gig, everyone staying at the Wolf Trap Motel was either looking for a place to eat, or going room-to-room looking for an after hours set and extending congratulations on a job well done. Also going around was talk of everything closing down the next day due to the severity of the storm.

In times of crisis, you can find the best in peoples characters, and for me, Henry and Vernell and the musicians gathered were a source of inspiration and strength. For the three days we were stranded, that particular wing of The Wolf Trap Motel was a hotbed of music, musicians, fans, stories and comradery. No one who was there left without sharing either food or drink or joyous music, which more than anything else was in abundance. We were all stuck together (the airport as well as the highways being closed) and there was nothing to do but make the best of a bad situation.

Nat Reese's room was where where most of the musicians got together for music, although several friends stopped by Henry and Vernell's room to set up impromptu sessions - (Judy Luis on keyboards with her fiance Paul Watson on mandolin and harmonica and Margo Blevin (Director of the Augusta Heritage Arts Program) on washtub bass, with Henry alternating on either guitar or piano and Vernell doing vocals). Vernell really shined during these impromptu performances. Because she was in her own element, relaxed and with her husband, friends and musical peers, she was truly inspiring. I was also greatly impressed by Nat Reese's guitar and vocal stylings. Everyone on the show, at one time or another, came in to either add to the music or to be an appreciative audience which shared precious supplies communally. Mention should be made of Howard Armstrong's excellent fiddle, mandolin & guitar work, Bob Vorel's excellent guitar back-up work, sit ins by the Texas Bluesmen; guitarist TD Bell, pianoman Erbie Bowser & harpist/vocalist Mel Davis and rest of the Blues Specialists band. Also on hand was Nancy Vorel, and Margo's friend Florette and Nat Reese's nephew Danny Reese who all helped to keep the amenities of such a large crowd in order.

After a couple days we were informed that the roads were being reopened and the media was calling it "the blizzard of the century." Fortunately the electricity remained on during the storm and no one was hurt or more than mildly inconvenienced. We exchanged warm salutations on our departure and on our return trip to St. Louis I couldn't help but think what a "cool" weekend with the Townsends it had been, and what a great song our trip would make... "Henry's Blizzard Blues."

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