

# BLUES LETTER

THE BI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF THE SAINT LOUIS BLUES SOCIETY March/April 2014 Number 67



Marsha Evans

Plus: Oliver Sain - Papa Ray's Top Ten Picks - Blues to Dos - IBC Report - Mat Wilson

# The St. Louis Blues Society

# BluesLetter

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## The Bi-Monthly Magazine of the St. Louis Blues Society

The St. Louis Blues Society is dedicated to preserving and perpetuating blues music in and from St. Louis, while fostering its growth and appreciation. The St. Louis Blues Society provides blues artists the opportunity for public performance and individual improvement in their field, all for the educational and artistic benefit of the general public.

March/April 2014

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## On the Cover..

**Marsha Evans, singing a lifetime of St. Louis music, performs for the camera at BB's Jazz Blues and Soups.**

photo by Peter Newcomb

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## Hello Blues Lovers,

As many of you might have heard, there are some changes coming to Bluesweek that normally happens Memorial Day Weekend in Downtown St. Louis. While there has been a lot of conversation about the event, we are happy to announce it will still be happening, just not downtown.

Bluesweek 2014 will be Memorial Day Weekend (May 24 & 25) at the Chesterfield Amphitheater and Central Park. The festival will still help support The National Blues Museum and will include national and local acts, as well as, a 40-team BBQ competition called The Bluesweek BBQ Blast. The specific information is still coming together and we will get it out to you as soon as it is finalized.

There have been many rumors going around about the reasons for the move, why the city isn't supporting the event, or who is actually running Bluesweek. While I think most of that information will work itself out over time, the speculation is doing more harm than good. St. Louis has one of the most incredible music scenes in the world, but very often we only hear the loud roar of the community when they are dissenting voices. I'd like to offer the idea that we use our voices as tools for creating and supporting St. Louis in a positive manner, not just when we don't like something.

All of the talk has really brought to my attention how many of you there are out there. Clearly there is a huge group of St. Louisans who want to see the music here thrive. The St. Louis Blues Society is an organization that supports any and all St. Louis blues related events, musicians and venues. I'd like to make the call to those of you who are critical of the lack of City support of the blues to get involved. The more people that get involved, the louder our group voice is, and the better St. Louis will be in future.

On that note, let's talk about something positive. This year we are celebrating 100 years of the song; "St. Louis Blues" by W.C. Handy. On Wednesday, March 26 at the Schlafly Taproom there will be a benefit to help two endeavors that support the history of the song and its author. First, Joanne Fish is producing a documentary called "Mr. Handy's Blues: A Musical Documentary," which is a film chronicling Handy's life and the song. Second, Daniel Fuller, founder of the W.C. Handy Memorial Foundation, is raising funds to create a life-size statue of Handy that will be installed across the street from the National Blues Museum. The event will include music, silent auctions and offer information about both projects.

As spring makes its way, we look forward to seeing you at the many Blues related functions in St. Louis. Thank you all for your continued support of the music we all love.

Jeremy Segel-Moss  
Vice Chairperson

## DISCOUNTED EVENTS FOR BLUES SOCIETY MEMBERS

*show your Blues Society Membership card to receive discounts at these venues:*

### BB's Jazz Blues and Soups 700 South Broadway

### HALF-PRICE DISCOUNTED EVENTS

#### March

2	Kenny "Blues Boss" Wayne	8 pm
8	Johnny Iguana & the Claudettes	7 pm
9	Melvin Turnage Band	8:30 pm
13	Garfield, Ligertwood and Stevens	9:00 pm
15	Stacy Michhart Band	10:30 pm
16	24th Street Wailers	10:00 pm
22	Davina and the Vagabonds	10 pm
23	Crankshaft and the Gear Grinders	8 pm
28	Harper and the Midwest Kind	10 pm

#### April

3	Larry Garner Band	10 pm
5	Clay McClinton Band	7 pm
11	Honey and the 45s	7 pm
12	Bart Walker Band	10 pm
18	The Bel Airs	10 pm
19	Andy T and Nick Nixon Band	10 pm
24	Dustin Pittsley Band	9:30 pm
25	CW Ayon	9:30 pm
26	Ivas John Band	10 pm

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# Marsha Evans:

## A lifetime of St. Louis music

by Bruce Olson

Deep in the memories of her childhood in the fifties there is music. As a teenager, as a college student, as a young adult and right up to the present, there is music. For Marsha Evans, one of St. Louis' most versatile singers, music is the thing and there's no end in sight.

There's no mystery about it. Evan's father was Leonard Bolar, lead trumpet for the George Hudson Band, the city's most popular mid-century jazz outfits. Her mother, Justine Bolar, was a member of another almost as popular group, the Legend Singers. Justine would also regularly join the Hudson gigs, including *Showboat* at the Muny.

Justine's sister, Marie, was another musician. During the fifties, she played piano in various St. Louis Recreation Center programs and was responsible for Marsha's first gig. Marsha isn't sure of the exact date, but thinks it was sometime between 1957 and 1959 when she and her sister Cheryl were selected to sing on the stage of the Kiel Auditorium in an all-star revue of kids plucked from the various rec center programs.

In segregated St. Louis, black performers on the Kiel (now the Peabody) stage wasn't usual. The sisters appeared just five years after Josephine Baker broke the color line in a sensational performance. Marsha had no fear, she was still short of her 10th birthday before looking out at thousands of white faces; but by then she was convinced that music was going to be her life.

In her comfortable living room in North County over 50 years later, surrounded by pictures of her family and mementos of her career, a satisfied Marsha Evans sighs and smiles, remembering her North City upbringing on Sarah and Page.

"We had so many musicians pass through our house. It was nothing for Lou Rawls to come to our

house; and so many jazz musicians. Not many houses had a piano back then. We had a home full of music, people knowledgeable about music. And it was a wonderful neighborhood, a real all-American neighborhood. It was like a *Leave It To Beaver* neighborhood. When the streetlights came on every kid was home, playing in the front yard. A totally different world," she said.

While attending Sumner High School, at the age of 16, she had landed a spot in Hudson's band as one of the Georgettes. And when the other two Georgettes left the band she stepped up as the soloist, singing the Count Basie songbook, tunes from Stan Kenton and meeting such budding jazz stars as Clark Terry.

"I ate, slept and drank this," she said. "I was hungry for it, I knew that's what I wanted to do, sing and entertain. It was in my blood. I have a lot of energy and I'm one who can function on very little sleep. I can do it to this day."

Around this time, in the late 60s, she joined the Young Disciples program, an East St. Louis public arts program that led to a five-year stint singing in the East St. Louis (when she wasn't booked by the Hudson band or attending classes at Harris College). There she met a number of young jazz players from the Black Artist Group, the black nationalist group whose members went on to found the SoHo loft scene in New York and in Paris.

It was at an East Side Disciples gig that she met Oliver Sain, a man who put a new charge into her career and changed her life. Soon Evans was recording backup tracks at Archway Studios, Sain's North Side music machine. Sain had been instrumental in Fontella Bass' major hit "Rescue Me" in 1965 and by the early seventies Bass was tired of being stylistically shackled by Chess Records in Chicago and returned to her St. Louis roots for a new look.

Sain called Evans and asked her get involved in

the project, which resulted in the album *Free*, a blues classic that critics agree is Bass' best effort. Recorded in 1972, *Free* is a close look at the aftermath of the civil rights movement and takes Bass away from the Aretha Franklin-style hits that Chess insisted she mass produce.

Evans was on every track of the record, which was recorded over three days. "Fontella was experimenting with things. She wrote songs for it. Sain wrote for it. She and I did all the background. I was really good at making up the background, I have to admit that. Harmony was my thing. I would just make it up and we'd do it." Evans said.

She got no credit listed on the record, however—something she said she hated. "That was the way things were done in those days."

By then she was teaching public school full time and spending many of her nights at Archways. "I went straight to teaching right out of Harris. I was teaching during the day and singing at night. Then I'd be right back in that classroom the next morning. I was so blessed to be there and meet all these people at Oliver's," she said. Evans did little touring because she didn't want to give up the teaching job, which she also loved. Her career as a public school teacher spanned from 1973 to 2006. She taught grades one through eight, ending up in a magnet school for performing arts.

She had one close call at the big time in 1979 when she joined a female R&B trio called Icy Hot to cut an album in a New Jersey studio for ABC Records and directed by Chubby Checker's producer. ABC, however, went out of business shortly thereafter and the disc was never released.

Evans returned for the next school year and helped put a rocket into the new blues scene in Soulard. The area was pulling acts from the North Side appealing to the white crowd. By the early eighties she was playing four nights a week at Hillary's.

This is where she formed Marsha Evans and the Coalition, the band she stills plays with.

In the nineties she became the vocalist for Johnnie Johnson's band and played regular gigs and toured with St. Louis' great piano master. "Johnnie was so easy going. He was one of the nicest people I ever met. Now I understand there was another side to Johnnie, but I never met that side. This was post whatever that was." At his wake she found herself standing next to several members of the Grateful Dead and remembered how humble a man Johnnie was for someone so famous in the music world.

Currently, Evans has steady gigs at BB's Jazz Blues and Soups and at 1860s in Soulard. But she says her bread and butter these days are private performances, weddings, parties and the big festivals in the summer such as Bluesweek, where she was a recent headliner, and the Big Muddy where she plays every year.

In January this year she played the Veiled Prophet Ball for the first time, but said she honestly was not all that impressed compared to the parades she saw as a child. "I knew what it used to be," Evans said. "The whole mystique, all of that is missing. Every year we'd go to the parade—that was a big deal." She shrugged her shoulders and smiled, giving the look of a musician who knows she can't play to a great crowd every gig.

She is also a musician who knows while the crowd might be dead there can be no lack of enthusiasm from the singer on the stage, not if it's Marsha Evans.

"The music we grew up on is still prevalent in all of our shows," she concluded. "It means so very much to me that I carry that on and make sure people know and hear good music from me. I wish I could predict the future. That's not possible. But what is possible is that I know I'm doing my best to make sure that our contributions will be no small part of that future." 🎵



photo by Peter Newcomb



**Friday, March 7**  
Atomic Cowboy 6-10p

**Saturday, March 8**  
Culpeppers (CWE) 9p-12a

**Thursday, March 20**  
Trainwreck Saloon (Westport) 8p-12a

**Thursday, March 27**  
Broadway Oyster Bar 9p-1a

**Friday, March 28**  
The Shanti 9p-1a

**Saturday, March 29**  
The Venice Cafe 9p-1a

**Thursday April 17**  
Broadway Oyster Bar 9p-1a

**Friday, April 18**  
Chez Marilyn (Alton, IL) 8p-12a

**Saturday, April 19**  
BB's Jazz, Blues & Soups 7-9:30p

**Friday, April 25**  
The Venice Cafe 9p-1a

**Saturday, April 26**  
The Shanti 9p-1a



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**Upcoming Musical Highlights**  
*Every Wednesday at 9PM Sean Canan's Voodoo Players*  
*Every Monday at 9PM Soulard Blues Band Open Jam*

**Fat Tuesday** Funky Butt Brass Band and Gumbohead 8PM  
**Friday March 7** Roster McCabe with Guests 10PM  
**Saturday March 8** Gravity A from New Orleans 10PM  
**Friday March 14** The Hatrick 10PM  
**Saturday March 15** Jakes Leg 10PM  
**March 21 and 22** Mussel and Scallop Festival  
**Saturday March 22** Sister Sparrow and the Dirty Birds 10PM  
**Friday March 28** Aaron Kamm and the One Drops 10PM

**Thursday April 3** Andy Frasco and the UN 10PM  
**Friday April 4** Clusterpluck Celebrates Leah's Birthday 10PM  
**Saturday April 5** Funky Butt Brass Band 10PM  
**Thursday April 10** Aaron Kamm and the One Drops 10PM  
**Friday April 11** Acoustics Anonymous 10PM  
**Saturday April 12** Al Holliday's East Side Rhythm Revue 10PM  
**Thursday April 17** Bottoms Up Blues Gang 9PM  
**April 18 and 19** Crawfish Boil and Festival  
**Friday April 18** Naked Rock Fight with guest TBA 10PM  
**Saturday April 19** Jakes Leg 10PM  
**Thursday April 24** Aaron Kamm and the One Drops 10PM



# PapaRay's Top Ten

*When asked for a list of my Top Ten Records associated with the St. Louis Blues and Soul scene, I realized I needed to make a few things known about such a list:*

*First, all my choices will come from performances AFTER 1955. No sides by Peetie Wheatstraw, Henry Townsend, Roosevelt Sykes, or other artists from the pre-WWII Era. I'd say check Leroy Pierson or Ron Edwards for that era.*

*Second, my choices will not be LPs/CDs (unless that was the only way the recording was available);—that's right, I'll be listing mostly 45s.*

*Finally, this list does not indicate anything more than my own personal selection, and the first one doesn't mean I consider it any better necessarily than the 9th! I'm just wanting to give you ten songs I'd play on any set or radio show having to do with blues... with those provisos...*

1. **BILLY GAYLES/I'M TORE UP** The wonderful drummer and percussionist for Ike Turner's Kings Of Rhythm cut this in the studios of King Records in Cincinnati; IMO, as great a song for those who are thinkin' & drinkin' as ever wrote, and Turner's concise solo is pure fire on the frets.

2. **OLIVER SAIN/HARLEM NOCTURNE** This Commander and Master of music cut this twice: once for the St. Louis label Bobbin, then later in Sain's own Archway Studio, later released on Abet. A moody driven version of this standard, and although recorded by many, none tops Mr. Sain's take.

3. **BILLY PEEK/CAN A WHITE BOY PLAY THE BLUES** This veteran world-traveler recorded his tongue-in-cheek, knowing and funny original after considerable road work with both Rod Stewart and Chuck Berry. The title cut from his first LP, Peek not only plays but sings the blues as only one who came up absorbing the culture of blues, rock and soul in St. Louis could. And given the chance, he WILL steal the show, as he did one night at the Sheldon at a Salute to Johnnie Johnson.

3. **CHUCK BERRY/WEE WEE HOURS** Our greatest musical citizen's finest blues effort. In 2:06 Berry gives a blues for midnight regret and his vocals are only more powerful for the understated delivery. Then comes the 12 bar master-chorus by Johnnie Johnson, which further drenches this song in the best piano blue tones this side of Otis Spann. In every way, a stone masterpiece.

4. **QT MACON/BLOW WIND** From East St. Louis, this short-lived-blues artist recorded this for the local Pulsar label. Played continually by KATZ radio's Blues Don, Lou "Fatha" Thimes, it is a distinctive and fundamental example of how potent Oliver Sain's Archway Studio could be when handling this sort of material. Never released on a full length CD or LP, Blow Wind was seen on a vinyl 45 picture sleeve. A classic blues in every way and Macon had a wonderful voice.

5. **ALBERT KING/C.O.D.** Before his breakout recordings for the Memphis-based Stax label, our man from Lovejoy Illinois recorded two 45s for the East St. Louis Coun-tree label. This is an up-tempo monster showing King didn't need Stax to cut world-class blues sides (as if his LP of material earlier for the King label didn't). All of King's vocal power and instrumental approach on records such as "Born Under A Bad Side" is in full evidence several years before driving 280 miles south on interstate 55. Well less than 2:30, this one is a swaggering heavyweight release.

6. **TOMMY BANKHEAD/CUMMINS PRISON FARM** (Disclaimer: I was one of the producers of the LP this was released on) A one-time take by the late St. Louis-based, Mississippi born Tommy Bankhead, who was one of the *two* bluesmen performing in the city of St. Louis in the early 1970s, at a time where blues was pretty much a non-issue in black clubs. "Cummins Prison Farm" is a duet with Bankhead and Keith Doder on harmonica on the Deep Morgan label. It was recorded without Bankhead's knowledge—he thought it a run-through to set recording levels for the band. Originally sung by Arkansas artist Calvin Levy, this can never be taken as anything but a doom-blasted account of a notorious Missouri prison. If anything, Bankhead pulls the listener further down into the stark hopelessness of a place where "you might find yourself in an unmarked grave." It's also the finest performance of Keith Doder's career; his harmonica work is almost telepathic in the role of counterpart, call and response to Bankhead's vocal. As deep as this music goes...

7. **MARQUIS KNOX/HERE I AM** The title cut on the APO label, the 23 year old blues protégé of the late Henry Townsend grows from strength to strength as singer/songwriter/instrumentalist. If the future of the blues depends on new blood, Knox gives lovers of the blues genre reasons to be hopeful. He was a master of blues performance as a teenager, and my guess is no one walking planet Earth under the age of 30 can test him. The swaggering/assured "Here I Am" shows you an artist confident in his abilities and knowing from where he came from—a far from guaranteed status in our attention-deficit culture. Hear this and know that Knox is going to keep on knocking on your door.

8. **CLAYTON LOVE/THE BIG QUESTION** Before he gave up a career in music for one in education, singer/pianist Love was featured with Turner's Kings Of Rhythm at the same time as Billy Gayles. He recorded his signature song the first time for the Federal imprint and it was a fine record indeed. However, for this list I'm going to his second and final take on *The Big Question* heard on the wonderful LP on Modern Blues, "Rockin' 88s." There Mr. Love was surrounded by sympathetic sidemen and placed in a line-up of fellow pianists Jimmy Vaughan and Johnnie Johnson. Recorded almost 30 years after the one he did for Ike, Clayton gives his definitive recorded performance of all time. As I often say on KDHX radio, "Who Feels It Knows It," and Clayton Love obviously did.

9. **BENNIE SMITH PENROSE AFTER HOURS/URBAN SOUL** OF **BENNIE SMITH** A CD only release with very limited distribution (that is, only from the bandstand) and recorded in the basement of his home. The late Mr. Smith was of the generation of guitarists (including Johnny Guitar Watson) who genuflected to the virtuoso of Texan savant Gatemouth Brown. Without a doubt, Bennie Smith was a fret-board wizard. After being missing in action from the late 60s into the 80s, he began a re-entry into live performance. This is his version of the Avery Parrish blues standard "After Hours," and a master's deft touch is evident. A killer instrumental by someone who reputedly once gave Ike Turner a few pointers on guitar.

10. **STACY JOHNSON/CONSIDER YOURSELF** Heard only on a 45 for the Los Angeles-based Modern label, this is as hard and unrelenting a blues performance to come out of the Ike Turner organization and talent pool in the 1960s. The under-recorded Mr. Johnson was a member of Benny Sharp & The Sharpies, and he also was found on the live Kent LP, Ike & Tina's *Live At The Harlem Club* album. This will stand as his best and among the best singles cut in its decade. The vocal's gospel intensity is given a deep blues groove by Turner, who provides stinging lead-work behind Stacy's wailing voice. Straight-razor electric blues of the highest order. ♫

**Tom "Papa" Ray is 'The Soul Selector' on KDHX 88.1 St. Louis Community Radio. The Soul Selector brings you deep soul, blues and R&B every Monday afternoon at 4 pm.**



Photo of "Papa" Ray spinning at the Old Rock House courtesy of Tom Ray

# From the Pages Past: Oliver Sain 1991

by Michael Kuelker

*The following article originally appeared in Spotlight issue no. 88 (October 1991). Published by Bob Baker, Spotlight was a music newspaper focusing on the St. Louis scene and ran from 1987-97.*

*I went to see Oliver Sain perform on a Sunday evening in Soulard, and he spoke to me on the break as we stood outside in the early autumn. The interview was peppered with brief but rich anecdotes about some of the many legendary blues figures with whom Sain is associated.*

*To hear Sain's talents as a recoding artist, arranger and producer, I kindly direct you to St. Louis Breakdown: The Best of Oliver Sain (Sain Sound 2009) and to St. Louis Blues Revue: Classic Bobbin Sessions (Ace Records UK, 1996).*

Although his reputation is in urban R&B made famous in the 1960s and 70s, Oliver Sain's roots are in Mississippi. An only child, Sain was born on March 1, 1932, in Dundee, Miss. He worked in cotton fields as a youth and moved around with his grandparents' family.

From childhood, he says, he was captivated by music.

"I heard [the blues] on the radio, like Willie Love, who did the King Biscuit hour, after working in the cotton fields. I'd be standing out there in the field pretending I was directing an orchestra.

"You can almost pinpoint when you lock into something," Sain told me. "I used to live in St. Louis for a little while when I was about 12. I remember seeing an All-America show, a big band thing with 14 pieces, at Grand and Laclede with my grandfather. I saw they were playing 'Air Mail Special,' and at the peak this cat banged his two cymbals and it just fascinated me. I'll never forget that as long as I live. I decided I wanted to play drums."

Initially a drummer, Sain gigged in West Memphis in the late 1940s. Willie Love, in fact, became Sain's stepfather, and while still in high school, Sain and his friend Junior Parker played with Love and legendary harp player Sonny Boy Williamson. West Memphis was teeming with rising blues stars, most memorably Riley King, the "Blues Boy from Beale Street," an itinerant guitarist who became better known as BB King.

"It would sometimes be that the band would ring up all the money on the bar tab, sometimes even before we went to play the gig, and we'd wind up not making anything. Junior Parker and I didn't drink, and we went up to Sonny



Oliver Sain (1932 - 2003)

photo by Mark Gilliland

Boy and told him all this. Sonny Boy just looked at us and said, 'Shit, you better start drinking.'" Sain recalled this with a great laugh.

Junior Parker went on to record for Sun Records in 1952-53, writing "Mystery Train," which later became Elvis Presley's first #1 hit (on the country charts, by the way).

Sain also found a blues connection with Howlin' Wolf, who at 40 years old was about twice his age. Recording sessions in those days, and their documentation, were often the result of precision guesswork, and Sain recalls one classic number from 1951 in particular.

"I might be playing drums on the original 'How Many More Years' by Howlin' Wolf. It was cut twice, you see. One has Ike Turner playing piano; the other has L.C. [Hubert] on piano on it. I'm not on the Ike Turner version, and I don't know which cut is on the record."

Sain played with Howlin' Wolf for a while, and then when the Wolf went up to Chicago, Sain stayed south with members of the band including Matt "Guitar" Murphy. "We stole Matt Murphy and we went down with a guy named Clarence Jones to Greenwood, Miss. and we were playing a kind of snooty-dooty white joint. We did the smooth ballads, played the upright bass, smiled a lot, that kind of thing," he said.

Sain was drafted by the United States Army and served a stint in Korea in 1952-53. When he got out, he started seriously learning the saxophone, the instrument for which he is best known, by puttering with his roommate's sax while he was gone.



"I actually learned to play – and this is hard for me to believe now – the entire album *Charlie Parker and Strings*. I would sit there every day and play the solos, everything. Each one of those tunes is with me today. Forever. It was a formative time of my life," he said.

When he went to Chicago and rejoined Howlin' Wolf, it was as a sax player. The bluesman born Chester Burnett was by then a premier artist at the peak of his talents. Singing in a deep-chested growl, Wolf was famous for referring to himself in the third person, a persona that became part-myth, when he extemporized in concert about "being a taildragger so no other wolf can find" him at night on the prowl. And when he belted out, "I'm three hundred pounds of heavenly joy," it sounded more like a threat than a come-on.

Sain called to mind the man apart from the stage persona. "Wolf was a very interesting man. An imposing man but really a very quiet guy. Wolf was uneducated, didn't say a lot but meant what he did say. He was a guy who didn't have a lot of education and he tended to sell himself short – was one of those people who didn't understand why he was so prominent.

"A friend of mine in the band, Hosea Kennard – we were young, about the same age – and we'd talk about jazz people like John Coltrane, Miles Davis or somebody while we were driving in the van. Wolf, he somehow thought it was putting him down, so he'd get impatient with the conversation and say a little something. He finally said one time, 'Everybody's daddy could chin the moon but when they get through, they still be's here with the Wolf.'"

"Another of his favorite expressions" – and here Sain imitated Wolf's baritone rasp – "'If you don't like the way I play, don't order me no more' as though the people were ordering off a menu," he recalled.

Sain also recorded and performed with Elmore James, another Chess Records bluesman whose star was on the rise. "Elmore James was basically a nice guy, but a totally different guy. Elmore drank a little, whereas Wolf didn't, and there might have been a little more arrogance as a result, a little more cockiness."

"I remember going to the Apollo Theater with Wolf in '58. The show was so big – the headliner was Bo Diddley but it was a diversified show, even with doo wop groups. Well, Wolf was a bit apprehensive but actually was bigger than most of those people. Ed Sullivan came backstage to get some people on his show like Willis Jackson, a honkin' type of sax player. When Sullivan came backstage, he walked toward Wolf and Wolf *bowed* to him. Sullivan said, 'Such a great performance, I should bow to you' and he did. So it was an awkward moment," Sain recalled.

In 1959, Sain hooked up with Little Milton again and returned to St. Louis. He became Milton's bandleader and from then on a permanent St. Louis resident. In the mid-1960s he and local singer-pianist Fontella Bass joined forces, recording several sizable R&B hits including Little Milton's 'Raise a Little Sand.' Sain wrote the flipside to Bass' 1965 smash hit 'Rescue Me,' which went to #1 on the R&B charts, fueled by the unforgettable bounce of the bass line and an irresistibly sweet vocal by Bass.

Sain's companion number was "The Soul of the Man," and he also wrote a Bass/Bobby McClure duet, "Don't Mess Up a Good Thing," a Top 5 hit as well in 1965. The latter song has been taken on by such disparate voices as the Grateful Dead (who began doing the song live in the sixties), Gregg Allman (on the solo album *Laid Back*, 1974) and Conway Twitty & Loretta Lynn (*Country Partners*, 1974) among others.

So what is it like, hearing his song interpreted by others? "I'm thrilled. It's an honor. I went to a Ray Charles concert in the late sixties, not too long after we had ['Don't Mess Up a Good Thing'] out. I very seldom go to concerts, but there I was, sitting there at the Kiel and he came on, man, sat down at the piano and started playing it. I wanted to jump up and yell, 'Hey, man, I wrote that song.' I will never forget that."

The remuneration from his work with Chess funded Sain's Archway Studio at 4521 Natural Bridge Ave. in St. Louis. Established in 1965, Archway has been the recording house for Sain's own material and school for many a local musician.

King Curtis' "Soul Serenade" became a minor hit for Sain, and collaboration with Fontella Bass continued on the *Free* album (Paula Records, 1972), which he produced, and other works. Sain was cutting his own albums on the Abet label – *Main Man* (1972), *Bus Stop*, (1974), *Blue Max* (1975) – instrumental soul/funk period pieces of the highest order.

In addition to hosting an annual R&B revue every spring at Mississippi Nights – a homecoming for musical friends now scattered across the nation – today the Oliver Sain Revue performs regularly. A Sain set begins with exploratory jazz and blues instrumentals with Sain tackling much of the soloing on sax and keyboards, and builds to a crest of spirited R&B classics. His own Archway Sound Studio continues to record blues, gospel and R&B.

A brand-new project might well widen his audience. A new collaboration by several veteran bluesmen familiar in St. Louis in the works is being recorded at Archway and produced by Sain. On the album are Tommy Bankhead, Johnnie Johnson, Keith Doder, Durious Montgomery,

continued on page 11

## ST. LOUIS OPEN BLUES JAMS

*Mondays - Hosted by Souldard Blues Band at The Broadway Oyster Bar*

*Mondays - Hosted by Hardtale Blues Band at Beale On Broadway*

*Tuesdays - Hosted by Matt Davis & Darrow Washington at Highway 61 Roadhouse*

*Sundays - Hosted by Voodoo Blues Band at Hammerstone's*

### MARCH

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>Joe Lewis Walker at The Old Rock House</i>
<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>Al Holiday &amp; East Side Rhythm Section at The Gramophone</i>
<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>Bob "Bumblebee" Kamoske at BB's Jazz, Blues &amp; Soups</i>
<i>Thursday</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>Sarah Jane &amp; The Blue Notes at Thaxton Speakeasy</i>
<i>Friday</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>Carrie &amp; the Catapults at BB's Jazz, Blues &amp; Soups</i>
<i>Saturday</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>James Armstrong at BB's Jazz, Blues &amp; Soups</i>
<i>Sunday</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>Dave Black at Schlafly Tap Room</i>
<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>Billy Barnett at BB's Jazz, Blues &amp; Soups</i>
<i>Thursday</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>Jeremiah Johnson &amp; The Sliders at Hammerstone's</i>
<i>Friday</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>Marty Spikener Blues Experience at BBQ Blues Smokehouse</i>
<i>Saturday</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>Tommy Halloran &amp; Guerrilla Swing at Moonshine Blues Bar</i>
<i>Sunday</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>Brian Curran at The Schlafly Tap Room</i>
<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>Dawn Weber &amp; Friends at The Sheldon Concert Hall</i>
<i>Thursday</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>Roland Johnson &amp; Soul Endeavor at Blues City Deli</i>
<i>Friday</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>Marquise Knox at The Moonshine Blues Bar</i>
<i>Saturday</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>Davina &amp; The Vagabonds at Blues City Deli</i>
<i>Sunday</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>Margaret Biachetta &amp; Mary Dee at The Shanti</i>
<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>The Thin Dimes at The Livery Company</i>
<i>Thursday</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>Ground Floor Band at Beale On Broadway</i>
<i>Friday</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>Melissa Neels Band at Satchmo's</i>
<i>Saturday</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>Big George Brock at Moonshine Blues Bar</i>
<i>Sunday</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>Dizzy Atmosphere at The Schlafly Tap Room</i>

### APRIL

<i>Thursday</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>Chicago Blues Angels at Blues City Deli</i>
<i>Friday</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>BB King at Peabody Opera House</i>
<i>Saturday</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>Funky Butt Brass Band at Broadway Oyster Bar</i>
<i>Sunday</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>Wayne Hancock at Off Broadway</i>
<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>Bootigrabbers Delight at The Livery Company</i>
<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>Rough Grooves at BB's Jazz, Blues &amp; Soups</i>
<i>Thursday</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>Kilborn Alley Blues Band at Blues City Deli</i>
<i>Friday</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>Melvin Turnage at The Shanti</i>
<i>Saturday</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>Gas House Gorillas at Blues City Deli</i>
<i>Thursday</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>Miss Jubilee &amp; The Humdingers at Thaxton Speakeasy</i>
<i>Saturday</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>Souldard Blues Band at Moonshine Blues Bar</i>
<i>Sunday</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>Soul Reunion at Beale On Broadway</i>
<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>Kim Massie at Beale On Broadway</i>
<i>Thursday</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>RJ Mischo Band at Blues City Deli</i>
<i>Friday</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>Bottoms Up Blues Gang at The Venice Cafe</i>
<i>Sunday</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>Tom Hall at The Schlafly Tap Room</i>

Show times can vary. Check with venues for specific show times.

continued from page 9

Doc Terry, JR Reed, Steve Waldman and Piano Slim and others. The project is set to be released next year on Wolf Records.

[Note: *St. Louis Blues Today* was released in 1998 on the Wolf label, which also issued *St. Louis Blues Today Vol. 2* featuring Big Bad Smitty.]

Meanwhile, Sain has taken an active role in the burgeoning resistance movement locally against the two recently enforced city ordinances (specifically regarding the amusement tax and business license) that threaten the livelihoods of area musicians and St. Louis' musical culture at large.

"The reasons [for the taxes] are ridiculous," Sain said. "Even the name itself. If you tell someone in another city, 'I got my license to perform a musical instrument in St. Louis,' they'd look at you and say, 'What are you talking about?' And just the idea of a license is scary. If it can be issued, it can be revoked." Sain believes a viable compromise can be achieved.

And still, after over 40 years playing music, Sain gets enthusiastic about his work. "I've been kicking around the business a long time, but I still love performing music." 🎵

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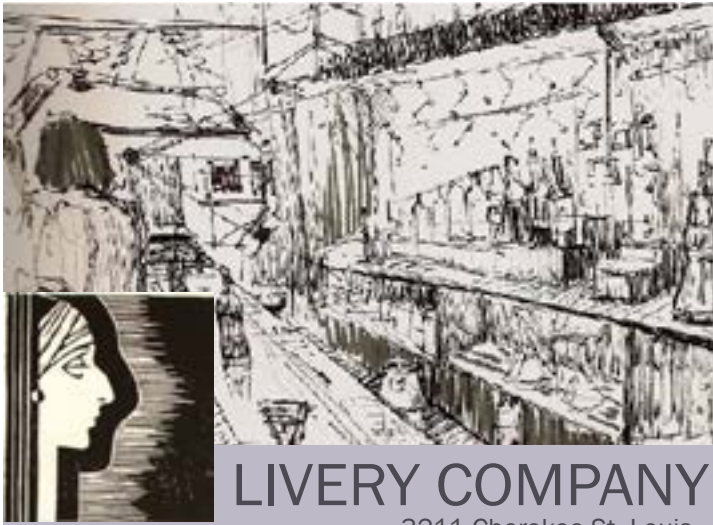
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Saturday	15	Soulard Blues Band
Thursday	20	Roland Johnson and Soul Endeavor
Saturday	22	Davina and The Vagabonds [Twin Cities MN]
Thursday	27	Nikki Hill
Saturday	29	Paul Bonn and the Bluesmen
Thursday	3	The Chicago Blues Angels w/ Mondo Cortez
Thursday	10	Kilborn Alley Blues Band [Champaign IL]
Saturday	12	The Gas House Gorillas [New York]
Thursday	24	RJ Mischo and his Red Hot Blues Band
Saturday	25	Miss Julilee and the Humdingers
Thursday	1	Big Mike Aguirre and the Blu City All Stars

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BLUES CITY DELI

# Dispatches from MEMPHIS

*The St. Louis Blues Society (SLBS) was proud to be a part of the International Blues Challenge in Memphis, Tenn. in January. SLBS sent two representatives to compete: Big Mike Aguirre and the Blu-City All-Stars and Bob "Bumble Bee" Kamoske. Both acts did a fine job and made St. Louis very proud. Board member, Johnny Willis, offers his experiences of the music and the city during IBC.*

## Day 1: Second day of first round

The International Blues Challenge (IBC) has a reputation for being the best blues gathering in the world. Some are bigger, some are longer, some have bigger names, but the IBC has a buzz like nothing else. This is why it was on my bucket list. This is why I decided to go to Memphis.

As fate would have it, we were running late to get down to Beale Street and it was looking like we were going to miss our homegrown act. In a pit stop that would make NASCAR drivers jealous we went skidding into the Hard Rock Café to see our own Band Winner, Big Mike Aguirre and the Blu City All-Stars. They put on a great set and it was good to see about a dozen St. Louis folks in the crowd supporting our entrant. It was here where I had my first "Star" sighting; Candye Kane and Laura Chavez. As soon as Big Mike's set was over we dashed over to the Blues City Café to see the Rockin' Jake Band. Jake lived in St. Louis for a couple of years. He came up to us after the show to get caught up on things in St. Louis. The set that the Rockin' Jake Band performed was probably the least bluesy of the night. He hit the stage at 100mph and never slowed down.

After that I popped over to The Pig on Beale Street for ribs and some solo/duo acts. The first act, from the Oklahoma City Blues Society, was a duo called the Christine Jude Duo. She sang and Chris Brown played an acoustic guitar to accompany the vocals. Over the delicious ribs, we also enjoyed a solo dobro guitar act by the name of Tevis Hodge Jr. from Oregon.

The next stop was to see the Randy Oxford Band who are always solid and very high energy. They did four songs and had a different vocalist on each song. They stomped into the semi-finals like they have in prior years. I spoke with Randy after the set and he had lots of great things to say about St. Louis and BB's Jazz, Blues, & Soups. On our way to the Blues City Café to see the Alex Wilson Band we had our second star sighting; Harmonica player Dennis Gruenling. He joined our pack and we were off to catch what would be three bands that made it to the semi-finals: The Alex Wilson Band, Boogie Patrol out of Edmonton and Bad Brad & The Fat Cats from the Colorado Blues Society.

The last official band of the night was St. Louis' own, Bob "Bumblebee" Kamoske. He played at the Westin, which is a block or so off Beale, but there was a good crowd for the small venue. Bob did a great job on slide and then switched to his solid body for "All the Women in my Life." Again, there were a bunch of St. Louis folks in the crowd to cheer him on.

## Day 2: IBC Semi-finals

We got off to a sluggish start on day two after the late night but made it to lunch at the famous Memphis restaurant, Central BBQ. We split pulled pork covered nachos as an appetizer and sandwiches for lunch. This place is definitely a thumbs-up. After a brief photo op at Sun Studios, a nap and some tasty dinner at Johnny G's we were ready for more blues.

It was semi-final night so things were going up a notch. The big debate was if we should go back to the bands we really enjoyed the

night before or to go see bands we hadn't seen yet. As it happened, we were sitting next to a woman from Houston who had been a volunteer at the IBC's for the last five years. We ended up swapping programs and circling bands that each of us liked. Day two's first star sighting was Chef Jimi Patricola, who runs Blues411.com and the Facebook page "The Blues-Still Alive and Well." His passion for the blues came through in our short conversation. Both experiences are an example of what a great community of music lovers, industry people and musicians come together to celebrate the Blues at the IBC.

We then made a quick stop at Wet Willies on the way to the 12 Bar Club to see Micah Kesselring from Ohio. This 20 year old was on his fourth trip to the IBC and subsequently his fourth trip to the semi-finals. I had heard one of his songs on the drive to and was excited to see what this kid had to offer. He played a solo deep-woods blues with lots of slide and at one point he pulled out a cigar box guitar. He had a great groove and I would like to hear more from him in the future.

At this point, the IBC semi-finals were over and it was time to return to the Rum Boogie for night two of the All-star Jam. The band was led by Steady Rollin' Bob Margolin and over the course of the night musicians such as Tad Walters, Dennis Gruenling, Rip Lee Pryor, Long Tall Deb and Nic Clark sat in. We shared a table with a nice older gentleman, who turned out to be Teddy Johnson, the proprietor of Teddy's Juke Joint in Zachary, La. This was great fun, but we had another full day planned for Saturday, so we headed home for the night.

## Day 3: Finals

We were bright eyed and ready for the finals at the Orpheum Theater. Prior to the finals, we had one piece of unfinished business — Gus' World Famous Fried Chicken. Due to a series of closed roads and one way streets, it took us time to get there, but it turned out to be the best meal of the weekend.

We got to the finals a little late and missed Bad Brad & The Fat Cats, which was disappointing because I enjoyed them a couple of nights earlier. There were 17 acts in the finals; nine in the band category and eight in the solo/duo. I won't expand on each band, but I did enjoy every act. Over eight hours later, the band winner was Mr. Sipp from Vicksburg, Miss. and the solo/duo winner was Tim Williams from Ontario.

It was a long day, but the weather was much better so I took a walk between sets. It was during one of these walks where I had my favorite experience of the weekend — running into Bob Corritore. Bob runs the Rhythm Room in Phoenix, has a syndicated radio show and is a harmonica recording artist. I let him know I was a fan and thanked him for all he did. We then began talking more casually and it came up that I played harmonica. We started discussing theory and technique. There was a lot of hub-bub on the sidewalk, so we stepped into a small doorway and Corritore took about 10 minutes to give me a private harmonica lesson. Eventually, a crowd formed and other folks wanted his attention. It was a moving experience for me.

After eight hours of music at the Orpheum, even Beale Street could not entice us for another late evening. We grabbed a burger, hit the souvenir shop to see if there are any trinkets we needed there, then back to the hotel to get ready for the early flights and long drives home. My first trip to the IBCs was an amazing experience. There were good bands, good food, good friends and lots of time with the legions of blues music fans that make this genre relevant.

Johnny Willis

# Mat Wilson

by Nick Pence



The Loot Rock Gang: from left; Wilson, Little Rachael, Banjo Kellie and Stephen Inman.

photo by Richard Nichols

*"If he got to be fairly good right away he went to Kansas City or Chicago. They didn't stay to build on the foundation they built up here, they moved out. You see it was just a few of us that stayed here in St. Louis and went all the way with what ever happened. A guy gets good and he leaves. By the same token if he stayed here he would draw other good musicians to him here. But it didn't work that way. They got good and boom, right where the recording places where" -Henry Townsend*

That quote is indicative of Henry Townsend's commitment to St. Louis and its blues music. Rum Drum Ramblers, Little Rachel, and The Loot Rock Gang guitarist Mat Wilson lives that commitment that he learned first hand from Henry. Mat would frequent Henry's home learning licks, stories and even sharing a couch with Robert Lockwood, Jr. "I took what Henry said like gospel, as the truth *and* with a grain of salt." This is how Mat approached every situation. He truly had a deep respect for Townsend who not only passed on his knowledge and experiences of the blues to Mat, but also instilled in him the ability to see the beauty of St. Louis and the need to keep the blues alive in the city.

When Mat started the Rum Drum Ramblers with Ryan Koenig and Joey Glynn, after being on the road with blues musician Sean Costello as a road manager and guitar tech, he said "I'm going to start a band and I don't care who likes it." His pride in St. Louis became part of the band as well. "Rum Drum was a great outlet to represent Henry," said Mat.

Though Mat's pure and original finger style picking was showcased in Rum Drum and his deep well of blues and 50's R&B licks are featured when backing Little Rachel it is his seasoned, charming, versatile songwriting in which is the focus in his new project The Loot Rock Gang. The name comes from the rock in Meramec Caverns where The James Gang supposedly divvied up the money from a bank robbery in the 1870s. It makes perfect sense that a story like that would be behind the vocal based group which includes his wife Little Rachel, Banjo Kellie Everett, and Stephen Inman. Mat and Rachel are both currently enthralled with mid- century Americana—the kind you find along Route 66.

When asked about his writing for the group Mat said "this is just a continuation of my writing and I happen to have this band to play them with." He has always written about, and with, what ever is sparking his interest at the time. "Right now it is Missouri history and Route 66" he says. The Loot Rock Gang is truly showing off a new level of writing for Mat. "Now when I write, I'm consciously thinking of horns and dual vocals in my melodies and arrangement." The unique vocal and horn parts make The Loot Rock Gang's music reflect Mat's seasoned writing. Though he says he is always in the process of learning, he has a knack for making art out of history.

Though a heavy tour schedule is not the plan for the Gang, making records is high on the list. He said, "as long as I can get records out then I can feel it's worth my time. Even if the project dies as a live performance it lives on as its own thing through records, that's why we call them records." On that note, he continued, "Rum Drum will always be an active band, it means too much to Ryan, Joey, and I to let it die."

Mat Wilson is a bluesman through his bones, but is also a versatile writer. We are fortunate here in the river city to count Mat as one of our own, and even more fortunate that he took Henry's advice and continues to call St. Louis his home. 🎵

*The Loot Rock Gang has eight tracks recorded and a few more to go before they release their first album.*



# ST. LOUIS musicians directory

**Aaron Griffin & Mojo Rising**

Larry Griffin  
[ljgriff43@yahoo.com](mailto:ljgriff43@yahoo.com)  
314.662.1857

**Al Holliday & The  
East Side Rhythm Band**

Al Holliday  
[www.alhollidaymusic.com](http://www.alhollidaymusic.com)  
618.210.6078

**Bible Belt Sinners**

Molly Simms  
[www.biblebeltsinners.com](http://www.biblebeltsinners.com)  
618.980.2428

**Big Mike Aguirre  
and the Blu-City All-Stars**

[bigmikemusic618@live.com](mailto:bigmikemusic618@live.com)  
618.610.7467

**Brown Bottle Fever**

Billy Skelton  
[www.brownbottlefever.com](http://www.brownbottlefever.com)  
314.226.2575

**Bootigrabbers Delight**

Jeremy Segel-Moss  
314.482.0314

**The Bottoms Up  
Blues Gang**

Jeremy Segel-Moss  
[www.bottomsupblues.com](http://www.bottomsupblues.com)  
314.482.0314

**Bob "Bumble Bee"**

**Kamoske**  
[rkamoske@gmail.com](mailto:rkamoske@gmail.com)  
314.322.2400

**Brian Curran**

[www.briantcurran.com](http://www.briantcurran.com)  
314.753.1395

**Dave Black**

[www.daveblackstl.com](http://www.daveblackstl.com)  
314.647.1415

**Eugene Johnson  
& Company**

[www.eugenejohnson.net](http://www.eugenejohnson.net)  
314.537.2396

**The Fab Foehners**

Sharon Foehner  
[sharondougfoehner@sbcglobal.net](mailto:sharondougfoehner@sbcglobal.net)  
314.577.1934

**Funky Butt Brass Band**

Tim Halpin  
[www.funkybuttbrassband.com](http://www.funkybuttbrassband.com)  
314.623.4504

**The Harris Brothers  
Blues Project**

Sean Harris  
[www.facebook.com/HarrisBrosBluesProject](http://www.facebook.com/HarrisBrosBluesProject)  
618.977.7333

**Hudson &  
The Hoodoo Cats**

Hudson Harkins  
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314.603.5641

**Jim McClaren**

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314.664.3449

**The Jeremiah Johnson  
Band**

Jeremiah Johnson  
[www.thejeremiahjohnsonband.com](http://www.thejeremiahjohnsonband.com)  
314.556.5211

**Johnny Fox**

[www.reverbnation.com/johnnyfox](http://www.reverbnation.com/johnnyfox)  
314.792.4446

**Miss Jubilee  
& The Humdingers**

[www.miss-jubilee.com](http://www.miss-jubilee.com)  
314.645.7220

**Larry Griffin  
& Eric McSpadden Duo**

Larry Griffin  
[ljgriff43@yahoo.com](mailto:ljgriff43@yahoo.com)  
314.662.1857

**North of the Quarter**

Toby Mechem  
[www.northofthequarter.com/](http://www.northofthequarter.com/)  
513.212.7782

**Pat Liston**

Dawn Liston  
[www.patliston.com](http://www.patliston.com)  
618.741.1166

**Raven Wolf**

**C. Felton Jennings II**  
[www.pugdogrecords.com](http://www.pugdogrecords.com)  
314.550.2743

**The Rhythm Section  
Road Show**

Andy Coco  
[www.rsrs.co](http://www.rsrs.co)  
314.255.3708

**Rough Grooves**

Rich McDonough  
[www.reverbnation.com/roughgrooves](http://www.reverbnation.com/roughgrooves)  
314.625.1787

**Sarah Jane  
and the Blue Notes**

Sarah Jane Ulrich  
[www.reverbnation.com/sarahjanethebluenotes](http://www.reverbnation.com/sarahjanethebluenotes)  
314.539.1142

**The Thin Dimes**

Nick Pence  
[www.facebook.com/thethindimes](http://www.facebook.com/thethindimes)  
314.657.6114

**Three the Hard Way**

Marty D. Spikener  
[spikemoves@hotmail.com](mailto:spikemoves@hotmail.com)  
314.435.7053

**Tom "Boss" Hall  
and Geyer Street Sheiks**

[www.tomhallmusic.com](http://www.tomhallmusic.com)  
314.853.0060

**Tommy Halloran  
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314.243.3147

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