

BLUES LETTER



TOM MALONEY AND TOM HALL

PLUS:

A Tribute to Four Important St. Louisans, BLUESWEEK Review in Pictures, An Essay by Alonzo Townsend, The Application Window Opens for the St. Louis/IBC Road to Memphis, CD Review, Discounts for Members and more...



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BLUESLETTER

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.

CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF SUPPORTING BLUES MUSIC IN ST LOUIS

Dear Blues Lovers,

Summer is in full swing in St. Louis. Festivals, neighborhood events and patios filled with music are kickin' all over the City. Bluesweek, over Memorial Day Weekend, was a big hit for musicians and fans alike. Check out some of the pictures from the weekend on page 11. Thanks to everyone who helped make Bluesweek a success!

July means the opening of applications for bands and solo/duo acts who want to be involved in this year's International Blues Challenge. Last year we had a fantastic group of bands and solo/duo acts competing to go to Memphis. The information for this year; application, dates and rules, are all on our website and on page 7. If you are interested in participating or have questions, please contact Jerry Minchey at jminchey@stlouisbluessociety.org.

International Blues Music Day is coming up August 2. According to the website, IBMD brings together communities, schools, artists, historians, academics, and blues enthusiasts all over the world to celebrate and learn about blues and its roots; raise awareness of the need for intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding; and reinforce international cooperation and communication. The St. Louis Blues Society will be celebrating IBMD in Lafayette Square this year with performance by Dawn Weber and Naked Rock Fight. Swing by and help us celebrate!

The beginning of summer was also a hard one in St. Louis. Unfortunately, we lost several musicians and community supporters in a matter of a few weeks. Lou "Fatha" Thimes, Tony Simmons, Jimmy Lee Kennett and Big Daddy will all be missed greatly. As most of us know, St. Louis music is some of the best music in the world. The musicians and community that support the music are important to us on many levels. This summer take special time to appreciate how good we have it in St. Louis. Thank a musician, thank a venue owner and thank yourselves for making St. Louis one of the greatest music cities in the world.

Jeremy Segel-Moss
VCP St. Louis Blues Society

ON THE COVER:
Tom Maloney by Madison Thorn
Tom Hall by Ralph Heine



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CORRECTIONS: Thank you to Joel Slotnikoff for pointing out that Cummins Prison Farm was [is] in Arkansas, not Missouri as stated in "Papa Ray's Picks" in our March issue. Indeed, according to the Arkansas Dept. of Corrections website, Cummins Unit is "28 miles south of Pine Bluff, off Highway 65 in Lincoln Co." and currently used as "Special Management Barracks for mental health, education, horse operation, Substance Abuse Education, Canine Unit, PAL Program, Agricultural and Industrial Operations." This c. 1914 photo is taken from the website's historical photo gallery. And a sincere apology to Leroy Jodie Pierson for misspelling his last name in the letter to members of the same issue. Of all people! we thought; one so familiar and so loved we are embarrassed and truly sorry.

Four very important St. Louisans were laid to rest in the past two months.

Requiescant in Peace

by Marty D. Spikener

JIMMY LEE KENNETT

When you saw his name on the marquee, you knew you were going to see some great guitar playing. Jimmy wanted to sing and play guitar from about the moment he was born. He learned to play guitar from his mother, a musician herself. After graduating from high school, he started one of the most popular bands around, Jimmy Lee and The Joint Jumpers.

After a fifteen-year-run with Joint Jumpers, Jimmy began playing out with other bands. That's how we met. We both landed in a band with Jon Erblich playing at Riddle's Penultimate Cafe on Wednesday nights.

Jimmy loved to laugh and make other people, both the audience and the other musicians on stage, laugh. At Riddles, he would unscrew the light bulb on the wall close to the stage just enough so it would flicker when he hit the wall. He always tried to make me laugh at something while we were playing. Usually he would get me to laugh so much I had to wear sunglasses to make him think that I wasn't looking at him.

The sunglasses didn't always work, and I still laugh at Jimmy's antics today. We have remained good friends all these years and every time we see each other, our conversation always starts with laughter.

Jimmy's amazing guitar playing has brought him wide attention over the years. He has played with Chuck Berry, Johnny Johnson, Jimmy Vaughan, Bugs Henderson and so many others. His late Sunday night jam sessions at 1860's were popular with fellow musicians and fans who ended their week-end being entertained by one of St. Louis' greatest guitar players ever.

Jimmy passed away at home on June 9 after a long fight with colon cancer. He was 60 years old. Jimmy Lee will definitely be remembered for his awesome electric blues and rock guitar playing, but those that knew him personally will also remember his smile, his quiet tenderness, his laughter and his passion for life.



BIG DADDY

Victor "Buster" Doyle Johnson, Sr. alias "Big Daddy," passed away on May 19; one month before his 53rd birthday from complications of diabetes. He was buried at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery.

He had a remarkable vocal style—loud howling with an incredibly deep strength. His band, Big Daddy's Blues Band, played all over St. Louis, but he was well known at BB's, Beale on Broadway and especially Johnnie's in Soulard.

I met Big Daddy at Johnnie's where I played a few nights with his band. That led to being a regular substitute for gigs when he needed a drummer. For years, he would come sit-in with the Rich McDonough Band on a regular basis. He loved his blues and he was a great showman. I will always remember him—singing those Howling Wolf tunes that he did so well.



LOU "FATHA" THIMES

The legendary star of St. Louis black radio, "Fatha" Thimes passed away on June 11 from emphysema and congestive heart failure. He was 85 years old.

Known for his deep sexy voice, he worked in St. Louis playing blues and R&B on the radio for over 50 years. Some might remember him too as the ring announcer at Kiel Auditorium boxing matches.

Thimes began his career as a comedian, but switched to radio after serving in the army. His love of comedy and his sense of humor was one of the endearing qualities about his popular radio shows. His timing was perfect and his wit unmatched.

During his long career, he worked at many different stations in St. Louis including KATZ, KADI and KDHX. He played blues and R&B, but he also made sure the black community was aware of important social issues. He deservedly is credited for not only a pioneering role in black urban radio, but for making the careers of many local and national artists that he debuted on his shows.

I grew up listening to KATZ radio. Doug Eason, Bernie Hayes and Lou Thimes were my education and my introduction to music. I believe I am the musician I am today because of the rich contributions they made to St. Louis.



TONY SIMMONS

Keyboardist Tony Simmons passed on June 7 after having a heart attack. He was 50 years old. Tony has been a cherished musical talent in St. Louis for many years. He started playing piano at the age of five and by age nine he was playing for the church children's choir and honing his skills in gospel. He never forgot his roots in gospel and as he became older, he stayed involved in the church and played with a number of different major church congregations.

Tony experienced many health issues during his life but he never let anything come between him and his music. Even losing his eyesight at a very young age to glaucoma did not stop him. He played ensemble gigs with some of the top jazz and blues acts around St. Louis and with international singers.

His extraordinary keyboarding has backed Mae Wheeler, Denise Thimes, Kim Massie and Bill Tucker. He wrote music for and or produced music for Kirk Franklin, Joe McBride, and Alkesha Brown. He released a solo album, *The Master Key* in 2006.

I had the pleasure of seeing Tony perform last year at Transfiguration Lutheran Church's Christmas Concert. Before the concert he said, "When I come to play my best, I'm going to bring the best." And he did; Tony and the young vocalist he accompanied tore the house down.

But, you expected that from Tony Simmons.



These things motivate you as you watch...and listen.

by Alonzo Townsend

Submerging yourself in something great can do nothing but push you. I've been submerged in something more than great from day one: The blues. I sometimes feel as if I fill myself with the same passion as my father, Henry J. Townsend (The Mule). His passion spanned ten decades, 80 career years, beginning a century ago. When my father began his career, there were no Grammys, Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame, or Billboard Charts. None. It was his passion, love and commitment to music and a craft that not many can master let alone understand.

Now fast forward. My father is an acclaimed legend and master with a Grammy, well over 50 Lifetime Achievement Awards and fame inductions. Respect is hard fought and earned. It is never an accident or mistake. My motivation is that right there and I've been more than blessed. I always say, "I couldn't complain if I wanted to." And, I can't.

As a kid on up, I've been around, learned, and soaked up some of the greatest legends of all time; Bonnie Raitt, "Uncle" Robert Jr. Lockwood, BB King, Honeyboy Edwards, Homesick James, Johnnie Johnson, Piano Slim, Oliver Sain, Bennie Smith, Big George Brock, Chuck Berry, Hubert Sumlin, Louisiana Red, Kenny Wayne Shepherd and Alvin Youngblood Hart. I remember Alvin sending my dad a letter and being the one to read it to him. As I read Alvin's letter, I saw the respect and admiration he had of his idol and request to learn more, and it influenced me. Like watching him put wings on a 13 year old man-child, Marquise Knox, so he could take off.

These things motivate you as you watch...and listen.

Some of you reading this have known me since I was "Baby Townsend." Some of you since, know me as the face (or should I say smiling face) of BB's Jazz, Blues and Soups. BB's also holds another big piece of my motivation and heart.

In the first incarnation of BB's, my father brought his legendary friends such as Roosevelt Sykes & Yank Rachell to perform at the club. He believed in this place. He believed in a home for

the blues in St. Louis, something which has now built a family. So yeah, along with "Uncle" Mark O' Shaughnessy the goal was something we continue to see every day now at 700 South Broadway. I give my job my all. The same loyalty, love, commitment and family endurance to make sure BB's continues to stand the test of time.

Brick by brick. Band by band. Note by note. I do it not only for me, but for our culture, our love and the generations that love my father and his passion. Not only our generation, but the next as well. Such as, the third generation of my dad—my beautiful six year old daughter, Kalia Townsend, who already blows harp, plays piano and has a goal to "be as great as my paw-paw."

These things motivate as you watch...and listen.



I hold on to the love of our music, what we built and carry, as bearers of the blues. A craft that is so hollowed that only a few can master it. It is my life, passion and work to see my father's love carried on in the new digital age. It will be done because it has to be done.

One thing I'd like to develop in the future is a radio program strictly catering to the 'baby blues' infusion of our music. Youth internet radio will attract and promote new, young, masters of the blues. Providing blues to and for the under-30s will only create more devotion to the same passion and love that I have known all too well and ensure a great American art form will not go away.

On September 24, 2006, my father in Jesus name passed away in Grafton, Wisconsin. He passed the torch to me and told me never to let go. To make sure his passion, his work, is never forgotten and always stands. So I make sure of that. I equip myself every day, soaking up as much knowledge, skills and commitment as possible to ensure that the blues live on. My motivation is the same as my dad's was; to preserve the legacy of the blues to make sure the blues never fades or dies.

Yes, these things motivate as you watch...and listen. 🎵

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Alonzo proud of his job at BB's surrounded by Henry Townsend memorabilia photo courtesy Alonzo Townsend

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July 5	7 PM	Wack-A-Doo
July 11	5 PM	THE PBJ's
	6 PM	New Orleans Side Show Performances
	7 PM	Wack-A-Doo
	10 PM	Les Gruff and the Billy Goat
July 12	8 PM	12 Tom Byrne Trio
July 16	8 PM	Redleg Husky
July 17	7 PM	Bob "Bumblebee" Kamoske
		Mike Graham
July 18	9 PM	The Dust Covers ft. Brian Curran
July 19	7 PM	Water Taxi
	11 PM	Jon Bonham and Friends
July 22	8 PM	Bret Mosley
July 23	8 PM	Linus in the Sapphire
July 24	7 PM	The Funatics
July 25	7 PM	Joe Bozzi Band
July 26	9 PM	Blue Fruit Snacks
July 28	8 PM	Julie Gribble
July 29	8 PM	Underhill Rose
		Alex Smith and The Mountain Sound
July 31	8 PM	Max Dvorak w/ The Wilhelms
Aug 1	7 PM	Sarah Jane & the Blue Notes
Aug 2	7 PM	Danbury Street
Aug 6	8 PM	Dylan Jakobsen with Eric Barnes
Aug 7	8 PM	Old Monk
Aug 8	9 PM	The Dust Covers ft. Brian Curran
Aug 9	7 PM	Wack-A-Doo
Aug 13	8 PM	Maryleigh Roohan
Aug 14	8 PM	Passerine w/ guest Russ Bowman
Aug 15	7 PM	Billy Barnett
Aug 16	7 PM	Joe Bozzi Band
	10:30 PM	Kiss-N-Tells Burlesque Show
Aug 18	7 PM	Traveling Tony B
Aug 22	7 PM	The Rombolinis
Aug 23	7 PM	Water Taxi
Aug 27	8 PM	Savannah Smith
Aug 28	8 PM	The Saturday Giant
Aug 29	7 PM	Sidemen
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www.stlouisbluessociety.org/blues-challenge

The St. Louis Blues Society announces the 2014 band competition to select one blues band and one solo/duo act to represent St. Louis at the 31th International Blues Challenge (IBC) presented by the Blues Foundation and held in Memphis, Tennessee the last week of January 2015.

Any act that performs 50% of the time in the St. Louis area is eligible to compete. Entrants must follow rules and guidelines for qualifying application submission.

*The St. Louis/IBC Application will be available for a limited time beginning July 1, 2014 on the St. Louis Blues Society website. Musicians who intend to enter the challenge will download the application and submit it timely to ensure a place in the final competition. *The St. Louis Blues Society will accept only the FIRST TEN band applications received that meet requirement qualifications and the FIRST FIVE solo/duo applications received that meet requirement qualifications. When sufficient numbers of qualified applications are received by the St. Louis Blues Society, the application availability period will close for that category. The official submission deadline date for both categories is August 31, 2014. No applications will be accepted after the official deadline. For complete rules visit: <http://www.stlouisbluessociety.org/blues-challenge/ibc-rules-and-scoring-system/> If you have any questions, please contact Jerry Minchey at jminchey@stlouisbluessociety.org*

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A CONVERSATION WITH TOM HALL

By Brian & Sara Curran



Sara and I recently had the pleasure to sit and chat with Tom Hall and learn more about the man and his music. But before we start, I'd like to tell you how Tom played a large role in my own start with music. I was about 13 years old and just picking up the guitar. Billy Barnett was my guitar teacher (still is) and he told my dad to take me to go and see the guitar sensation Eric Johnson play at Mississippi Nights. Before Eric got on stage, I remember watching a guy all by himself picking on a metal guitar. It was Tom. I was mesmerized by the sound one man could make all on his own. I had never heard anyone play guitar like that before. Tom filled the room with music. I decided then and there that was what I wanted to do! Later, through my late teens and early twenties, I was lucky enough to take lessons with Tom. I learned so much in the lessons we shared and am truly grateful for the music and techniques Tom passed along to me.

Tom Hall never set out to become a musician. His beginning in music started in his early twenties when he took bluegrass banjo lessons while living in the Central West End. He was playing banjo in a band called the Franklin County Donkey Club. "We were playing Old And In The Way type stuff," Tom says. Then on a visit to Columbia, Mo., it all changed. A friend played him a Mississippi John Hurt record. "I'd never heard anything like that. I was floored!" It was *The Best of Mississippi John Hurt*, a live recording from 1965. Tom got back to St. Louis and purchased the record for himself. With a borrowed guitar, knowing only a few chords and never having a formal lesson, Tom locked himself in a room every night for 3-4 hours after his bartending shift and learned to play. "I could hear the bass goin' like this, and I could hear the fingerpicking, and I knew it was one guitar and I just had to figure it out." For 2-3 years he'd go home, "get me a six-pack of tall boys, sit myself in that room and slow everything down to 16 and figure it out."

His first gig was at The Orphanage (now Dressel's Public House). He was so scared and nervous about singing, that after the gig, they called him "Whispering Tom Hall" since nobody could hear him sing. He played a couple John Hurt songs and made \$40. "I played a few more gigs that year, but money just got worse and worse so I just sort of lost the attraction," he said. After that, Tom "was just piddling around...tending bar, driving trucks and painting houses."

Until he met Steve Mote, who was teaching at COCA. "I went to take a lesson from Steve. I wanted him to show me how to play John Hurt's 'Richland Woman.' He told me, 'I can't teach you nothin'. I thought, 'Am I not good enough?' I didn't understand. But I still had the desire." So Tom started playing a few gigs at Mike & Min's where Steve was playing on Thursday nights. Steve invited him to get together and play some tunes.

In 1978, Tom and Steve started playing around town as Bozo's Hometown Skiffle Band where Tom was introduced to bands like the Mississippi Sheiks and Gus Cannon's Jug Band. "Bozo's Hometown Skiffle Band was too long of a name and we were playing on Geyer Street at Mike & Min's, so we came up with the Geyer Street Sheiks."

The Sheiks (also featuring Mike Tiefenbrun, Dave Gebben, Julie Olin, Kevin Keegan, Charlie Pfeffer and Mike Prokopf) played Friday & Saturday nights at Mike & Min's where you could barely get in the door it was so packed. They played around St. Louis and regionally at clubs and festivals. "We didn't travel a lot but enough for it to get around, you know. And of course, I'd never been anywhere or done anything...so you know, to me it was just sex, drugs, and rock & roll. That's all I was in it for." Tom laughs. The Geyer Street Sheiks broke up around 1981 and Tom went back to his solo career. "I just played to play and make some money."

Tom played Allen Avenue (now the Shanti) and various other venues as a solo gig and then started the BBQ Band with Tom Maloney and Dave Black. "That developed into River City Rhythm with John Higgins, Dave Black, Vince Corkery, Vince Fala, and Rusty Parker. That was a good band. That broke up and then I had The Illusions which was Mike Prokopf, Dave Black, and Jimmy Miller."

In 1991, Tom ran into Steve Mote again. "Enough time had passed so I guessed it was time to get the Sheiks back together again!" Julie had moved away so Alice Spencer took over as the new female vocalist, and Mark Rennard replaced Kevin Keegan on fiddle. They played again until about 1996 and making a very good living at it! "We were playing Off Broadway...the seven of us...making 600 bucks apiece," Tom recalls.

All the while, Tom was still playing solo gigs. "I'll tell you," Tom says, "part of why I kept doing it was money...and I didn't know what else to do. I got sick of tending bar." To push himself on solo gigs, he explains, "I try to make myself have one little thing...even one lick so when I get there I'm like...ok. I can sit around and practice all I want at my house and I think I sound great but then when I go out in public, it's a whole other story. The more I play stuff out that I don't know very well, the quicker it develops and I get better at it. So I try to do that."

In 2013, things took a different turn. "2012 was brutal for me. I really went through a rough year." He didn't have a place to live and moved in with some friends. "I was starting to come around...get healthier, and then two days after Christmas, I fell down the steps and shattered my collarbone. I like to think I got pushed down the steps." The Geyer Street Sheiks came to answer the call and organized a reunion / benefit show at the Schlafly Tap Room. "The best thing that ever happened to me in years. If they wouldn't have taken me in, I would have been pushed down the steps. I don't know where I would have been. This whole thing has been a huge blessing. Not playing guitar for two and a half months gave me a lot of time to think about shit. And then the support I got...These people, I need to pay them back. Not just individuals. A whole crowd of people."

Tom says about the future, "I'm giving it my best shot. And I'm enjoying it." He is excited about the new duo with Alice Spencer called T&A. They have been performing locally, including the St. Louis Blues Week Festival, touring regionally, and have a new CD. Tom says, "Make a better living is what I want to do. Enjoy myself. Make good music. What else can you ask for?"

Go see Tom Hall play! He is truly one of the greatest fingerstyle guitar players around! And I'll have the pleasure of sharing the stage with Tom Hall and Dave Black on July 26th at the Focal Point for a fingerstyle guitar showcase. 🎸

Tom Hall at Bluesweek 2014 photo by Reed Radcliffe

Tom Maloney:

The St. Louis Sideman Extraordinaire

By Bruce Olson

A wry smile grows larger and larger as local musician Tom Maloney talks of his parents; Tom and Laverne, their living room, and the piano he and his sisters enjoyed during their childhood. In his own South County living room, just a mile and a half from where he born and raised, Maloney remembers his mom and dad in the fifties, “I’d hear them play ‘Maple Leaf Rag’ [It was] such a happy sound. As a little kid, it sent me into joy and ecstasy. When I heard that song, I used to run in a circle and just dive into the pillows. There was something in me right from the start.”

Born on May 1, 1952, Maloney grew up in the South County community of Mehlville, near the Mississippi River and not far from the city line. St. Louis, at the time, was the confluence of blues, R&B, jazz and ragtime. Music was very available to him—everything from his mother playing Chopin to Ike Turner performing at Club Imperial.

By 1970, when Maloney graduated from Mehlville High School, he had already played in bands called the Nightmares, King James and the Royals, the Chaparrals, the Malibus, the Dynamic Soul Revue, Soul Tree, Gary & the Greasers and Tree. During his teenage years, St. Louis City sponsored events called *Teen Town Dances*. Bob Kuban and The Hitmen were the stars of the show in the mid and late 1950s. After Teen Town events, Maloney and his bandmates would “make a bee line for Gaslight Square and walk up and down the street. The action was visible from the street. You could see the go-go girls and the band right through the window.”

Maloney remembers the night he sat in with Kuban at the Club Imperial during an opening set for the Ike and Tina Turner Revue. “[It was] one of the most high energy, high polished, dramatic, theatrical shows that we had ever seen—keyboard, drums, bass, a left-handed guitar, three horns and various male vocals.”

It was also 1970, at the Prince Nights Palace in East St. Louis, when he first saw Albert King. It changed him. The guitar players could never figure out what he was doing because he played left handed. Everybody loved him, but nobody knew how to play him. “Albert took that whole thing to another level. He was a perfect example of someone who didn’t have a musical education, but had it in him and did something with it. A guy told me years ago that [King] played about seven notes and I said, ‘he plays them like nobody else and the minute you hear him you know it’s him.’”

In the mid 1970s, Maloney joined Timmy Tours, a rock band that toured Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, and wound up in Chicago, giving him his first taste of the national scene. He didn’t much like it. “There was this Rolling Stone guy with us, writing a story. He was always trying to stir up shit between us. It was

eye opening. I didn’t want to be a rock star anymore.” After that, Maloney performed with several groups including Honest John, Big Mama Blue and Jeannie Burke & The Marsmen. Ultimately, by the late 1970s, he had married, moved back to St. Louis and began playing with Marcel Strong. In 1982, Maloney joined the newly formed Souldard Blues Band, who at the time featured vocalist Larry Thurston.

Maloney’s educated guitar handled all these situations with dramatic flair. He became known as the go-to-guy when you needed a guitar. He got calls to perform with Oliver Sain, Clayton Love and he played a regular Christmas Day show with Albert King. When Thurston formed Sounds of the City in the mid 1980s, he brought Maloney with him from the Souldard Blues Band. The new group included bass player Gus Thornton and Jim Miller on drums. However, before long the band had an additional member, Johnnie Johnson. Johnson, who had been driving a bus at the time, was trying to get his musical feet in gear and asked Maloney if he could join the band.

Sounds of the City had just landed a weekly gig at the newly opened Broadway Oyster Bar. One night in early 1985, Johnson arrived at the side door down by the stage, dragging a piano—a stand-up wooden piano on wheels. Maloney remembers the band was playing Chicken Shack as he approached. “I see Johnnie and he’s dragging this piano and we stopped the song. We open the door up wide and help him get the piano on stage and get his amp and we get it all set up and I say ‘Johnnie what would you like to play?’ And he says, ‘Well, I liked what I heard when I got here,’ and we jumped back into it. I’m standing back and I’m hearing him play and I’m hearing all those licks I heard on the Chuck Berry records and there he was playing them. I was just floored.”

The band caught on and within a few weeks they were playing five gigs a week, sometimes seven a week. Johnson was back behind the 88s, rolling that left hand with a rocking beat. It was around this time that the documentary *Hail! Hail! Rock’N’ Roll* was being produced. The documentary was meant to tell the Chuck Berry story, but in doing so it gave the world a chance to see Johnnie Johnson and the part he played in rock and roll. “By the time the movie rolls around,” Tom recalls, “Johnnie had all this playing, all the time. So, he’s liquid on his piano, he just flows.”

Driving home from the Oyster Bar, Maloney remembered his dreams to be a rock star, to be cheered by stadium crowds. “I’m driving past the brewery and I’m looking up in the sky and I knew Keith Richards and Eric Clapton would give their right arm to be in my shoes. I’m playing with Albert King’s bass player and Chuck Berry’s keyboard player. Not making much money, but working all the time.”

Maloney’s playing hasn’t slowed over the past 20 years (even doing musical theater stints in Arizona and Las Vegas), but he doesn’t leave the river city often now-a-days. Maloney is once more involved in the Souldard Blues Band, playing consistently with the St. Louis Social Club, fulfilling his sideman duties in several other bands, still growing his guitar playing and keeping his smile about where it’s always been. On top of his heavy performance schedule, Maloney teaches guitar at Music Folk in Webster Groves, Mo. “I love trying to make contact with the kids. You have to do it.”

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A few of the albums
St. Louis
Sideman
Extraordinaire
Tom Maloney
appears on:

Nothing to Lose
Soulard Blues Band, 1984

Blue Hand Johnnie
Johnnie Johnson, 1987

Rockin' Eighty-Eights
Johnson, Love, Vaughn,
1991

Unwanted Child
Clara McDaniels, 1997

Live in Stuttgart
Soulard Blues Band, 1999

88 Reasons
A.J. Salas, 2000

Shook Up
Bennie Smith, 2001

Schools for Fools
Larry Thurston, 2002

Handle It
Bottoms Up Blues Gang,
2010

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But Maloney worries about the state of blues in St. Louis. "The blues in St. Louis in the last ten years has gone through more of a transformation than it did in the previous 20," he said. "Everybody died. All the people I learned from, that Rich McDonough learned from, that Art Dwyer learned from, they are gone. Henry Townsend...Oliver Sain...I used to see them and talk to them all the time. I would talk to them multiple times every week. Now they are gone and their music is gone. I can't accept that. I think it left things in a state of, 'what do you do now? How do you follow that?' The audience is starting to shift. That's just what happens. With them there, it was different. Nobody now has the credentials that those guys had."

"The musicianship and the players are still here. There's some great players and there are lot of new guys coming up that I'm really excited about. But at the same time I worry what have they got to go for? Is there some kind of new unification of blues people? I see a whole bunch of people out there, but what are they standing on? What's this all built on, other than we can play with a lot of energy and gusto. And there are hundreds and hundreds of musicians; they look good, sound great, but where do they go?" Maloney worries.

Tom Maloney's life has been a story of St. Louis Music. A South County kid who turned into one of the smoothest blues guitar players in town. His has been a life in dozens of bands, with thousands of performances, records uncounted, from Teen Town to the Fox Theater, a life of music in St. Louis that has touched most of the sides of St. Louis' many-sided musical confluence. ♪

Tom Maloney at Bluesweek 2014 and recently at BBs
photos by Reed Radcliffe



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BLUESWEEK 2014

Photos by Reed Radcliffe and Madison Thorn



From top and left to right: Ms. Marsha Evans who appeared with her Coalition; Boo Boo Davis; Jim Stevens* accompanies Denise Thimes; the beautiful venue at Chesterfield City Park; John May making sure back stage operated smoothly; Nephew Davis working with St. Louis King Boo Boo Davis; Sharon Bear Foechner playing acoustic early in the morning blues; David Dee sparkled Sunday night; Johnny Diamond Erblich playing with the Bottoms Up Blues Gang; Marquise Knox and Skeet Rodgers share a laugh backstage; Eugene Johnson with Rich McDonough and Big Mike Aguirre; always cool Gus Thornton; a quiet moment for Tony Campanella*; Renee Smith sings with the Soulard Blues Band with Marty Abdullah and Art Dwyer; and with Tom Maloney and Kurt Grice; Curt Landes plays keyboards for the Soulard Blues Band; and St. Louis' eldest to youngest - Big George Brock and Matt Lesch. All photos by Reed Radcliffe except * by Madison Thorn.

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Saturday July 5 Funky Butt Brass Band 10PM

Thursday July 10 Aaron Kamm and the One Drops 10PM

Friday July 11 Sister Sparrow and the Dirty Birds [NY] 10PM

Thursday July 17 Clusterpuck CD Release Party 9PM

Friday July 18 Fat Pocket 10PM

Saturday July 19 Jakes Leg 10PM

Thursday July 24 Aaron Kamm and the One Drops 10PM

Friday July 25 The Hatrick 10PM

CRAB FEST 6 to 11PM

Saturday July 26 Al Holliday's East Side Rhythm Review 10PM

CRAB FEST 1 to 11PM

Wednesday July 30 Turkuaz [NY] 9PM

Friday August 1 Naughty Professor with Big Chief [NOLA] 10PM

Thursday August 7 Stooges Brass Band [NOLA] 9:30PM

Friday August 22 Dwayne Doopsie and the Zydeco Hellraisers 10PM



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26th-The Tiny Cows

August:

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16th-The Tiny Cows

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TOM HALL AND ALICE SPENCER UNTITLED AKA THE KITCHEN RECORD SELF-RELEASED, 2014

By Lee Howland



Tom Hall and Alice Spencer (T&A) are no strangers to the music scene of St. Louis. Both are long-time veterans of The Geyer Street Sheiks, although Alice was a relative newcomer when she first hooked up with the band over 20 years ago. Although she was still almost a kid at the time, singing old tunes along with musicians a generation or more older than herself, it worked! Eventually the band environment of the Sheiks spawned the duo project of T&A, which was the realization that there were songs and styles they wanted to explore that just didn't fit well within the framework of The Geyer Street Sheiks.

In late 2013, Tom and Alice revisited the T&A concept and created a new album after a hiatus of approximately 20 years. As the saying goes, you don't want to hurry a good thing, and a good thing this album is!

The album, from this point referred to as *The Kitchen Record* due to cover art, Robert Johnson, and a few other cosmic coincidences, is as fine an acoustic blues/jazz recording as you'll hear this year. Sonically, it has a depth and warmth that nearly takes your breath away. You feel as if Tom and Alice are in the room with you.

This is due in no small part to the talent of Tom, Alice, and the top-shelf production team from Austin, Texas. Tom's phenomenal guitar playing is sometimes underrated (if you can believe that), likely due to his own distaste for self-promotion. Alice possesses a rare gift of a voice; rich, warm, controlled and nuanced. She can make you smile or cry or laugh or blush—sometimes all within a single verse and chorus!

The Austin production team of Danny Levin (primary engineer and co-producer), Joey Benjamin (assistant engineer), Stuart Sullivan (mixing), Brad Blackwood (mastering) and Dave Toretta (additional engineering) deserves mention. When you work with the best, you tend to achieve the most. That is certainly true with The Kitchen Album.

All of the tunes on this album are covers. They are an interesting collection songs; from Robert Johnson to Allen Toussaint to Randy Newman. Let's run down the tracks for you, one by one, to give you a feel for The Kitchen Record.

My Babe (Willie Dixon) Alice and Tom completely rearranged this tune (which is most closely associated with Little Walter), converting it from a prototypical electric Chicago blues to a finger-twisting, foot-stomping, back-porch acoustic stomper. Tom's fancy pickin' and Alice's sweet singing set the stage and mood for the album with this song.

My Daddy Rocks Me (J. Berni Barbour) Alice is at her seductive best on this song of Tin Pan Alley-soul, leaving no doubt as to what the title actually refers to. Her vocal control is astounding. She sings as sweetly as honey one moment and with

an incredibly seductive purr the next. Extra musicians for this cut are Oliver Steck (trumpet) and Danny Levin (piano).

Devil Got My Woman (Nehemiah James) You know musicians' hearts are truly captured by blues and roots styles when they credit a Skip James tune to his real name, Nehemiah. The tune is stark, it is melancholy, it is sad, but it is also beautiful. T&A perform the song true to that spirit. Tom's guitar playing is absolutely striking in its beauty and Alice's vocals are haunting, nuanced and gorgeous. This may be my favorite performance among a CD full of favorite performances!

Black Cat Blues (Memphis Minnie) T&A pace the CD nicely here. They bring the tempo and spirit to a brighter, happier, feel after the starkness of the previous tune. It sounds as if there are two guitar players here, rather than only Tom. This one is jaunty and a lot of fun. You can almost hear the twinkle in Alice's eye, as well as her sly smile, through the double-entendres.

Come On In My Kitchen (Robert Johnson) Tom put a slide on a finger here, playing the ole' National for all it's worth. He makes it scream, cry, moan and ring as if it was a living being. Additionally, the vocal duet, with the contrast between Tom's gruff, deep tone and Alice's pure, sweet tone blend magnificently—to the point where it can raise the hairs on the back of your neck.

Last Night I Had A Dream (Randy Newman) It's not often you'll hear mention of a vampire or ghost on a blues album, but you do on this tune. Tom's playing here is lyrical to the extent that it essentially serves as a second voice to Alice's. The combination, dynamics and volume of their performance creates mood and tension.

Mess Around (Ahmet Ertegun) Yes, it's *that* Mess Around, the one associated with Ray Charles. James Gwyn's snare drum provides percussion that supplies a syncopated feel to this up-tempo track. Alice is singing with gusto and Tom is once again playing as if he had a twin.

Phonograph Blues (Robert Johnson) This is my other favorite-among-favorites on the CD and is a vocal track featuring Tom. It's essentially a solo piece for Tom, except for Alice's beautifully haunting background vocals. Alice's spectral moaning intensifies the feelings of loss contained in the song's lyric.

Some Of These Days (Shelton Brooks) Shelton Brooks is a shamefully under-recognized songwriter who had a prolific and successful career in the early part of the 20th century. Tin Pan Alley is visited once again here, with Tom picking a lovely melody and Alice opening up the old vocal pipes a bit, singing both loud and proud.

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Funny But I Still Love You (Ray Charles) While “Mess Around” was strongly associated with Ray Charles, it was actually written by his boss, Ahmet Ertegun. Maybe that’s why T&A chose to perform this Charles tune. It was a fine choice, and the decision to render it as a touching, tender, acoustic ballad was inspired.

Sneakin’ Sally Through The Alley (Allen R. Toussaint) Rearranging “Sneakin’ Sally” as a back-porch stomper, stripping it back to the bare emotion of the lyrical content, was a fine decision. The listener reaps the rewards. This is hip, fun, sly, and a real work-out for Tom’s fingers on that guitar. Alice’s spoons are getting a work-out as well. You can never have too much spoons.

Rainbow Dreams (Eddie Lang) Other than a couple spoken words just after this song’s intro, it is performed as an instrumental. It’s an early 20th century jazz piece, written by noted jazz guitarist Eddie Lang. Tom’s pickin’, Alice is whistlin’, and guests Danny Levin and Oliver Steck join in on the fun on piano and euphonium, respectively. What a joyous way to end the album!

Well, there you have it; the full run-down on the new album from Tom Hall and Alice Spencer. Folks in St. Louis are well aware of their talents and it’s time to get that word out much farther afield. I think they may be slightly surprised by the depth, power, and beauty of their stunning new album. Yes, stunning. The song choices are inspired, the performances are magnificent and the production is so warm and so friendly that you are almost saddened when the last notes of the final song play out. 🎵

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