BLUESLETTER

THE BI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF THE SAINT LOUIS BLUES SOCIETY Jan/Feb 2015 Number 72

14in14

The St. Louis Blues Society presents its first Compilation CD

St. Louis Blues History: Pre-war Piano Blues

R.I.P. Alvin Jett

National Blues Museum Radio Show

Event: Reflections of Henry Townsend

Jan/Feb 2015 Number 72

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

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The BluesLetter readers would like to hear from you. If you have a local story idea you want to share with blues fans in St. Louis and beyond, contact Jeremy Segel-Moss or Mary Kaye Tönnies. Submissions are accepted until the 15th day of the month preceeding each issue.

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On the Cover:

The St. Louis Blues Society presents ***14 in 14***, a sample of original songs by contemporary St. Louis musicians who represent a wide range of blues in both style and performance and can be seen performing nightly around the city.

Where's Pokey? correction

In last issue's awesome story about Pokey LaFarge playing for the Six String Heroes group at Jefferson Barracks by Frank Mastromatteo, it seems that the last sentence of the third paragraph disappeared. Can't really say where it went, but it is here now for those of you patiently waiting all this time to find out some key highlights of where Pokey has appeared.

"Pokey has appeared on *The Late Show with David Letterman*, NPR's *A Prairie Home Companion* and *World Café*, at the *Newport Folk Festival* and, you're right, that was him playing Red's brothel in the 2013 Disney movie *The Lone Ranger*."

Sorry Pokey. Sorry Frank.

dear blues lovers,

Happy New Year,

2015 has all the makings of a good year for St. Louis music, especially the blues. The STLBS is excited to kick off the new year with the release of our first compilation CD: *14 in 14* See page eight for a brief look at the musicians who make this a terrific release. What better way to support local blues music than to provide exposure for our outstanding community of musicians?

We are happy to have the ability to give all paid members a copy of the new CD. ***If you are not a member, sign up during the first three months of 2015 and receive your free copy too!*** (Use the membership form on the back cover of this magazine or visit www.stlbluessociety.org).

The St. Louis Blues Society is planning several new endeavors in the realm of events, educational programs and promotion that you can get involved with this year! We always need help with the BluesLetter. We are looking for contributing writers and photographers; and, of course, advertisers to keep the issues coming.

I know I sound like a broken record, but we are always looking for proactive people who can help make the organization better. If you are someone who loves the blues, has skills in organizing or promotion, or are a musician who wants to help make the St. Louis music community better, please contact us so we can make 2015 the best year yet!

If you are making the trip to Memphis for the International Blues Challenge this month, make sure to show up and show your support for our bands! We'd like to wish luck to St. Louis representatives Tom Hall & Alice Spencer and The Kingdom Brothers. Everyone here at the STLBS wishes you the best in the start of the new year.

Thanks for helping support St. Louis blues!

Jeremy Segel-Moss
Vice Chairperson

To the winners of the 2014 STLBS

Road to Memphis Blues Challenge

The Kingdom Brothers & Tom Hall and Alice Spencer

Good Luck in Memphis

The 31st (2015) International Blues Challenge will be held January 20-24, 2015 in Memphis, TN on historic Beale Street beginning Tuesday, January 20, with the International Showcase. Quarter finals will be held Wednesday and Thursday nights. Semi-finals will be held Friday evening. The event will conclude Saturday, January 24, with Finals competition at the Orpheum Theatre.
Visit the Blues Foundation website for further information: www.blues.org

Alvin Jett

By Corey Woodruff, Matt Davis and Frank Bauer

Photo by Peter Newcomb

We were very saddened by the passing of the beloved blues guitarist, singer, songwriter, band leader and showman on December 23, 2014 at 54 years of age.

Alvin Jett was born in 1960 in East St. Louis to a family of music lovers. His father was a postal worker who also played drums for Little Milton and Albert King as they passed through town. He played some guitar and gave young Alvin pointers on the instrument. With thirteen kids in the family, there were always different kinds of music being played in the house. Alvin picked up on all the different styles, but blues always seemed to be the music to which he most related. After high school Alvin joined the Navy.

Upon his discharge at age twenty, he started taking the guitar seriously, eventually landing a job with St. Louis blues legend Tommy Bankhead & the Blues Eldorados. Jett spent three years under Bankhead's tutelage, improving his guitar technique while learning the ropes of the blues scene. After leaving Bankhead's band and playing in several other blues groups, Alvin finally created his own outfit, The Hired Help, whose original members included drummer Marty Spikener, bassist Jon Fulmer, and keyboardist Nick Georgeoff. Essentially a working cover band, The Hired Help played a mix of rock and blues around the St. Louis area, building on Jett's growing reputation as an engaging entertainer and eventually introducing him to saxophonist Frank Bauer. Bauer and Jett soon left to begin a new project, Phat noiZ, beginning a professional partnership that would last a decade and allow the band to achieve respect and acclaim from the national blues community.

While The Hired Help released an album with a couple of original compositions penned by Jett and Bauer, Phat noiZ was a band wholly focused on writing and recording its own music. The band released two albums with bassist Matt Davis and drummer Jeremy West: *Wet My Beak* (2005) and *Milk and Cookies* (2006). The International Blues Challenge named *Wet My Beak* a finalist for Best Self-Released Album and the song "Angel Sings the Blues" won the 2007 International Songwriting Competition for Best Blues Song.

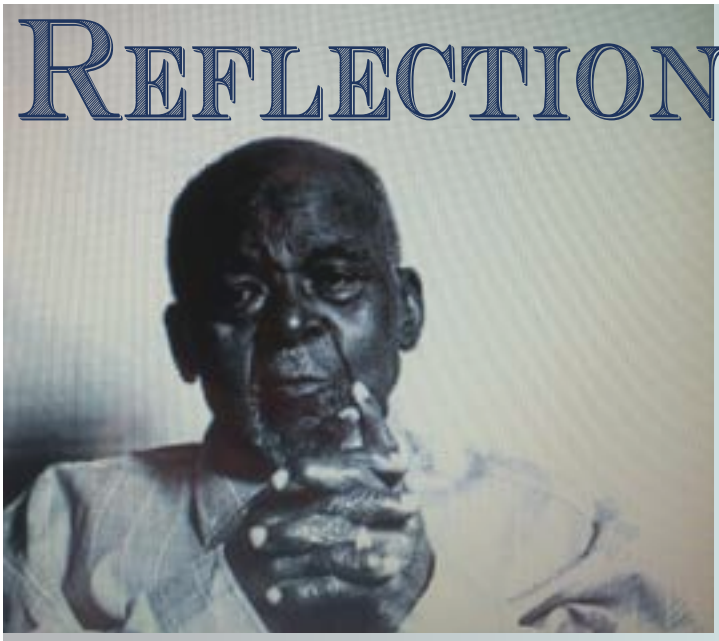
In 2009 the band released a third album, *Honeybowl*, with Corey Woodruff on drums and continued to increase their national profile via numerous festival appearances and airplay on XM satellite radio. The band's growing acclaim was the result of a relentless schedule that had grown to over 200 performances per year, plus another 50-60 duo gigs by Jett and Davis, including the weekly blues jam at the Highway 61 Roadhouse in Webster Groves. The duo began hosting the weekly Tuesday gathering in 2006, steadily building a critical mass around the open mic that eventually grew into a respected forum for both young musicians and veteran players to share and grow musically. The weekly jam continues to this day.

Alvin's passion for playing was matched by his openness and encouragement of aspiring musicians. He left a lasting impression on numerous youngsters that cut their teeth at the open mic, playing alongside the veteran and eventually moving on to front bands of their own. Now respected players in their own right, Aaron Griffin (Soulard Blues Band), Paul Rhodes (The Thin Dimes), and Paul Niehaus IV are but a few of the musicians that regularly shared the stage with Alvin early in their careers.

Literally hundreds of musicians played with Alvin, from the numerous local artists that passed through his bands to national touring acts that would gladly invite him to share their stage. It was not uncommon for Jett to come off stage at BB's Jazz, Blues & Soups during a break between sets and walk across the street to The Beale on Broadway to sit in with whatever performer was playing that night, then make his way back to his own gig after a blazing guest appearance.

While Phat noiZ was a group endeavor, Alvin Jett's massive stage presence and charisma provided the magnetism that made the band such a success. His huge smile and deft playing made for an entertaining combination that belied Jett's confidence in his decidedly funky, non-traditional approach to the blues. When asked about his song "Boogie to the Blues", Jett once remarked "Some told us that we weren't old enough to make it. Some told us that we were too old to make it. Some said our music wasn't bluesy enough. And, some even told me I wasn't black enough to make it, but no one ever said the music wasn't good enough. We knew right away that we had to shield ourselves from the negative thoughts. You have be true to what you believe in and let that show in your music." ❤

Alvin Jett performing at the 2007 Big Muddy Blues Festival. photo by Christopher Scribner



Reflections of Genius: The Mule

Sunday, February 8, 2015

BB's Jazz, Blues & Soups
700 South Broadway
6:30-8:00 pm
$10 at the door
$5 with St. Louis Blues Society Membership

Sunday, February 8, 2015 **Alonzo Townsend** will host a recollection of the legacy of Henry James "Mule" Townsend at BB's Jazz, Blues and Soups. Alonzo, Henry's son, will paint a portrait of his father only a handful have gotten to see —a father, parent, teacher, navigator, craftsman—but more than anything, a survivor. Alonzo will provide stories about life challenges that every young man and woman from this generation should hear and see. There will be live music from "The Future of St. Louis Blues" and student of "The Mule," Marquise Knox.

Alonzo explains, "We will take you down every avenue and alley as we give my father's work as a human being and musical legacy the ultimate stage. If you need words of encouragement, words of wisdom, words of laughter, and inspiration to battle the challenges of your life, come listen to how dad overcame his. How he battled his own challenges from dealing with race to working hard to provide for himself and his family."

Volunteer with the St. Louis Blues Society

THE SLBS NEEDS YOUR HELP

BLUESLETTER - volunteer for creation of content and advertising representation.

MEMBERSHIP OUTREACH - help sign up new members and arrange for new membership benefits.

EVENT COORDINATOR - help coordinate all SLBS events and work on promotion.

EDUCATION - help create curriculum for Blues in Schools and fill SLBS website with content.

BUSINESS OUTREACH - help get more local businesses involved with the SLBS.

STREET TEAM - help with getting the word out about the SLBS by hanging posters, passing fliers and distributing BluesLetters.

Contact Jeremy Segel-Moss
to volunteer
jsegelmoss@stlouisbluessociety.org
314-482-0314

Play it Forward

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Saturday	10	Brian Curran
Thursday	15	The Kingdom Brothers
Saturday	17	Slick Nick Schnebelen
Thursday	22	Soulard Blues Band
Saturday	24	Laura Green Blues Band
Thursday	29	NGK Blues Band feat. Big George Jr.
Saturday	31	John Long
Thursday	5	King Cake Party feat. The Boudin Brothers
Saturday	7	Zach Bramhall Band [Texas]
Thursday	12	The 24th Street Wailers with Elliot Sowell
Saturday	14	no music - celebrate Mardi Gras in Soulard
Thursday	19	RJ Mischo Band
Saturday	21	Kyle Yardley Band
Thursday	26	The Nick Moss Band
Saturday	28	Felix Reyes, Dave Herrero and Preston Hubbard

The deli has live music just about every Thursday and Saturday. Lookin' for a taste of the blues? Check out our website for upcoming shows and events!

www.bluescitydeli.com

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JANUARY CONCERT CALENDAR

Jan 2	7pm	Dindi Band
Jan 3	7pm	Sidemen
Jan 6	7pm	Musical Performance and Birthday Party for St Louis based Trumpet Player and Recording Artist Jim Manley with Randy Bahr
Jan 8	7pm	Richard Strater (Columbia, SC) with Pianist Leslie Sanazaro
Jan 9	7pm	Bob "Bumblebee" Kamoske with Mike Graham
Jan 10	6pm 10pm	Gene Lynn Andrew Adkins (Nashville, TN)
Jan 11	7pm	Max Dvorak (Verona, WI) with Dane Aaron (Minneapolis, MN) and Kate McRae (Nashville, TN)
Jan 12	7pm	Nigel Egg (England)
Jan 13	7pm	Tommy Halloran
Jan 15	7pm	Gateway Jazz Project
Jan 16	7pm	Boogiefoot
Jan 17	7pm	The Peoples
Jan 20	7pm	Heather Aubrey Lloyd from ilyAimy (Baltimore, MD) with Justin MacMahon and special guest Traveling Tony
Jan 22	7pm	M. Lockwood Porter (Berkeley, CA) and John Calvin Abney (Norman,OK)
Jan 23	5pm 7pm 10pm	Leslie Sanazaro Water Taxi House of Whales
Jan 24	7pm 10pm	Wack-A-Doo The PBJ's (Ottumwa,IA)
Jan 27	7pm	Genevieve (St. Louis, MO)
Jan 28	10pm	Jeff Plankenhorn (Austin, TX) Bluegrass dobro/slide guitar for the Dixie Chicks
Jan 29	7pm	Bootigrabbers Delight
Jan 30	7pm	Joe Bozzi
Jan 31	7pm	Fletcher Moley Group

SOUTHERN COMFORT
TASTE OF SOULARD
SAT. FEB 7, SUN. FEB 8
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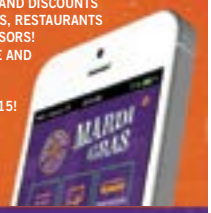

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9- The Style Band
10- The Town Drunks
16- Eric Lysaght and Jeff Gallo
17- Bottoms Up Blues Gang
23- Thunder Biscuit Orchestra
30- The Style Band
31- Eric Lysaght and Jeff Gallo

FEBRUARY
14- Eugene Johnson & Company
21- Eric Lysaght
28- Bottoms Up Blues Gang

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Fri. 1/23 at Element 8-11pm
Fri. 1/30 at Hammerstones 9pm-1am
Sat. 1/31 at The Venice Cafe 9pm-1am
Thurs. 2/12 at Herbies 8-11pm
Fri. 2/27 at Evangeline's 7-11pm
Sat. 2/28 at Culpeppers CWE 9:30pm-12:30am

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photos by Reed Radcliffe (RR); Peter Newcomb (PN); Virginia Harold (VH); courtesy Charles Hunt (cCH); and Ray Marklin (RM)

PN

ARTHUR WILLIAMS: Midnight Blue

Born in Mississippi, Arthur Williams one of the few remaining authentic Delta-style blues harmonica masters. He played with Elmore James, Eddie Taylor, James Cotton, Junior Wells and Muddy Waters. Arthur's harp prowess on Frank Frost's 1966 album earned the respect of music critics and fellow bluesmen. He continues to be a living legend in St. Louis.

BIG GEORGE BROCK: I'm 80 Years Old (I'm Worried About It)

RR

Big George Brock's background as a professional boxer shows as his shiny, fringed cape and trophy belt proudly proclaim him the "Heavyweight King of the Blues." Brock was born in Mississippi in the 1930s where he picked cotton and started playing harmonica—both at a very early age. In Clarksdale and Walls, he met and played with Muddy Waters, Memphis Minnie and Howlin' Wolf. He came to St. Louis in his early twenties and formed the Houserockers. Playing today with the New Houserockers, Brock channels the souls of Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf and Jimmy Reed every time he mounts the stage. www.cathead.biz/BigGeorge.html

RR

EUGENE JOHNSON & COMPANY: Knocking Boots

Eugene Johnson is a self-taught musician who has been playing music for as long as he can remember. He has performed with Albert King, Oliver Sain, Barbara Carr, Chuck Berry and Kim Massie to name a few. Eugene currently plays in several St. Louis bands including The Ground Floor Band, Roland Johnson & Soul Endeavor and can be seen often at Culpepper's in the Central West End. www.eugenejohnson.net

AL HOLLIDAY: Little Woman Of Mine

RR

Al Holliday, with every bit of help from the East Side Rhythm Band, brings a genuine sound to the St. Louis music scene. The band's name pays tribute to the burning rhythm and blues music that has come from our beloved, and essential to our music history, Metro East. The East Side Rhythm Band is built on the rock solid foundation of the deep rhythm section as Al sings and plays piano out front. You can often see Al at The Beale on Broadway downtown. www.alhollidaymusic.com

SOULARD BLUES BAND: It Don't Matter

RR

The Soulard Blues Band is a St. Louis institution and holds the longest running blues jam in the world on Mondays at The Broadway Oyster Bar. They perform a unique blend of blues, soul and R&B with various St. Louis musicians, currently featuring vocalist Marty Abdullah. The SBB is frequently at The Moonshine Blues Bar in St. Charles. www.soulardbluesband.com

ROUGH GROOVES: Mojo Syndrome

RR

Rough Grooves has been knocking audiences out at blues festivals and major venues throughout the country since 2005. with their high-octane blues with a classic sound. Whether playing for four-thousand people on a lawn or just a few dozen in a bar, Rough Grooves will give it all they've got. Rough Grooves performs weekly at BB's Jazz, Blues & Soups on South Broadway. www.reverbnation.com/roughgrooves

BRIAN CURRAN: Made Myself Lonesome

RR

Brian Curran is in his thirties, but don't let that fool you. Brian has been studying blues and fingerstyle guitar for almost 20 years. He keeps his feet planted firmly in the sounds of the past, but is not afraid to put his own stamp on the music he loves. Brian can be seen regularly at The Shaved Duck in Tower Grove East. www.briantcurran.com

RR

BOB 'BUMBLE BEE' KAMOSKE: Caught In The Act

After four decades of live gigs, "The Bumble Bee" still plays every set like it was his last. City, country, fingers, picks, or slide, Bob lays down the foundation of all American Music. Whether pickin' or slidin' on his old National Resonator or Silvertone electric, the music explodes, seduces and grooves. Bob plays steadily at The Iron Barley in the Carondelet neighborhood. www.bobkamoske.com

GROUND FLOOR BAND: Bucket Heat

cCH

The Ground Floor Band, formally the Ross & Hunt Band, is one of St. Louis' best-unknown bands. They perform a straightforward blues, soul and R&B set with some incredible four-part harmonies as well as the soulful guitar playing of Charles Hunt. You can find The Ground Floor Band weekly at the Beale on Broadway.

MISS MOLLY SIMMS: Usual Suspects

RR

Smoldering, angry and saucy, "Daddy's Little Girl" is a full-grown woman now (and more than a bit pissed). Miss Molly Simms can sweep the floor with tender ruminations on loves lost and quiet yearning, but not before setting the situation straight with a few doses of hard-earned sass and voodoo bile.
www.missmollysimms.com
www.biblebeltsinners.com

St. Louis Blues Society presents

The St. Louis Blues Society is proud to present our first compilation CD, *14 in 14*, which celebrates fourteen St. Louis artists that were performing in St. Louis during 2014. St. Louis' deep well of music makes it hard to create a completely comprehensive compilation CD, but we feel this is a good representation of the original music that happened nightly in our city last year.

14 in 14 features a wide range of blues, including electric, country, soul, R&B and brass. We think this is very indicative of St. Louis, because our blues is such a wide range of sounds. On any given night many artists perform everything from delta blues to soul to rock'n'roll even during one set. This is one of the strengths of St. Louis music and it makes us happy to share it with you.

The artists on the album have all donated their original songs to this publication, which will hopefully be the first of many. In return for their support of the St. Louis Blues Society through music, we ask that if this CD sparks your interest in one or more the groups, you make a point to go see them live, purchase their full-length CDs, or at the very least, share the sounds with your friends.

HUDSON AND THE HOO DOO CATS: Who Do?

RM

Celebrating 25 years and over 4,500 performances, Hudson and the Hoo Doo Cats have carved out a special place in the St. Louis music scene by mixing original Rock and Roll, early Rhythm and Blues, Swing and Southern New Orleans style grooves. When Hudson is in St. Louis, you can see the band at Joe's Café in Skinker/DeBaliviere neighborhood. www.hudsonandthehoodoocats.com

RR

JEREMIAH JOHNSON: Black and Blue

Born and raised in St. Louis, Jeremiah seasoned his style on the Gulf Coast of Texas and then came home to lay down some dirty, rockin' blues. His original music features The Sliders, a horn section well known in St. Louis. You can catch the JJB frequently at Hammerstone's in Soulard. www.jeremiahjohnsonband.com

THE BOTTOMS UP BLUES GANG: South Broadway Blues

VH

The BUBG features vocalist Kari Liston and guitarist Jeremy Segel-Moss. They have been steadily performing their sound in and around St. Louis for over 13 years and feature a gang of outstanding St. Louis musicians. They can often be seen at The Venice Cafe in Benton Park. www.bottomsupblues.com

RR

FUNKY BUTT BRASS BAND: The Devil's Taxi

The Funky Butt Brass Band was formed in 2008 by six talented musicians who respect and revere the New Orleans brass band tradition. The FBBB takes classic New Orleans jazz and gives it a twist. Don't be surprised if you hear some 70's funk, Motown, Southern rock, Memphis soul, Chicago blues and St. Louis R&B in the mix. You can see FBBB steadily at The Broadway Oyster Bar on South Broadway. www.funkybuttbrassband.com

The St. Louis Blues Society Presents 14 in 14 is available from our online market at:

https://squareup.com/market/st-louis-blues-club/in-st-louis-blues-society-compilation-cd

St. Louis Blues History:

The pre-war blues era encompasses a 20-year stretch from the early 1920s to the early 1940s. During this time, 'race' records were being churned out at a breakneck pace, and just like our current entertainment industry, the thriving race record market followed and capitalized on the hottest and most popular trends of the day.

In the early '20s, black female blues singers—professional entertainers from Vaudeville and other traveling circuits—were the order of the day. The music, referred to as "classic blues," had a definite jazz character. Indeed, this was before the lines between jazz and blues were so defined. In the mid-'20s, thanks to the unexpected success of a Texas guitarist named Blind Lemon Jefferson, country guitar blues became the craze. Record companies dispatched mobile recording stations to scour the South and record as much as they could, in the hopes of catching "lightning in bottle" as they had with Blind Lemon.

It is usually at this point in the commonly told history of the blues, that the Delta and Robert Johnson enter the story. While the Blind Lemon Jefferson craze certainly led to many early Delta guitarists being recorded, it should be understood that Robert Johnson did not record until the latter half of the 1930s. In other words, to go straight from Blind Lemon Jefferson to Robert Johnson is to skip over almost a decade of blues recordings! What happened in the decade in between?

In 1928, the piano/guitar duo of Leroy Carr and Scrapper Blackwell recorded "The How Long Blues" and Chicago duo, Tampa Red and Georgia Tom, recorded "It's Tight Like That." These two tunes became smash hits and set off one of the most important and popular trends of the pre-war blues era: urban piano/guitar blues. Mainly overlooked today, this style of blues significantly shaped the sounds of Robert Johnson and the post-war electric bluesmen.

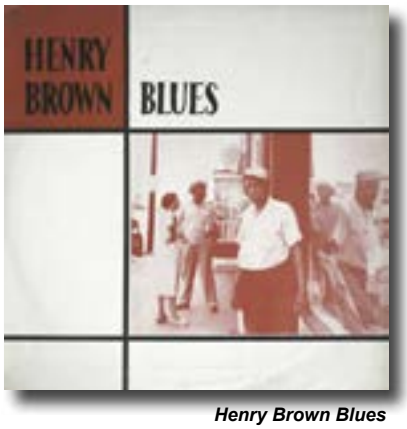
HENRY BROWN

If you find yourself in the main-floor bathroom of BB's Jazz, Blues & Soups, take a moment to locate the portrait of Henry Brown. Bathroom or not, I would safely guess that there is not another blues club in the world that honors his memory. The rest of the world can go ahead and forget about Henry Brown if they please, but St. Louisans would do well to remember to him, for no pianist represents the St. Louis sound quite like "Mr. Ramrod."

Born in 1906 in Tennessee, Brown and family moved to St. Louis in 1918, when Henry was just 12 years old. His exposure to blues piano occurred after moving to the city, where he remembers listening to a pool hall pianist from the Deep Morgan district who went by the name "Blackmouth." Brown recalled that Blackmouth was "a real old-time piano player" who could "stomp 'em down to the bricks." Brown also credits learning piano from another unknown St. Louisan, Joe Cross. As Kevin Belford writes in *Devil at the Confluence*, "Blackmouth and Cross are two of the many St. Louis blues originators who left no examples of their talent other than the work of their disciples like Henry Brown."

The quintessential elements that shaped St. Louis blues piano are heard in the recorded output of Henry Brown—in his solo work, in his duets with gutbucket trombonist Ike Rodgers, and in his accompaniment work with singers Mary Johnson and Alice Moore. The music was not flashy—he rarely played above a medium tempo. His left-hand rhythms tended towards a steady, low-down, ¼ note stomp—a far cry from the uptempo, 8-to-the-bar, boogie rhythms popular in Chicago and Kansas City. His right hand melodies were simple and when accompanying singers, sparse. [For those familiar with music theory: his blues form has frequent quick trips to the V chord. This move, which I like to call the "St. Louis V," is a common and distinguishing feature of the St. Louis style.]

There is an unexpected beauty in Henry Brown's playing. Subtle, rich colors emerge from what at first appears to be the crudest iteration of the blues. Despite the untutored feel and the bare-bones nature, Henry Brown's blues is a pretty blues, pretty and low-down at the same time.



Henry Brown Blues
recorded August 1960 for Paul Oliver's Blues Recording and Research Project.
1961 London: 77 Records

RECOMMENDED LISTENING (found on You Tube):
MARY JOHNSON "BLACK MEN BLUES"
HENRY BROWN "SCREENING THE BLUES"
HENRY BROWN "DEEP MORGAN BLUES"
HENRY BROWN "EASTERN CHIMES BLUES"
ALICE MOORE "BLACK AND EVIL BLUES"

Pre-war Piano Blues

By Ethan Leinwand

St. Louis—a piano-town since the days of ragtime—was at the center of this new sound. Along with Chicago, many of the biggest stars and most prolific recording artists were from St. Louis. In fact, of the ten most recorded blues artists of the pre-war era, four are St. Louisans! Of these four, only Lonnie Johnson was a guitar player. The other three, Peetie Wheatstraw, Walter Davis and Roosevelt Sykes were piano players.

Immensely popular, hugely influential, and almost entirely neglected, piano and the sound of St. Louis blues is a history that needs telling. One of the few resources for this information, Kevin Belford's book *Devil at the Confluence*, is tragically out of print. Other blues histories, if they speak of St. Louis at all, see it as a rest stop on the way to Chicago. Worse, they give value to the St. Louis artists by focusing on their rural birthplaces, seemingly undermining the city's beating blues heart. St. Louis had a particular sound, style of playing blues—especially when it came to the piano—and that style directly shaped the many players who called St. Louis home.

In this issue of the BluesLetter, I present a brief look at two important St. Louis blues pianists, Henry Brown and Peetie Wheatstraw, along with listening recommendations via You Tube. In coming issues, I will continue to showcase the wonderful legacy of St. Louis blues pianists. ♬

PEETIE WHEATSTRAW

William Bunch, aka Peetie Wheatstraw, aka "The Devil's Son-in-Law," aka "The High Sheriff of Hell," is one of the most colorful personalities of the pre-war blues era. Does the name sound familiar? It can sometimes ring a bell. But hopefully it's not because you're remembering the 1977 Blaxploitation film *Petey Wheatstraw*. Or, maybe you think Peetie was a guitar player because his one surviving picture shows him holding a guitar. Make no mistake though; Peetie Wheatstraw was a piano player, and an immensely popular one. Of his vast recorded output of over 160 sides he plays guitar on only a handful, the rest feature his distinctive (and distinctively St. Louis-style) piano playing.

Peetie Wheatstraw was born in Arkansas in 1902. He died in East St. Louis, tragically, on his 39th birthday, Dec. 21, 1941 when the car he was riding in was struck by a train. Though it is unclear exactly when Peetie moved to St. Louis, he was certainly here by the late 1920s, and it was here, according to Henry Townsend who met Peetie Wheatstraw in those early days, where Peetie really learned piano. "He was mostly a guitar player in those days, and his piano was pretty much undeveloped. In St. Louis, there were so many piano players. It was really a piano town…What I think happened is after he got here, with so many piano players around; he quite naturally leaned toward the piano. It was here he got to working on his piano playing." (Paul Garon, The Devil's Son-in-Law)

Few blues musicians at the time were as popular as Wheatstraw. Long before the legend of Robert Johnson and the crossroads, Peetie was shaping his own satanic myth. However, Peetie Wheatstraw didn't just make a deal with the devil, he went and married into the family!

It was not just his persona that separated him, but his use of easily identifiable, trademark motifs. In his singing, he employed a distinctive move that can only be explained as a half yodeled/half-moaned "oooh well." His piano playing was just as unique. Though he only had a handful of moves, they were powerful, expressive and often haunting. [For those familiar with music theory: he would commonly add a major 7th to his I chord. It's basically impossible to make this color sound "bluesy", but Peetie was able to!] St. Louis blues is full of seemingly incompatible juxtapositions, and Peetie Wheatstraw represents this to the fullest. His rhythms can seem straight and swung at the same time; or have a playful bounce and a heavy stomp. There is, to my ear, a definite nod to Henry Brown in his playing, but Peetie is looser, rougher and more ethereal.

Peetie Wheatstraw: The Devil's Son-in-Law 1934-1941
2009 Vienna: Wolf Records

RECOMMENDED LISTENING (found on You Tube):
PEETIE WHEATSTRAW "DON'T FEEL WELCOME"
PEETIE WHEATSTRAW "LONG AND LONESOME DRIVE"
PEETIE WHEATSTRAW "ICE AND SNOW BLUES"
ALICE MOORE "S.O.S. BLUES (DISTRESS BLUES)"
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Tues Jan 27. Sophisticated Babies feat. Adam Hucke of Funky Butt Horns 9PM FREE

Fri Jan 30. Mountain Sprout [Eureka Springs, AR] 10PM

Sun Feb 8. No BS Brass Band [Richmond VA] 8PM

Fri Feb 13. Tyrannosaurus Chicken [Greenwood AR] w/Clusterpluck 9:30PM

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The National Blues Museum Radio Show debuted in February 2014. Host, Christian Cudnik, has created a show, syndicated worldwide, that is currently the voice of the forthcoming NBM. Recently, Jeremy Segel-Moss spoke with Cudnik to learn more about the program.

Some questions for the National Blues Museum Radio Show

by Jeremy Segel-Moss

What is the philosophy behind the show?

CC: For me, blues is the backbone of all modern music. Each week, I set out to prove it. This means, I play blues, country, soul, R&B, rock, whatever. It all comes from the blues. That said; I created a blueprint for how we program music. It's not a free for all. I want to teach the next generation about these significant artists, but I also want to serve the blues purists. I may play Albert King and then go off into the weeds a little bit and play an artist like Magic Sam. I may play Pearl Jam into Lester Bowie. We have that flexibility, but I always make our way back to the heavies. It's all about balance.

What is the importance of the radio show to the NBM?

CC: This show is and has been a great marketing tool for the National Blues Museum. By the time the museum opens in 2015, we will have been on the air for nearly two years. So we've helped create a buzz worldwide before we've opened the doors. This show can carry the message and the mission of the museum beyond the walls of the institution.

I've certainly learned that there's a skeptical thread within the local blues and music community about the National Blues Museum. Specifically, how St. Louis will be represented. I totally get it. Keep in mind, this is the National Blues Museum. It's not the St. Louis Blues Museum, respectfully, so there's a broader focus on preserving this great American music. This doesn't mean we won't be represented. At this point, I can only speak to the music I play. But it stands to reason that perhaps once we build trust, we can rise together.

In your investigation of the blues...what have you learned about St. Louis?

CC: St. Louis has contributed significantly with regard to all music. This goes back to the riverboats and the afterhours clubs in the city. There's great music being made here today. Many great artists have come from, through or lived in this city. If we could have coined our sound back then, our historical footprint may have been a much clearer to world.

Although we're a radio show based in St. Louis, it's not just a St. Louis blues based radio show. Be that as it may, we have programmed a lot of music with St. Louis connections. I've played Oliver Sain, Albert King, Little Milton, Ike Turner, Johnnie Johnson, Chuck Berry, Big George Brock, Boo Boo Davis, Tommy Bankhead, Roosevelt Sykes, and Lonnie Johnson. So for me, our contribution is significant and it is featured proudly on the show.

I'd love to talk to the local blues historians. They've dedicated their life and time to this music. It's important to document the stories now. It's also important to give them the proper credit for their work. I say, Let's give them a voice. There are people with volumes of information just packed away in their attics. I just know it. If we're going to preserve this great American art form, we're going to need their help. I've got a microphone and a recorder. It's an open invitation.

What are the goals for the future?

CC: In October, we recorded a LIVE radio show at the Missouri History Museum where we were able to highlight some of the musical contributions of our city. I'd like to take the show on the road. There are great museums, blues societies and radio affiliates that would love to host us. However, it's going to take sponsorship to just keep this show in production. I've got ideas, but time will tell how far or big this thing can be. It may all end tomorrow. I can't predict what will be of interest down the road. I know a blues community exists worldwide. It's a matter of who or what companies or foundations want to support the show and reach our audience. That unknown keeps me grounded and reserved with getting too dreamy about the future. ♬

You can find out more about the NBM Radio Show with Chris Cudnik at his website: **www.christiancudnik.com/nbmradio/**

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29	*Jeff Jensen Band*	8 pm
30	*Randy McAllister Band*	10 pm
31	*Bo Lamar with Jokes and Notes*	7:30 pm

February

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13	*Kilborn Alley with Jackie Scott*	10 pm
14	☠☠★Mardi Gras Parade Day♦☠☠ *Josh Hoyer & the Shadowboxers*	10 pm
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