THE BI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF THE SAINT LOUIS BLUES SOCIETY July/Aug 2015 Number 75



PLUS:

St. Louis Blues History: Walter Davis National Blues Museum's Dion Brown Remembering Mike Prokopf MUSICIANS!! Sign-up for the IBC STLBS calendar of sponsored events



BILUES ETTER

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.

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Membership Contribution Levels:

- Blue Plate Special Annual \$25
- Boogie Down/Family Annual \$50
- Blue to the Bone Lifetime \$500
- Blue Business Annual \$100
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Please check the desired category and return this form with your annual membership donation to our return address..



Or visit our website www.stlouisbluessociety.org to join and pay through Paypal or credit card



Volunteer with the Blues Society!

Rebecca Ryan

St. Louis Blues Society Volunteer Coordinator volunteer4@stlouisbluessociety.org

The St. Louis Blues Society YouTube Channel

hosted by Ethan Leinwand www.youtube.com/channel/ UCUcxqQx7B6nVx7MKapFIeBg



ON THE COVER

Eugene Johnson tells a story about just missing Albert King and more in our cover article on page 8.

photo by Peter Newcomb

ear dues louers.

Summer is in full swing and the blues are flowing through the streets of St. Louis. It seems to me that the city has been exploding with new opportunities for musicians to perform and music lovers to connect with St. Louis' blues tradition. This year the STLBS is on course to participate in and/ or coordinate over 30 events. You will find many of them listed to the right, but make sure you go to our website or Facebook page and sign up for the weekly email, the *Blues* Dispatches, to stay up-to-date. Members should already be receiving it, but if you are not, please reach out and let us know.

MUSICIANS: It is time to sign up for the 2016 International Blues Challenge! Each year the STLBS sends a band and a solo/duo act to Memphis to compete in the IBC. All of this year's information on our Road to *Memphis* challenge is on page 4. If you have questions, you can contact me or Jerry Minchey (jminchey@ stlouisbluessociety.org). We are here to help. Also, previous representatives; Big Mike Aguirre, Kingdom Brothers, Bob Kamoske, Jeremiah Johnson and Tom Hall & Alice Spencer will be happy to tell you what their experience was like. The deadline is the end of August so sign up as soon as possible!

I'd like to take a moment to note that the *BluesLetter*. which we hope you have been consistently enjoying, is moving right along. We have new writers and volunteers getting involved, more distribution and new content all the

time. It should be noted that the cost of printing the *BluesLetter* comes from our advertisers. So, BIG thanks to the venues, bands and organizations who continue to support our efforts to bring you a quality production: 1860's Saloon, Angry Beaver, BB's Jazz, Blues & Soups, Blues City Deli, Broadway Oyster Bar, Corner Keg Pub, Culpepper's, Evangeline's Bistro, Highway 61 Roadhouse, Play It Forward and the Soulard Blues Band.



Finally, we have a new Blues Society image in the works that will be on stickers and the new t-shirts. Check it out and let us know what you think!

Enjoy the summer! Jeremy Segel-Moss Chairperson of the St. Louis Blues Society

St. Louis Blues Society Calendar of Events

Sponsored and coordinated events July/Aug 2015

*Saturday, July 11, 6-9p **Soulard Business Association Soulard Market Concert Series** Liquid Gold

*Wednesday, July 22, 6-8p **Maplewood Community Betterment Foundation** Summer Concert Series Ryan Hummert Park The Jeremiah Johnson Band

*Tuesday, July 28, 7-9p **Carondelet Living Summer Concert Series** Tuesdays in Fanetti Park Sara Jane and the Blue Notes

*Saturday, August 1, 5p-1a DA FEST at The Venice Cafe Raising money for the STLBS Education Fund - The Bottoms Up Blues Gang, ARR!!!, Dust Covers, Molly Simms, Bryan Ranney Band

> *Saturday, August 1, 6-9p Lafayette Square Concerts in the Park Lafayette Park Gazebo Joe Pastor and The St. Louis Legacy Ensemble

> > *Friday, August 7, 7-9p Brentwood's Music on the Menu **Brentwood Park** Rough Grooves

*Sunday, August 9, 6-8p Carondelet Living Summer Concert Series Sunday Nights in Carondelet Park Miss Jubilee and the Humdingers

*Saturday, August 15, noon-close Corner Keg Pub Five Year Anniversary Highland, IL

Carrie & the Catapults, Hurricane Ruth, JD Hughes and Funky Butt Brass Band

*Saturday, August 15, 6-9p Lafayette Square Concerts in the Park Lafayette Park Gazebo Big Rich & The Rhythm Renegades feat. Laura Green

> *Saturday, August 22, 6-9p Soulard Business Association **Soulard Market Concert Series** Patti and the Hitmen

*Sunday, August 23, 6-8p Lindenwood Park Neighborhood Assoc. Lindenwood Live in the Park

*Sunday, August 23, 6-8p **Carondelet Living Summer Concert Series Sunday Nights in Carondelet Park** Cornet Chop Suev

> *Sunday, August 23, 2-4p **STLBS Meet & Greet** Hammerstone's

*Saturday, August 29, 6-9p **Lafayette Square Concerts in the Park** Lafayette Park Gazebo Jeramiah Johnson Band

Come visit, or volunteer in, the St. Louis Blues Society booth at these sponsored summer events

THE SAINT LOUIS BLUES SOCIETY





The St. Louis Blues Society announces the 2015 band competition to select one blues band and one solo/duo act to represent St. Louis at the 32nd International Blues Challenge (IBC) presented by the Blues Foundation and held in Memphis Tennessee the last week of January 2016.

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.

Application Availability/Submission Deadline July 1 through August 31, 2015*

www.stlouisbluessociety.org/blues-challenge

DON'T DELAY - APPLICATION IS ONLY AVAILABLE FOR A LIMITED TIME!

The St. Louis/IBC Application will be available for a limited time beginning July 1, 2015 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, 2015. No applications will be accepted after the official deadline.

St. Louis Blues Challenge Final Judging Sunday, October 18, 2015 Doors open 2 pm. Show 3 pm to 8 pm

Kirkwood Station Brewing Company

105 East Jefferson

Kirkwood MO 63122

St. Louis Blues Challenge Winners' Showcase and Fundraiser Sunday, December 13, 2015 (tentative date)

Doors open 3 pm. Show 4 pm to 7 pm

BB's Jazz, Blues and Soups 700 South Broadway St. Louis MO 63102

*The two St. Louis winners will agree to perform together at a St. Louis Blues Society fundraiser prior to the IBC in January 2016. Proceeds from the fundraiser will go towards expenses incurred by the Blues Society to send the two fabulous acts to Memphis for the time of their lives!

For complete rules visit:

http://www.stlouisbluessociety.org/blues-challenge/ibc-rules-and-scoring-system/













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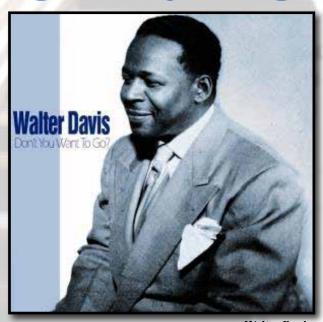
St. Louis Blues History: Pre-war Piano Blues

By Ethan Leinwand Waller 113VIS?

Walter Davis is yet another blues pianist and singer from St. Louis who was quite well known in his time, but is largely ignored today. In the late 30s and early 40s he was one of the most popular blues recording artists. His 150+ issued sides—many with Henry Townsend on guitar—rank him in the top ten of the most prolific blues musicians in the pre-war era. And yet, when you listen to his music you can't help but ask, how? Not because it's bad, but because it's really weird.

Walter Davis had a very strange way of playing the blues. His greatest strength was his song writing—rich with poetry and original imagery—that he sang with great clarity. But he had an odd nasally voice that was neither smooth nor powerful. His stumbly piano playing, inextricably linked to his singing, was wholly of his own invention. He sang and played so far ahead of the beat that sometimes he would just swallow it up and skip a beat altogether. He played dark, haunting, hollow harmonies that only hinted at standard blues forms. On top of all this, he had a specific way for playing in each of the keys. Walter Davis's sound is nearly impossible to duplicate on the piano. It's too subtle and idiosyncratic and off-kilter.

In preparation for writing this article, I listened to Walter Davis for long stretches, and I must confess it is a rich, but altogether unsettling experience. Thirty minutes with Walter Davis, and I can promise that you will end up feeling just terrible. Apparently, Davis understood his affect all too well, and as his close friend and musical cohort, Henry Townsend explained, "Walter Davis played some of the saddest songs that was ever heard about. I think he was thinking right [to not play in the clubs], because he knew this wouldn't draw a crowd. Each one of them would get up and get them a bat, go home, and go to fighting or do something. A gal would go home and get the rolling pin and go to hitting someone over the head" (Greensmith: A Blues Life).



Walter Davis
Don't You Want to Go?
2003 Acrobat Music (UK)

And yet, there is no denying that the African-American blues fans of the time truly connected with Walter Davis. In1941, Fisk University conducted a survey of the Mississippi Delta which included a very telling report that documented the contents of five juke-boxes in the bars of Clarksdale, MS. Filled with a wide range of contemporary jazz, blues and pop hits, only one record was to be found on all five juke-boxes: Walter Davis' "Come Back Baby." I urge all of you to give that song a listen, and tell me if it surprises you that this kind of blues could ever have been popular. \square

RECOMMENDED LISTENING

COME BACK BABY
I CAN TELL BY THE WAY YOU SMELL
SWEET SIXTEEN
SANTA CLAUSE
M&O BLUES (p. Roosevelt Sykes)
THINK YOU NEED A SHOT
ASHES IN MY WHISKEY
BIDDLE STREET BLUES
ERIE TRAIN BLUES (w. The Sparks Brothers)









St. Louis is not universally credited as being a "home of the blues" in the way cities like Clarksdale, Chicago or Memphis—but it absolutely should be. Many godfathers of the blues who migrated north from southern upbringing wound up calling St. Louis home. The early '50s introduced a crop of music that laid the foundation for rock, pop, R&B and funk.

Landing contently here, they found fruitful cultivation of their craft along the 55 highway that stretches from the raw cotton fields of Mississippi north to urban Chicago. These artists pioneered an expressive, emotional music that seemed to bubble up from the banks of the Mississippi River.

One legend of the blues guitar, Mr. Albert King, called St. Louis home from 1956-1966. After ten years on the St. Louis blues scene, King went to Memphis, signed with the infamously funky Stax record label and was backed by Booker T. and the MGs. Together they recorded now mega-icon tracks such as "Crosscut Saw" and "Born Under a Bad Sign."

But before Stax, the Master of the Gibson Flying-V had landed a few hits recorded right here in St. Louis, notably 1961's "Don't Throw Your Love On Me Too Strong." King would one day play with the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra in 1969, fronting what he called "an 87-piece blues band."

King's electric leads pioneered the minor pentatonic, sweet-spot wailing, which became the cornerstone sound of all rock and blues lead guitar. Clapton used King's solo from "Personal Manager" almost note-for-note in Cream's early hit "Strange Brew." Hendrix used King's licks to fuel his blues opus "Red House."

And then came Stevie. King was clearly Stevie Ray Vaughn's biggest influence, so much so that early critics wrote SRV off as a copy-cat. Stevie would do more for the blues revival explosion of the '80s than any other blues recording artist. You can still occasionally turn on PBS and see him in his electric blue satin blouse and widebrimmed hat, trading endless variations of just 5 notes—the 5 scale notes known by all guitarists worldwide as "The Albert King Box." Vaughan is trading with King himself, laughing gleefully at the challenge of getting every ounce of feeling imaginable out of *just those 5 notes*.

by Jason David Cooper

I sat down with Eugene and asked him to tell me about his new song and his history with Albert King.

JDC: So tell me a little about where music began for you. When did you begin honing your craft?

EJ: Actually from the very beginning when I was at home with my grandmother, music was a natural part of me, where I thought just anybody could do it. Watching TV, watching musicians on TV, one in particular, Lionel Hampton, played xylophone. He got off the xylophone, played drums, played piano played all those that night, and I liked that. I was about five or six.

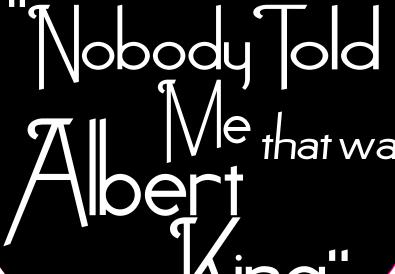
When my mother moved from my grandmother's house, we moved down the street to the projects. My grandmother stayed—this was at the very early part of my life—my grandmother stayed at 2429 Biddle, and my mother was young when she had me, so she was still at home with her mother. We moved down to the other end of Biddle. I had to be about five years old.

I met these guys, some young guys about 12, and we had this singing group called The Tones, and we would get in the hallways and harmonize because we had an echo. And that's where I learned the harmonies part of music, and I just had a natural ear to pick up parts. I'd hear one part, and I knew what my part was gonna be. That was when I was about 12, 13, somewhere in there. That's when I learned to play the guitar. A friend of mine had a "Stella." I remember the name of the guitar was a Stella. And the first song I ever played was "You Don't Have to Go" by Jimmy Reed.

We borrowed instruments, a whole band full of instruments for about two, three hundred dollars. We got in my friend's living room, play Motown, Miracles, you know R&B stuff with chord changes, colors and harmonies, which is what I like. Miracles, Temptations, Four Tops...when I hear those songs it instantly takes me back to them days.

JDC: So you didn't set out with the bass as your primary instrument?

EJ: At first I was playing guitar. Then later on with the group they needed someone to play the piano, and I started playing piano. Then later on somewhere down the line, my



If you watch that "In Sessions" program with Stevie Ray Vaughan and Albert King, occasionally the camera catches one other musician on the screen. The young afro-haired head of the bass player backing these blues giants

That young man was Gus Thornton who was, and still is, a fixture on the St. Louis blues scene. King picked him up from the smoky bars on the East side, taking him on tours and putting him on records. Gus still plays the St. Louis scene weekly; he is a member of Kim Massie's Solid Senders as well as the bottomend for Marquise Knox, and is available to sit in with every Monday at the pro blues jam at the Beale on Broadway.

But there is another bass player who has been a staple on the St. Louis blues scene just as long as Gus Thornton who you can catch performing every week—another bass player who had ties to King: Eugene Johnson.

Johnson doesn't just play bass but also delivers an infectious vocal style, blending harmonies and singing out front his own unique blues and R&B. He's been doing it, and doing it well, for a long time. And he has a lot of stories. He tells one of those stories in his new song "Nobody Told Me That Was Albert King." (Available on Johnson's LP *Live at BB's Jazz, Blues and Soups* on iTunes)

arm, I couldn't do the exercises and it started going down where I couldn't lift it up. The doctors couldn't find out what it was. First thing I thought about, thinking ahead because I knew I had to play music.... I can't hold my hands up and play the piano, I can't hold my form to play the guitar, so I said the most natural thing for me to play with my illness was the bass. The doctors don't know what it was, I'm thinking it might have been a pinched nerve somewhere in my back.

You know it's just funny how life is, man. Things that what could have been—if this hadda happened, if that hadda happened—but that old saying, it is what it is.

It's so many things I can't do, and so many things I can. When you get in a certain situation where you get so many limitations on what you can do, which is what's good about humans, we are resilient about adapting. If we allow ourselves to say, "F#©%-it, this is the best I can do," instead of harping on it, "Woe is me, I can't raise my arm" or "What I'm gonna do?" You know, I mean you can't do that, man. I still feel good about myself. I feel good about music. I can still get women. That's what keeps me GOIN' man."

JDC: So your new song "Nobody Told Me That Was Albert King" is a great song, man. Can you tell me how the song came about? How did you come to meet King?

EJ: I was still staying with my mother. When I was 18, I got a call from Albert King. At that time, I was with a group over in East St. Louis called Members of the Family. We were in the studio, Gold Futures, and we had several good songs that I felt good about. I just knew we were gonna make it, knew we had hits and everything.

Somebody had told Albert about me. Somebody gave Albert my number and he called me at my mother's house. I talked to Albert King on the phone. I wanted to get back to him after I talked to the band and my dumbass didn't know who it was I had turned down.

I asked them, "If I leave with Albert King, can I come back to the group?" And they told me, "Well, we can't promise you your position would still be here," so I didn't go with Albert King. If I had told somebody, somebody woulda known who I just talked to. They would have told me, "That's Albert King, get on out there, get that experience." But nobody told me... ha...you know?

The song I wrote, "Nobody Told Me That's Albert King," is a song I came up with when I saw him on TV with...uuh...what is that guitar player...Stevie Ray Vaughan. It was Stevie Ray Vaughan, Albert King, and the bass player in the background was Gus Thornton. And the first thing in my mind was, "You know, that could have been me." Because at the time,

when Albert called me to play with him, I didn't realize how famous he was. Nobody told me that was Albert King. Even the guys I was playing in the band with, I don't know if they knew. Pretty much, if you listen to the song, it tells you exactly what happened.

I didn't go with Albert King because blues wasn't my music and I wasn't thinking about all the experience I could have got out there playing with Albert King. I felt like blues was a very simple music, it was not as pretty as R&B. It didn't have all those flat fives and minor sevens and majors and all those pretty chords they use in R&B.

JDC: So the blues wasn't your first love. It plays so much a role in your stage show today, how did it sneak into your performance?

EJ: I didn't really start appreciating the blues until I started playing with my friend, Buzzy Martin. Buzzy understood the blues and then I started understanding the blues. It ain't all about 1-4-5 chords, it's about who played the chords and how they expressed themselves. Blues is a vehicle to express yourself without having to know a lot about music. Know what I'm saving? You can play them three chord changes and sing about anything. That's when I started to respect the blues, because it's not that complicated, but it's all about the feel. I love blues now. I love R&B now, but I have more respect for the blues now than I ever have.

JDC: What were some notable gigs that stick out in your mind working on the St. Louis blues scene all those years?

EJ: Oliver Sain, Martin Carr...anybody that's anybody I played with them the last 40 years. Playing with Oliver Sain I learned a lot about music, as far as, playing alot of notes is not necessary to making good music. Oliver Sain always said, "Simplicity is the key, keep it simple, keep it in the pocket. Keep it where people want to dance or feel the groove." If you play too much, it's not solid, especially being a bass player.

I would play with so many bands and for some reason I would get fired. I don't know what it is, it seemed like I would get fired when I sang too much. But I wanted to sing and so eventually I started learning songs, building a band around me.

I have such a wide range of styles. I like to think of myself as a chameleon that adapts to whatever surroundings he's in. I can't classify myself. I like the funk, the blues, jazz, R&B. Tower of Power, James Jamerson. I get a little bit from everybody.

JDC: What are you doing now? What does the future hold for Eugene Johnson?

EJ: If you ever come to one of my gigs, I will play a song, I will play a song and at the

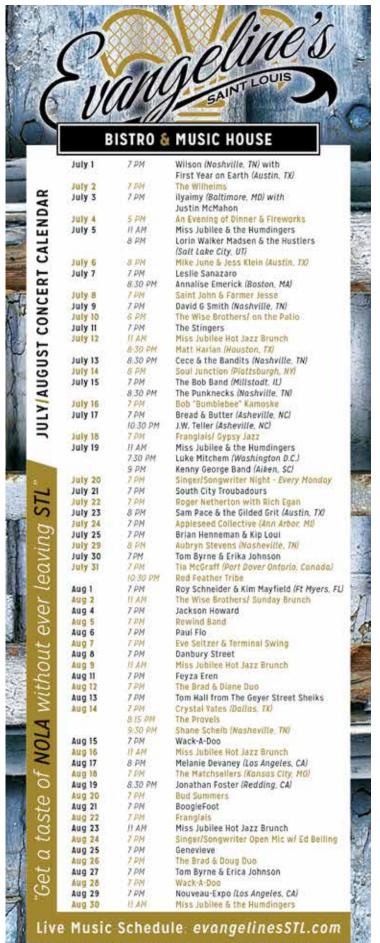
end of the song, I will just play with it. I will do me, change the groove around, just play with it. That's what I'm notorious for doing. I love to make it mine.

The musician that you work with, all that goes into "making the magic." I feel like I got the musicians. I feel like the magic is going to be on the next CD. There's so many things I want to do. I feel like I wasted so much time back in the day. I went out on drugs for awhile. Spent a lot of time messin' up on drugs and that took a lot of time away from music and the things I want to do now. I got a lot to write about. Before I leave this earth, my whole life and all the things I experienced are going to be in my music."

Music is a vehicle for me to express myself, to get into, try to minister something to the people. If I'm singing about something I believe in, I try to break it down some kind of way like a form of preaching, show people about the love that we were meant to do towards each other, and that's my way of teaching, through the music. If I can get to that point, I can teach a lot. The thing about being a musician on the level, you get a chance to teach more people through your music, and if you can do that, you can change the world... if you get to the right position. You know, just think about it. Every time they have a crisis, they call musicians. Musicians raise the money, they tell people what to do. They got musicians in a right position to have a lot more power than people in politics. Think about it. That's why I want to be a musician and write music. This is my way of trying to change the world. 🎜



photo by Tiffany Waits





Live Music Every Night of the Week

Mondays 8 to 12 - Doug Phillips (from 70's Band "Children") Tuesdays 9 to 1 - Open Mic Night hosted by Kimmy V. Wednesdays 9 to 1 - Blues Jam Session (Hosted by the Fred Pierce & Company) Thursdays 9 to 1 - Everett Dean & Lonesome Hearts (High Octane 50's, 60's & 70's Rock & Roll)

WEEKEND SCHEDULE

Saturdays 2 to 6 - Soul Reunion (Played R&B here every Sat. afternoon for 20 some years)

Friday & Saturday Nights 9 to 1 Aug 01 – Steve Pecaro Band (Stevie Ray Vaughn Style of Blues) Aug. 07 – The Catapults (The New Breed of Blues) Aug. 08 - Tony Campannella Band (Plays Like Nobody Else) Aug. 14 - TBA

Aug. 15 – Steve Pecaro Band (Stevie Ray Vaughn Style of Blues)

Aug. 21 - TBA

Aug. 22 – Marsha Evans & The Coalition (A St. Louis Music Diva with a true blues band) Aug. 28 - Joe Medzka Band

(Man These Boys Can Play) Aug. 29 - Steve Pecaro Band (Stevie Ray Vaughn Style of Blues)

Sundays 2 to 6 Fred Pierce and Company (Classic R & B, Blues and Rock & Roll)

Sunday Nights 7:30 to 11:30 Aug. 02, 16 & 30 - Michael Thomas & Travelin' Band (Soulard Style in R&B, Blues and Classic Rock & Roll) Aug. 09 & 23 - The Catapults (The New Breed of Blues)

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314-276-4386

Remembering Mike Prokopf by John Higgins ~ photo by Robert "Ferd" Frank

I was asked to write some thoughts about Mike Prokopf, who left us, or as his wife Ruth said, "Took the train out of here," on July 6, 2014. As we near the first anniversary of his passing, I've enlisted the help of some friends and herein we've relayed some of our thoughts about Mike, both as musician and friend.

A lot of people knew Mike Prokopf. He's what you would call a "musician's musician". Mike played bass in some of St. Louis's best and most-respected bands for nearly fifty years, and won a lot of recognition during that time. He also worked at the Schlafly Taproom from nearly day one of their opening, and then moved on to the The Bottleworks when it opened in Maplewood. These were places and pursuits that put Mike in front of a lot of people, but he was never one to seek the spotlight. He was more the kind of person that wanted to see everyone he was involved with, through and with his support, be recognized and to do well. If the light happened to shine his way, he would be ok with it, but he never sought it out. He let his music, and his efforts, speak for themselves—no spotlight required.

I first met Mike in 1982, soon after moving back to St. Louis from Springfield MO. I had been traveling and playing music full time for nearly five years, and needed a change. I met Chuck Aulgur soon after moving back. He asked me to play in a group that he was putting together and I said yes. It was at the first rehearsal for that group that I met Mike, whom Chuck had hired to play bass. It fell on Mike and I to arrange Chuck's originals, and we found out right away that in many ways we worked in the same manner and shared many ideas. It was the start of a long musical friendship that lasted many years—a relationship that had a truly positive effect on my efforts to become a more complete musician. I learned early on that I could trust that Mike would always have his part down, and would always keep things glued together, no matter how ragged things might get. Those kinds of people are like gold to other musicians-they give you the confidence to focus on your own contribution, and your own musicianship.

It may have been this ability of Mike's to give that confidence to the people that he played with that elicited a desire on the part of some to make sure that they tried to return that gift. I spoke with both Tom Hall, who played over a span of forty years with Mike in the original Geyer Street Sheiks, The Illusions, and the re-born Sheiks. And, I spoke with Alice Spencer, who played with Mike in the second go-round of The Sheiks. We all agreed that if you felt like you had gained Mike's

respect, and pleased him musically, then you had really succeeded as a musician. Both Tom and Alice said that Mike had a way about him that drew really great performances out of them, regardless of the style of musiand that his support and "big ears" were irreplaceable. High praise from two great musicians that loved Mike so well.

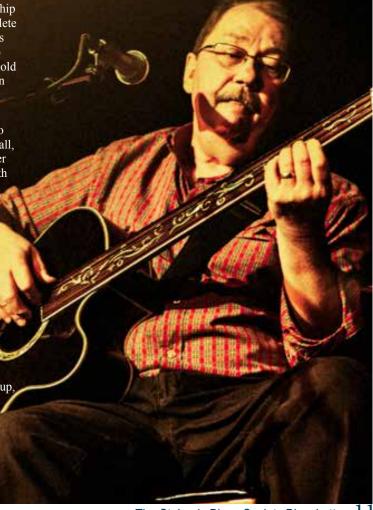
Charley Pfeffer first met Mike around 1976, soon after Mike had moved back to St. Louis from Boston. Charley was playing guitar and mandolin in Nick Silver's All-Star Interchangeable Doo-Dah Band, and Mike was hired to play bass. This started a collaboration and friendship between the two that would last nearly forty years.

After Nick Silver dissolved, and the first version of The Sheiks fired up, Mike came on to play bass about a year in. I asked Charley what his musical memories of Mike were in that first version of The Sheiks, and without hesitation, he said, "dynamics and drive." Tom and Alice had said the same, and that was certainly my experience with Mike as well. Dynamics can be one of the most elusive and under-utilized parts of music, but when

they happen naturally, it adds a level of feeling and emotion to music that can't be created in any other way. Again, it was this focus that Mike brought out in people that let those magical dynamic moments happen naturally, and elevated the level of so much music that he was involved in.

Lydia Ruffin shared time with Mike in Spatz, one of the greatest vocal groups to ever grace a stage. One of the things that she loved about Mike was that his playing was so spot on, and musically appropriate, that it was almost like she didn't notice the bass parts. While that might seem odd to some, when you play with someone who was such a talented ensemble and team player as Mike it's as if a whole big part of the music is just taken care of. Lydia also said that his quiet presence, coupled with his ability to listen with broad ears, gave an air of confidence to the band that let her really be herself musically. Again, it is this ability that Mike had to help people be their musical best that made him unique, and so admired.

When people play songs that they shared a lot of time playing with Mike, I suspect that they'll hear many of his parts, along with the meaty tone, and the touch, and the feel; all true and close reminders of what Mike brought to the musical table. I also suspect that there are many people who listened to Mike over the years that will have similar reminders as well. We are all glad to have them. Alice really summed up Mike in a very short and simple sentence, "Mike was music"....indeed he was, and is. Thank you Mike.





A Second Conversation with Mr. Dion Brown

by Jeremy Segel-Moss

The National Blues Museum is currently in full swing. The construction is underway, stage is coming together and the content of the museum is in full production. Each issue from now until opening we will be bringing you updated information about the NBM and the new leadership. Dion Brown, the new Executive Director, recently moved here from Mississippi where he was the E.D. of the BB King Museum.



Here is a small interview about Mr. Brown's experience at the BB King Museum, what it was like to be involved with the burial of Mr. King, and what's happening at the NBM.

Please tell us a little about your experience at the BB King funeral.

DB: I was in St. Louis doing some transition work when I got the call that Mr. King had passed. I rushed back to Indianola and we immediately went into planning his funeral. I had the honor to be one of the individuals charged with the planning. Mr. King actually laid in state at the museum and we had over 5,000 people come and pay their respects. He had made it clear how he wanted his funeral and we did exactly that. One thing that we did add though was placing two of his Lucille guitars on a horse for the processional to the burial site at the museum.

Where the NBM is in the process of building, content and open dates?

DB: This place is coming along so fast that they could actually be finished with the build out by mid-July. I'm normally over at the site daily and the progress from day to day is unbelievable.

The next phase will be receiving in the exhibits. They are currently being fabricated out in California and should be finished and installed sometime during the fourth quarter. We will be announcing soon exactly when we will be ready to officially open. It's been a long process for the NBM and St. Louis, but that time is fast upon us.

Talk about how the LOCAL musicians can and will be involved.

DB: Great question. Although we are the NBM, it is a must that we have local musicians partnering with

us. For instance in one plan, I'm sure we will hire at least a couple musicians to work at the museum. I'm not sure if that will be in a full time or part time capacity though at this time. We also would love those who would like to volunteer to engage our visitors throughout the museum. This is a major value add to our presence. Visitors are amazed that they can actually interact with the musicians.

While at the BB King Museum you never knew who may be in the exhibit or just hanging out to meet/greet their fans. Also, in the near future we will reach out to the local musicians to see if they have an interest in playing at the NBM. Early on we plan on live music every day we are open during our hours of operation. Then, on certain nights, we plan to have live music also. It will take all of us and the great musicians of St. Louis to truly make this the NATIONAL BLUES MUSEUM.

What will the performance space be like?

DB: At the NBM, one of the many great areas is our performance area. This is a great space that's decked out with TV monitors that will always be on display. We will show concerts, promotional videos, and actual performances of the live music. Outdoor speakers have already been installed that I hope will attract even more people in to see our performers. This is really an exciting time watching all of this come together and soon all will see the hard work everyone has put into this great institution. Π

For updates and information about the museum go to: www.nationalbluesmuseum.org

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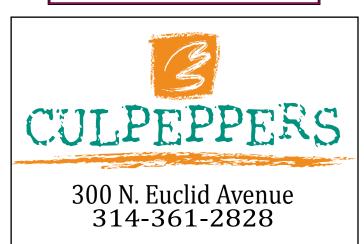
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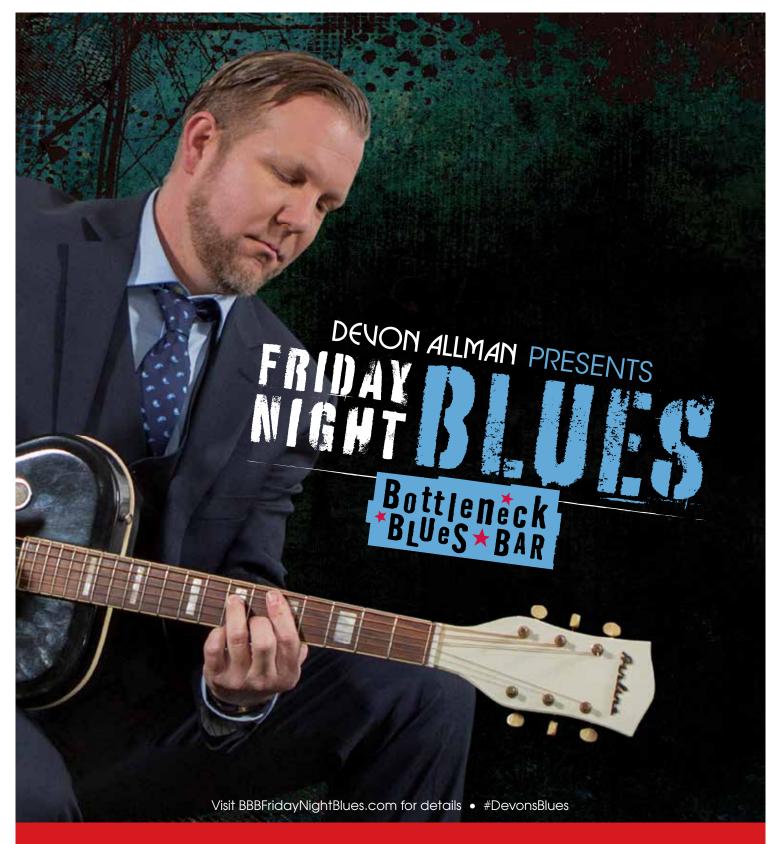
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