BLUESJETTER



An excerpt on Victoria Spivey from Bruce Of
 Marquise Knox Q&A with Alonzo Townsend
 CD Review: Gene Jackson



PRESERVING AND PERPETUATING BLUES MUSIC IN AND FROM ST. LOUIS SINCE 1984

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Happy Spring everyone!

In this issue we are proud to present just a few of the amazing women musicians of St. Louis. While we certainly didn't include everyone—we'd need a much larger publication for that—we hope that this group offers a good variety of style and talent. Often women in the male-dominated music industry are overlooked, dismissed, and not given the same opportunities as men. However, the role of female musicians is undeniable and hugely impactful to the music we all love. Whether she's a vocalist like Renee Smith or bass player like Tecora Morgan or a vocalist/bass player/guitar player like Sharon Foehner, St. Louis should be very proud of its history of women in blues and excited to see all the contemporary musicians performing now!

In February The St. Louis Blues Society was proud to have funded and presented two school education programs about blues. Big thanks to our Education Director Mike Battle, the Legacy Ensemble, Marquise Knox and Alonzo Townsend. Each one of these presentations does cost money and so the next step in continuing to provide education is fundraising. If you or someone you know might be interested in donating funds for Blues Education, please contact myself or Mike Battle at: michael-battle@sbcglobal.net. Or go online to our Square Market, squareup.com/store/st-louis-blues-club, and scroll down to the donation section. The STLBS will also be hosting our annual fundraiser for the Education Fund, the 3rdAnnual Atomic Blues Festival on June 11, 2017 at the Atomic Cowboy. At the very least, we hope you can join us for that very fun event!

As we get into the season for outdoor shows, festivals and community events look for the STLBS table and volunteers spreading the word. If you have upcoming events that feature blues music, please reach out to us in a timely fashion so we can help promote your events. Also, our concert calendar is up and running. If you're a musician, band, venue or event organizer make sure to email your shows to concertcalendar@stlouisbluessociety.org.

As always, thank you for supporting St. Louis Blues Music!

Jeremy Segel-Moss
Chairman of the St. Louis Blues Society



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Mary Kaye Tönnies
Co-Editor
mktonnies@stlouisbluessociety.org
Jeremy Segel-Moss
Co-Editor
jsegelmoss@stlouisbluessociety.org

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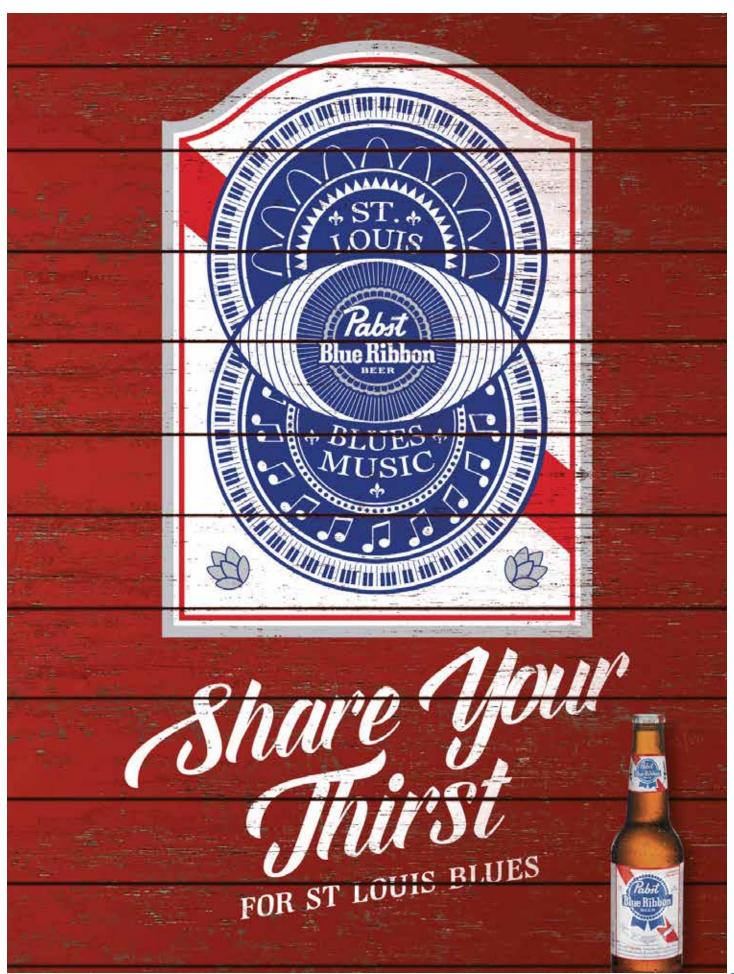
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The St. Louis Blues Society is dedicated to preserving and perpetuating blues music in and from St. Louis, while fostering its growth and appreciation. The St. Louis Blues Society provides blues artists the opportunity for public performance and individual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

The St. Louis Blues Society is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit Missouri corporation. Memberships to the Blues Society are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.





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MARCH - APRIL EVENTS

SUN 5 Brunch with Miss Jubilee & The Humdingers 6:00рм

Jazz Troubadours

MON 6 7:00рм Singer / Songwriter Night

TUES 7 7:00рм **Box of Nerves**

THUR 9 7:00рм Lindsay & the Fireflies

FRI 10 7:00рм **Boogiefoot**

THUR 16

SAT 11 11:00_{AM} Saturday Brunch with The Panamaniacs

8:00рм

SUN 12 11:00_{AM} Hot Swing Jazz Brunch with Miss Jubilee

MON 13 7:00рм St. Louis' Singer / Songwriter Night

WED 15 7:00рм Chris Ayer Los Angeles, CA,

> with **Adam Barnes** Oxford, England 7:00рм Two Cities One World

FRI 17 Olivia Mainville & The Aquatic Troupe with

Jack & the Bear Grand Rapids, MI | Monroe, MI

11:00_{AM} **SAT 18** Saturday Brunch with The Breakfast Boys

> 7:00рм The Fabulous Joe Bozzi Band

SUN 19 11:30_{AM} Miss Jubilee & The Humdingers

MON 20 7:00рм Singer / Songwriter Night

WED 22 7:00рм Cary Colman Jazz Trio

THUR 23 7:00рм Jess Novak Syracuse, NY

FRI 24 7:00pm Midwest Jazz-tette

SAT 25 11:00_{AM} Saturday Brunch with The Breakfast Boys

> 7:00рм Justin Howl Chicago, IL

SUN 26 11:00_{AM} Brunch with Miss Jubilee & The Humdingers

MON 27 7:00рм Singer / Songwriter Night

7:00рм Society of Broken Souls Fairfield, IA **WED 29**

THUR 30 8:15pm Nathan Kalish Grand Rapids, MI

FRI 31 7:00рм Fletcher Moley Group

SAT 01 8:00рм La Terza Classe Napoli, Italy

SUN 02 6:00рм **Jazz Troubadours**

MON 03 8:00рм Stephen Chopek Memphis, TN

WED 05 7:00рм Austin Cebulke Jazz Trio

THUR 06 7:00рм Jesse Gannon Trio

FRI 07 7:00рм Sarah Jane and the Blue Notes

SAT 08 7:00рм **Danbury Street**

TUES 11 Glen Smith & Eric Slaughter

SEE FULL BAND LISTING AT EVANGELINESSTL.COM *************************



rictoria Spivey was a frightened teenager when she got off the train at St. Louis Union Station in 1926. She walked into the middle of the Roaring Twenties when they were roaring, when just about all the players were in place and St. Louis was at one of those peak times when the people who lived it would never forget it. Spivey was from Houston. She'd ridden the railroad all the day before and all the night. She got her bearings in the giant train station and asked a black man in a red cap to direct her to the Deluxe Music Shoppe. He sent her four blocks up the hill from the station to Jesse Johnson's record store.

The store sat behind the Booker T. Washington Theater, the 1,500-seat music palace where all the black stars of the day came to perform. The door to Deluxe Music was just steps from the backstage entrance to the theater, the entrance where Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey and Sippie Wallace and all of Victoria's heroes had walked.

"I was frightened, I was afraid," Spivey told Paul Oliver in 1960. She asked for Jesse Johnson and was told he was in Chicago. She blurted out to the woman behind the counter, "I'm a singer and I wanna to make a record!" The woman behind the counter said, "Girl, you better go home."

"I says, 'What's home?' I live in Houston, Texas, and I'm not going home. I come here to make a record."

"She says, 'Well, there's a piano over there, can you play the piano?" "I says, 'I certainly can!' I was darin' you know. So I just sit there and commence to whippin' on them ole 'Black Snake Blues.""

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From That St. Louis Thing, Vol. 1: An American Story of Roots, Rhythm and Race, "Chapter 16: Pre-war Blues"

By Bruce Olson

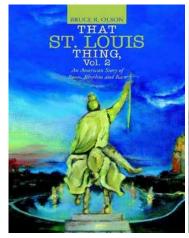
A few days later, on May 11, 1926, a local guitar player by the name of Lonnie Johnson joined Spivey during an Okeh Record field trip to St. Louis and recorded "Black Snake Blues." By that summer, 150,000 copies were sold. The song became a blues standard, the first of 83 sides Spivey cut between 1926 and 1937. Spivey performed steadily until 1952. She came out of a short retirement to join the American Folk Blues Festival in Europe in 1962, one of just a few early women blues singers (with Etta James and Big Mama Thornton) on the tour.

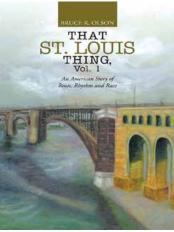
Singers like Aretha Franklin, Bonnie Raitt and Janis Joplin absorbed Spivey's style during the feminist upsurge in the later sixties. Indeed, the style, invented in the twenties by women like Spivey in places like St. Louis, soon infiltrated all of blues, rock, soul and pop.

Spivey was born in Houston Oct. 15, 1906. Her mother sang in church and her father and brother strummed in a string band. Victoria brought in money playing the piano in Houston's sporting district before she left for St. Louis.

After her most memorable work, including songs about the death penalty, life in prison and a wild moaning visit to the dentist's chair, "Toothache Blues," she moved to Chicago and then to New York, eventually forming her own record company. Spivey Records issued 20 albums between 1961 and 1976, including Three Kings and a Queen (1963) with Lonnie Johnson, Big Joe Williams, Roosevelt Sykes backed by a young Bob Dylan on harp.

Spivey died in New York City on Oct. 3, 1976, at age 68. J





"That St. Louis Thing" is available direct from the author at bolson@casco.net, at Left Bank Books, Subterranean Books, Vintage Vinyl and at the Missouri History Museum. Online at lulu.com.

Eating Cake with the Future Marquise Knox by Alonzo J Townsend

aturday, February 11th brought a huge, wall-to-wall, epic celebration at the Broadway Oyster Bar that would have made my father proud for the future of our music. The celebration was the 26th birthday party of the young phenomenal prodigy of the St. Louis blues, Marquise Knox. I had a chance to sit back, have some cake, and talk with Marquise about his reflections on his birthday show (his actual birthday is February 8), and what is on the horizon for him in 2017.

AT: The reaction, videos and feedback from your party on social media was tremendous. How did it make you feel?

MK: It's the best feeling I can imagine man...being with people that love the same thing that you love. It's an experience...all that love that is for you based on what we share and I get to play it. If that makes sense. I've been blessed to travel far and play, but to have your city come out and celebrate you, birthday or not, and the way they came out, oh man. It makes me feel like I already made it bro.

AT: Yeah, it's a beautiful thing. St. Louis has always had a long standing history of celebrating their own, especially in our music community. What moments do you take away from the night?

MK: I loved how jam-packed it was. The weather made for a very pleasant night in February too, so we just vibed-out man. Just wonderful to see so many people. And, all my family came down and some up from Mississippi so it was beautiful just to be surrounded by so many people that love you. The room full of love in a time like this in America right now... makes me feel even better about that night.

AT: What do you have planned for the year ahead?

MK: Well, I'm just 'bout ready to release my next album, Black and Blue, coming up soon and I'm really proud of it. I could say it's my best work yet...but I can't because I'm trying to put out the best work I can every time I get a chance to play whether it be on somebody's porch or a stage. I want people you feel my spirit and my energy every time so they can carry it with them and bring it back. I like the passion of it all, so I just want to keep making music and keep playing music. I want

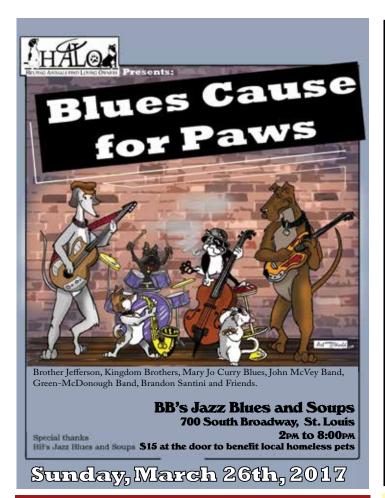
to play some more festivals and maybe hopefully touch some I haven't yet like up in Chicago, but I'm going to just keep showing everybody what the future looks like for the blues and how bright it really is and not just in St. Louis. The *Black and Blue* CD is gonna help do a lot of that work this year.

AT: How do you feel about the future bro?

MK: Well, as far as blues and our music and everything, man it's damn bright. We got a lot of good people in this city making damn good music right along with me, so you know we thriving and surviving around here man. We're carrying Henry's [Townsend], Tommy's [Bankhead], Bennie's [Smith], Johnnie's [Johnson] and all the dreams and lights they turned on for us and setting the bar higher which is something some thought wasn't gonna happen here some years and tears ago. But, like I said, 'we thriving and surviving.' We're just gonna come together across our country and build the same bridges, resist the nonsense and foolishness, and love each other so we can thrive and survive as a nation.



Marquise Knox (left) and Alonzo Townsend celebrating Knox's birthday at the Broadway Oyster Bar on February 11, 2017. Cell phone photo courtesy of Alonzo Townsend. Photobomb courtesy of Gus Thornton.⊚









Before the development of a male dominated blues scene in the post WWII era women led the way. The collapse of the record industry in the Great Depression changed the women led dynamics of the 1920's that introduced the blues to the greater American market. Jazz, a new style of music, became a recording craze during WWI and helped open the door for a decade long blues craze triggered by Mamie Smith's 1921 Valentine's Day recording, "Crazy Blues." It was the first record by an African American woman to sell a million records -opening new markets and created opportunities for blues artists. Race labels like Okeh, Paramount, Gennet, Black Swan competed with major labels like Columbia and RCA in the scramble to find African American blues women. The best know names of the era Mamie Smith, Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Alberta Hunter, Ida Cox, and Lucille Bogan all came out of the vaudeville, minstrel/tent shows and cabarets of the era.

Victoria Spivey, one of the top recording artists of the '20s, stands at the head of a long line of St. Louis women who were part of the craze. Two excellent St. Louis books, Kevin Belford's Devil at the Confluence and Bruce Olson's That St. Louis Thing, chronicle the women of the times. Olson's research shows that these women—Spivey, Eva Taylor, Virginia Liston, Irene Scruggs, Luella Miller, Katherine Henderson, Elizabeth "Lizzie" Washington, Edith Johnson, "Signifying Mary" Johnson, Little Alice Moore, Luella Miller, Helen Humes, Olive Brown, Bertha Henderson, Missouri Henderson Cora Perkin, Katherine McDavid, Priscilla Stewart, Florence Lowery, and Bessie Mae Smith—appeared on more than 300 record sides.

The St. Louis tradition of women in the blues remains alive and well. This article profiles eight of our talented women artists. As a group, they are committed to the music, connecting emotionally with their audience, developing their craft and believing in the future of the blues. Working with Oliver Sain is a common thread among many of those interviewed as is balancing music with full time jobs in a range of occupations: nursing, nurse assistant, occupational therapist, school psychologist, teacher, school aide, autoworker and grocery/retail. These are hardworking committed women whose stories are representative of the St. Louis blues community.

St. Louis Women of the Blues by Bob Baugh

Uvee Hayes, Vocalist

Uvee Hayes is a fine bottle of wine that keeps getting better with age. Growing up with blues loving parents in Macon, MS, Uvee was always singing the Delta blues. She was in choir through high school and college, but it was winning a local talent contest in high school got her interested in discography at Southern Soul. the music business.

Hayes' marriage to St. Louis radio personality Bernie Hayes in 1972 brought her to St. Louis St. Louis Diva who can turn any song into a where she began a career in the St. Louis schools. Her musical repertoire continued to expand from its Delta roots into R&B, soul, contemporary, country and more. "Funny How Times Slip Away" by Willie Nelson is a favorite that is always in her show. Another favorite is "Walk Away" by Oliver Sain.

Hayes says a key to her success was breaking the mold of a female singer by performing songs More karaoke led to sitting in with the legendary like Muddy Waters' "I Just Want to make Love to You," and Howlin' Wolf's "Howlin' for My Darlin'." She says, "So many of the delta songs were by men...I just wanted to provide a woman's point of view." Uvee also credits working with "some of the best producers in the business like Luther Ingram and Oliver Sain."

Thirty plus years and eight albums in, Uvee sees good times ahead. Her last CD, In the Mood, got airplay on over 400 hundred stations.

sees a bright and growing future for St. Louis and audience." She visualizes her songs so they the blues. The women artists in St. Louis "can do become like "sittin' and chillin' on the porch with Blues as well as anyone in the world ... What they people ... because they asked for a song that need is more exposure," says Hayes.

Kim Massie, Vocalist

Kim Massie, the "Siren of Song" is a true personal experience. As a kid, Kim would walk around the house snapping her fingers and tell her Mom, "I'm listening to the music in my head." It took time for that music to go public.

Children at a young age, welfare, a business degree, years as a nurse's aide and karaoke contests around Cleveland preceded her 1999 relocation to her mother's East St. Louis home. Oliver Sain. In 2001, Bud Jostes, owner of Beale on Broadway, offered a paying gig and formed Renee Smith, Vocalist a band for her. The first band went, but Massie but the Blues.

Aretha Franklin and Etta James are two of Kim's favorites but she says, "I am a songstress." Debonettes that recorded "Choose Me" with Singing all types of music is an asset that allows Oliver Sain. She would reunite with him years

With two new CDs scheduled for release she her to "make a personal connection with my takes them back to a memory ... a happy time." Read more about Uvee and check out her She loves it when a patron tells her "you helped me out of a terrible day."

> Kim takes pride in making a living singing but is guick to say "I couldn't have done it without my bandmates." She encourages young musicians to embrace "different genres, go outside the box and keep working." Kim hopes for more young blues musicians like Marquise Knox that "provide a link to their musical roots and pass it on." She says St. Louis women blues artists "are real people that love what they do and who want to spread some peace and tranquility."

> Look for Kim at Beale on Broadway on Tuesdays and Thursdays and check out her CDs Inspired and A Lady by Choice.

Renee Smith, the little girl with the big voice stayed and carefully built her own band. Kim from East St. Louis, grew up to the be the "Queen says her education about the blues came from of St. Louis Soul." Her childhood roots in gospel her 2003 performance in the musical Ain't Nothin music at the Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church laid the foundation for what was to come.

At 16, Renee joined an R&B group, The

after high school she "got schooled in the blues when "Rich loses his mind playing because I love his 16-year-old Marsha joined their singers, The singing with Larry and the Fellas." That set her to improvise with him." She has also become Georgettes. Becoming a big band jazz soloist, on a long career path that included annual trips an accomplished guitarist, vocalist and writer, singing opera, and working with the East St. to Singapore (1998-2007) where she introduced often performing duets with her husband, Doug, Louis arts program and the Young Disciples led Asian audiences to the blues, festivals, TV, a master slide guitarist. This year she hopes to to meeting Oliver Sain. She became a mainstay recording with Willie Mitchell (Memphis), add a CD with Derrick Bonn to her accomplished at his Archway Records (vocals and background) recording and performing with Oliver Sain, and resume. singing with Bennie Smith and Sharon Foehner in the Urban Blues Express as well as with her own band.

Renee says she has occasionally seen prejudice against women in the business. Sometimes a club owner might prefer a man but her answer is "I am determined to do what I want...so if they want a man I'd tell them I'll bring one along to sing with me." She has never been concerned about men's songs dominating the blues because "I would just learn them and do it my way." What she would like to do sometime is some piano bar blues and to be part of an allfemale band.

Renee says the blues will never die. She sees St. Louis women artists on the rise with more than expected coming into the business "writing their own material and getting stronger." She is doing her part too by working on a new CD with Paul Niehaus at his Blue Lotus Studios. It's all part of the legacy Renee wants to leave behind that says, "This is who I am."

Sharon Foehner, Bass, Guitar and Vocals

Over the last 30 years, Sharon Foehner has become one of the most sought after bass players in St. Louis. It was meeting the bass great Jimmy Hinds in 1987 that helped inspire her. He gave her a tape of his "Cajun River Tour" and told her to "listen and learn." She says, "it took me years to absorb it all."

Listening to the tape just whetted her appetite for playing and she began sitting in and learning with James Crutchfield's band. After a couple of months, she was asked to join the band. A few years later she talked Bennie Smith out of retirement to form the Urban Blues Express and had him teach her guitar.

Sharon says being a woman blues artist is tough. She told how one musician once told her, "You don't look like a bass player." She found it both funny and revealing: "These misconceptions about you as a woman are something men do not face." What it did do was fuel her determination. "You may not get judged fairly so you have to be twice as dedicated, improve every day and bring it every day." In St. Louis, she says "women blues artists all have high standards and a deep and abiding respect for their craft."

Today Sharon brings it with Rich McDonough and Rough Grooves as well as playing with

You can hear Sharon, Doug and their daughter Beulah on the STL Blues Society's 16 In 16 release performing her song "Homeless Child."

Tecora Morgan, Bass

Tecora Morgan says she was born with music in her blood. Her father, Riley "Coatie" Morgan, was the long time lead guitar player for Big George Brock and every weekend he held "rehearsals" to train the kids as musicians.

Morgan worked her way through bongos, keyboards, horns, and reeds but nothing stuck until she tried the bass. With a natural ear for music she learned it in seven months and made her first stage appearance at the age of 15 sitting in with Big George. She later joined his band.

Tecora says her Dad offered all kinds of good advice. He encouraged her to learn many styles...ballads, country, blues, etc. because "if you want to work you don't want to get labeled." She brings a distinct style that other musicians have called "a clear bold solid crisp sound." She says that may be because "unlike most bass players I use a pick."

Morgan was also schooled on the challenges loved them." she would face. Her father warned about fiealousy amongst men in town to see a young woman playing rings around them." He told her "you must work that much harder...there's competition out there but it will make you better." She looked to Memphis Minnie, who could play guitar with the best, as an inspiration. Today, she sees things changing for the better with more woman musicians coming into the business. Her advice them is "be humble about your craft, be of strong mind and keep focused."

You can find Tecora focused and playing around town and Sunday afternoons with Blues Boy Bubba at the Red Door in East St. Louis.

Marsha Evans, Vocalist

Marsha Evans wrote her first blues song on a piano when she was six and performed with her sister at Kiel Auditorium (now Peabody) in the late '50s. With an opera singing mother, a horn playing father, an aunt (and mother) in the Legend Singers, uncles teaching music, a blues sax playing grandmother and musician friends all around, her early start in the family business was no surprise.

Evans' father, Leonard Bolar, was the lead

later in the studio and on stage. Renee says Paul Bonn and the Bluesmen. Sharon loves it trumpet in the jazzy George Hudson Band when and with his band. It was there she reunited with and married her old grade school boyfriend, the renowned bass player, Jimmy Hinds. She says their working together is easy because "we always understood each other musically since the beginning ... He allows me to be a creative

> By the 1980s, she was a teacher by day providing leadership in "helping students believe in themselves and their ability to accomplish anything." At night she was singing at Hillary's in Soulard with her band, Marsha Evans and the Coalition. She also performed with Johnnie Johnson in the '90s. Evans' extensive playlist has one rule: "a song doesn't make my playlist unless it means something to me."

> Marsha is encouraged about the future by seeing "lots of young kids that have latched on to the blues ... lots of younger fans asking us questions." But, she cautions, "the music industry must use real musicians." Marsha believes St. Louis deserves more recognition because "the talent of St. Louis blues women is as great or greater anywhere else." She wants the world to be able to say "we stopped, looked, listened and

> Watch for Marsha Evans and the Coalition at 1860's Saloon in Soulard.

Melissa Neels, Lead Guitar, Vocals, Songwriter

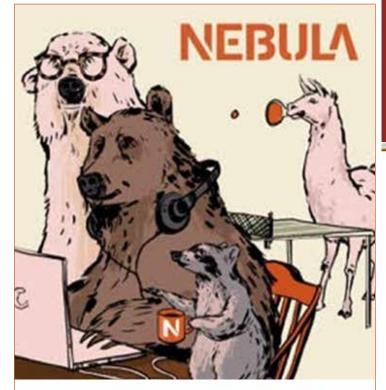
Melissa Neels began playing guitar in seventh grade, but it was going to see Bonnie Raitt when she was 15 that changed her life. A backstage meeting (twice) with Raitt where she told Melissa, "keep playing the blues," is the source of Neels' inspiration.

Raitt's Nick of Time album and the song "A Thing Called Love" sat at the top of Melissa's play list. The three Kings—BB, Albert and Freddie along with the Allman Brothers and a local band, Patti and the Hitmen, all influenced her bluesy rock style. Melissa says she "sings and plays from the heart...music from experiences and the inside." Her first big stage show at Big Muddy in early 2000 was a big deal. "People got into it... we felt the energy and it fed ours."

Melisa feels that women do have to work harder because there is so much talent out there. "It isn't as hard," she says, "once you prove yourself but you have to keep on your game to get gigs." She sees things changing with more role models like the Melissa Neels Band. Melissa

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Thursday 4/6 Ricky Nye and the St. Louis Crew

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Thursday 4/13 Roland Johnson and Soul Endeavor

Thursday 4/20 Chris Ruest Band wsg. Gene Taylor

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Thursday 5/11 The Soul Merchants feat. Felix Reyes and Paul Linden

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continued from page 9

talks fondly about a St. Louis all-girl band with Sharon Foehner, Carolyn Ittner and Leslie Sanazaro that didn't work out due to schedule conflicts. She says they are part of a community of all St. Louis women artists who are "strong, talented, nice people that are damn good."

among younger people and credits the St. Louis Blues Society for its efforts. Her show now includes newly written songs that she plans to lots of emotion on stage and make a personal put on a new CD.

at her shows. Check local listings for upcoming performances.

Laura Green, Vocalist, Songwriter

Growing up in the Dutchtown area of south St. Louis, Laura Green always loved to sing but becoming a blues artist came later in life. She was a mother and well into a work career in 2002 when she began to sing jazz and folk in duets. It was a 2012 Springfield, MO ad that led to the musicians who ignited her blues groove.

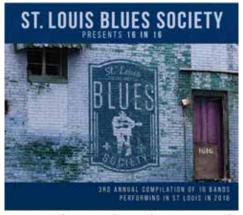
Returning to St. Louis in 2014, she was singing jazz but Vinnie Vilenza (Blues City Deli) heard a blues voice that Alonzo Townsend once to Pick" on the STL Blues Society's 15 In 15 or proclaimed "as mighty as the Mississippi River." Vilenza gave encouragement and helped her

form the Laura Green Blues Band. It was, she says, "a baptism under fire...forming and leading a man band, booking, learning new material and discovering I enjoyed writing." After joining with guitar great Rich McDonough in 2016 to form the The Green McDonough Band, created a CD and 2017 trip to the semi-finals of the International Neels sees the blues making a comeback Blues Competition in Memphis guickly followed.

Laura says her soulful style fits well "under the blues wide umbrella...it allows me to show connection with the audience." She credits great Melissa's CD Shine is available online and musicians and people who encouraged her for her success and praises her counterparts. "It is a special honor to be in the company of so many great and interesting women artists."

> Laura takes pride in representing the St. Louis Blues community. She wants people to know that "St. Louis Blues women are talented, got moxie and are carrying on the tradition of some extremely cool women who started this whole thing." Green and bandmate McDonough are carrying on the tradition with a CD in the works for a summer release.

> You can hear Laura sing her song "A Bone check the Green McDonough Band web page for scheduled appearances. ...

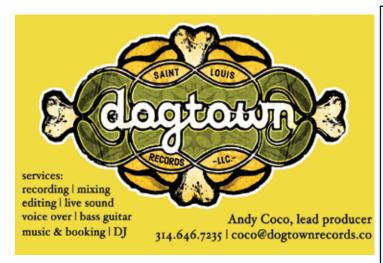


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ENE JACKSON

Blue Lotus Recordings, 2017

by Bob Baugh

Gene Jackson will remember March 10, 2017 for the rest of his life. It is the date of his Beale on Broadway release party for his first CD, 1963. It has been a long road for the well-known local soul singer but the wait has been worth it.

Gene, a 1979 Soldan graduate, started life in the Pruitt-Igoe projects with his mother, Mary Coleman, who loved to sing and did freelance work with Ike and Tina Turner, The Shirelles and others. She provided the R&B and soul influence while encouraging his interest in music by signing papers when he was 15 to enable him to play with bands. Back in those days he says he was "too shy to sing on stage," so he stuck to flute, congas and drums and limited his vocals to the Mt. Gideon church choir.

As a teen, Gene began a nine-year gig with Doc Terry, the house band at the Mary Moonlight Lounge on MLK Blvd., playing flute and congas while his friend Skeet Rodgers played the drums. Rodgers (Inner City Blues Band) eventually stepped out front as a singer and that inspired Gene to do the same. He joined Power Play as a pop singer thirty years ago and added blues/soul to his catalogue when he joined Soul Reunion sixteen years ago. A decade ago, after losing his day job, he decided to make a go of it as a full time singer.

The only other time Gene recorded was a music industry rip-off story. In 1989 he recorded two singles. One, "The Night I Fell in Love," became a smash hit in England but he didn't know it. When he found out, he discovered his name was spelled Jean and another person's picture was on the cover. He and his attorney daughter, Venus, are still chasing the royalties that were stolen from him.

It was trust and respect that brought Gene to Paul Niehaus and his Blue Lotus Studios. He was impressed with Niehaus and Kevin O'Connor's work as co-producers of Roland Johnson's 2016 cd, Imagine This, which was first original music release of Roland's career. Like Johnson, Jackson had covered others work for years but hearing that cd convinced him it was time to do one of his own.

When Gene called Paul to see if they could do something similar his response came easily, "I said yes because I love his voice and emotional singing style." Once they began working together "it became clear," Gene says, "they were meant to make music together...he reminds me of my younger self." Their five-month effort with co-producer Kevin O'Connor, resulted in a deeply personal cd about love, desire, marriage, joy, poverty and death that draws upon Jackson's life experience.

The ten cuts selected for 1963 came from the 15 they actually wrote. While soul flows through the CD Gene and Paul describe it as a "bit out of the box." Jackson says it has "the feel of the early movement 60s through the roughness of the 70s with each song in a different key." And, he loves the "icing on the cake" that Paul adds to the songs at the end of their creative process. Paul agrees citing one of the out of the box elements. "Some of the tracks have 'wall-of-sound' elements in their production style, which was really fun to make."

Their creative process begins by finding a groove/a feel for a song. From there Paul says, "I would write a song form to it, to get all the phrases and sections. Then I added guitar and keyboard parts and bounce out a rough mix." Gene would then take the music and work out the melody and lyrics. There was plenty of give and take between Jackson, Niehaus and O'Conner. Jackson co-wrote seven of the songs with Niehaus and O'Conner, who played drums and handled the string arrangements, joined them in writing the other three.

In the case of "Ain't No Way," which also appeared on the new St. Louis Blues Society 16 In 16 CD, Jackson had a melody in his head and Paul and Kevin turned into music. On "Son" it only took Paul playing a few chords for Gene to tell him "I have it. The music speaks to me. I can write the words easily."

Other songs weren't as easy. Both Jackson and Niehaus say "Rag Doll," even though it was the first song written, and "Voodoo Girl" were the toughest and last to be finished. The creole flavor of the latter "was a real change of beat and rhythm." Jackson says, "I had to get online and do a lot of research to understand what it is so I could find the right words."

The traces of Stax and Motown run through 1963. Listening to the opening chords on "That's Why I Love You," "1963," "Only God Can Help Us," "You're Gonna Get Hurt," and "Married at the Station" will make you think of other hits from those labels. The opening of "Love at First Sight" even echoes the Beatles. The icing on the cake Gene loves is the "lushness and change of direction" Paul achieves with the final elements he incorporates such as a conga drum, violins or orchestration.

Gene and Paul are both pleased with the outcome. Paul is excited because "this album has one foot rooted in classic 60s soul and another reaching forward into the future." Gene says the message "is about life and I hope people get enjoyment from what I wrote."



Gene Jackson's 1963 CD Release Party on Friday, March 10, 2017 with Tom Maloney on guitar, Kevin O'Connor on drums and Paul Neihaus IV on bass at Beale on Broadway photos by Bob Baugh



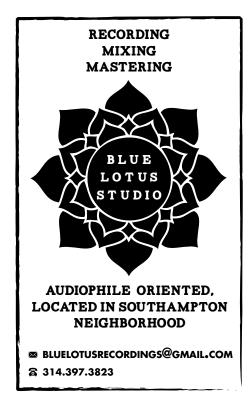


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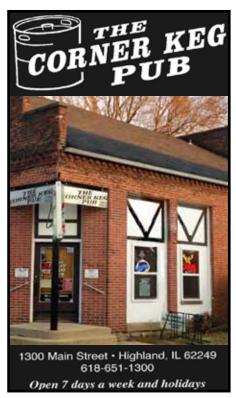


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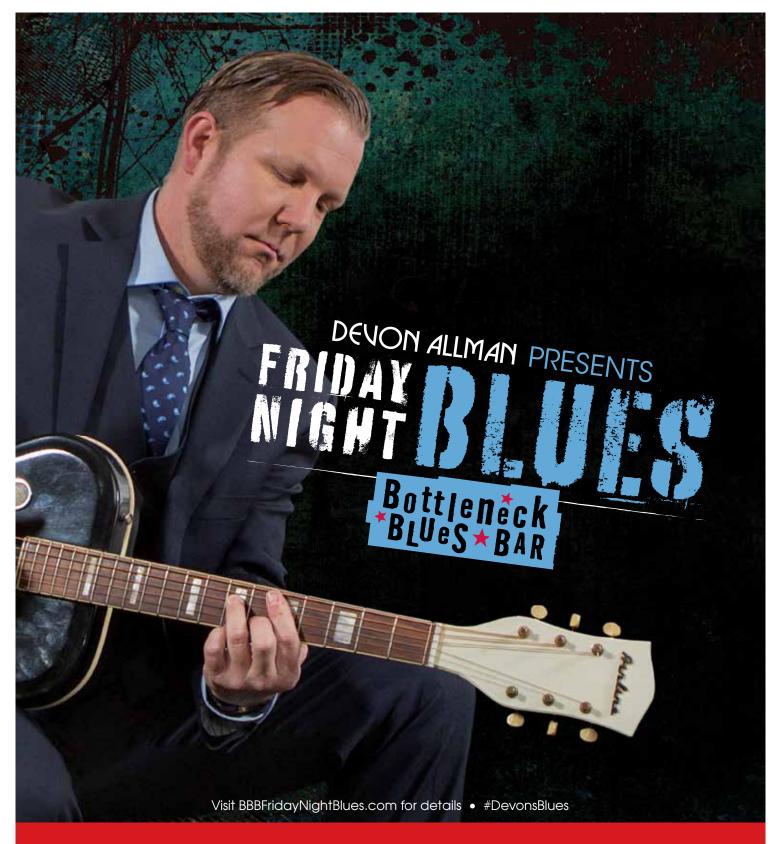
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