THE BI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF THE SAINT LOUIS BLUES SOCIETY May/Jun 2017 Number 85

BLUESLETTER

Eric McSpadden

Tom "Papa" Ray

Chris Taylor

Jon Erblich

Jim McClaren

Harmonica Players

Sandy Weltman

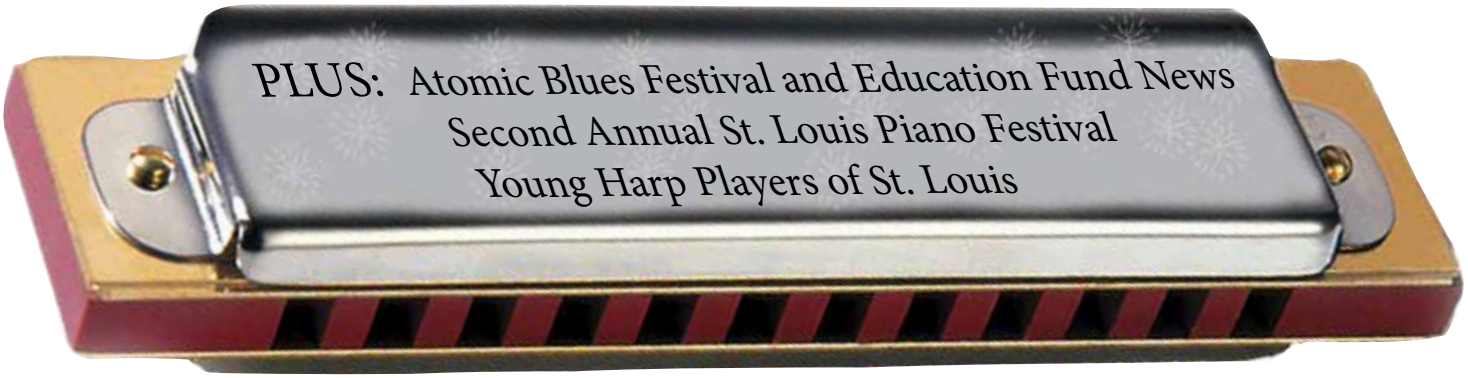
Glenn Charger

Bill Edwards

Chuck Loeb

Howard Young

# of St. Louis



PLUS: Atomic Blues Festival and Education Fund News
Second Annual St. Louis Piano Festival
Young Harp Players of St. Louis

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

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Hey Folks,

In this issue we feature some of the many harmonica players in St. Louis. Historically, St. Louis has been a piano/guitar town, but in the more recent decades, there is no arguing that we have one of the best harmonica communities in the country. As you read the interviews you'll see the wide range of styles and tones that the harmonica players present, but most glaring is the incredible community that exists in St. Louis. All of the players seem to have learned from each other with great respect. In one way or another they are all intertwined. That inclusive artist approach is something that filters into so many aspects of St. Louis music (in all categories) and may be one of the strongest, most unique, attributes of our community that simply doesn't exist everywhere. We are very lucky to live in such an outstanding music town!

On June 11, the STLBS will be hosting the Third Annual fundraiser for the Education Fund; *The Atomic Blues Festival*. The show will be at the Atomic Cowboy in the Grove and will feature several acts, live art, and a raffle all to benefit our Education Fund. The STLBS has presented at several schools over the last few months, practiced with our youth band and we are planning several future programs throughout the year. Michael Battle, our Education Director, has done a great job organizing everyone and pushing to spread the story of St. Louis Blues. If you are available, please join us at the Atomic Cowboy for the Third Annual *Atomic Blues Festival*. It's going to be a great time for a great cause!

For those of you planning for the future, the 22nd Annual *Big Muddy Blues Festival* happens on Labor Day Weekend and for the second year, will host an ALL ST LOUIS line up. This year will feature over 50 acts on six stages over three days, including two tribute shows—Albert King and Tommy Bankhead—at the National Blues Museum. The full line up and schedule will be announced soon, but make sure to mark this one on your calendar. The weekend has once again become the perfect celebration of the thriving blues scene we have in St. Louis! For updates: bigmuddybluesfestival.com

Hope everyone is enjoying the weather and so many outdoor shows throughout the community this summer. If you are a band, venue or the host of a community show, make sure to send your line up and schedule to concertcalendar@stlouisbluessociety.org for inclusion in our calendar.

Thanks, as always, for supporting St. Louis Blues Music!
Jeremy Segel-Moss

E-mail Jeremy
I'd love to hear from you!
Please write me at jsegelmoss@stlouisbluessociety.org and tell me what you think of our organization's growth.

BluesLetter is published six times a year by the St. Louis Blues Society.
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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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MAY – JUNE EVENTS

FRI 5	7:00PM	Brother Jefferson Band
SAT 6	11:00AM	Saturday Brunch with Stephen Haake Trio
	7:00PM	Fresh Burn Band
SUN 7	11:30AM	Brunch with Miss Jubilee & The Humdingers
	6:00PM	Jazz Troubadours
MON 8	7:00PM	B.J. Huffman Mason City, IA
	8:00PM	Terry Winchell Austin, TX
TUES 9	7:00PM	Tom Byrne & Erika Johnson
WED 10	7:00PM	Savannah King Buffalo, NY
	8:15PM	Daniels & Baker Nashville, TN
THUR 11	7:00PM	Jake Weisman
FRI 12	7:00PM	Rewind Band
SAT 13	7:00PM	Bottoms Up Blues Gang
SUN 14	11:30AM	Sweetie & the Toothaches Boogie Brunch
MON 15	7:00PM	The Matchsellers Kansas City, MO; Warsaw, IN
TUES 16	7:00PM	Jim Manley
WED 17	7:00PM	Brent Stewart
	8:30PM	Edgefield C. Johnston
THUR 18	7:00PM	Dave Black
FRI 19	7:00PM	Analog Thief
SAT 20	11:00AM	Saturday Brunch with Stephen Haake Trio
	7:00PM	Joe Bozzi Band
SUN 21	11:30AM	Brunch with Miss Jubilee & The Humdingers
MON 22	8:00PM	The Moon & You Asheville, NC
TUES 23	6:00PM	"Ragtime" Jack Radcliffe Raynham, MA
	7:00PM	Joe Metzka Trio
WED 24	7:00PM	Tommy Halloran
THUR 25	7:00PM	Jon Bonham Duo
FRI 26	7:00PM	Southside Jazz Trio
SAT 27	7:00PM	Midwest Jazz-tette
SUN 28	11:30AM	Brunch with Miss Jubilee & The Humdingers
MON 29	8:00PM	Matthew & Christina
WED 31	7:00PM	Jeremy Joyce Trio
FRI 2	8:00PM	Stephen Haake Trio
SAT 3	11:30AM	Brunch with The Breakfast Boys
	7:00PM	The Breakfast Boysz
SUN 4	11:30AM	Brunch with Miss Jubilee & The Humdingers

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The Third Annual Atomic Blues Festival

by Frank Bauer

The *Atomic Blues Festival* is an annual fundraiser for the St. Louis Blues Society Education Fund. The goal of the STLBS Education Program is to educate and bring awareness to the history of St. Louis Blues, highlight St. Louis legendary musicians, artists, and songwriters, both past, present, and future. The money raised at the *Atomic Blues Festival* is used to provide educational opportunities in the following areas: Performance, Music Journalism, Recording Studio Techniques, and Developing a Career Pathway.

The ***3rd Annual Atomic Blues Festival*** is being held at the Atomic Cowboy on Sunday, June 11, 2017 located at 4140 Manchester Ave, St. Louis, MO 63110 from 3pm to 8pm. Tickets are $12 and are available at Ticket Web: www.ticketweb.com/t3/sale/SaleEventDetail?dispatch=loadSelectionData&eventId=7411805&pl=atomiccowboy.

St. Louis Blues Society members can purchase one ticket and bring a friend to get in free with their membership card.

The acts in the lineup for the *2017 Atomic Blues Festival* are all locally sourced talent and include:

The School of Rock
Gene Jackson
Paul Bonn & the Bluesmen
The Jeremiah Johnson Band with members of the STLBS Youth Band featured on two songs
The Melissa Neels Band featuring Renee Smith

Rip Kastaris will be performing live art during the performances. His art piece will be auctioned off near the conclusion of the event. Local photographers, Bruce Toulmin and Reed Radcliffe, will be displaying their photographs of St. Louis blues musicians. A raffle will be held during the event with prizes consisting of St. Louis blues musician CDs and merchandise along with gift certificates from local dining establishments.

This event is an opportunity for the St. Louis Blues Society membership to come together to network while actively supporting the future of our St. Louis blues community. At the buy-one-bring-one-free ticket purchase option for STLBS members, this is also an opportunity to expose friends and family to the outstanding musical talent that is available in the St. Louis region. The board members of the St. Louis Blues Society would love to see all current members attend this worthy event. There is a reason that you joined the St. Louis Blues Society. If you've enjoyed the rich musical tradition of the St. Louis region over the years, this event is a great opportunity for you to help that tradition continue.

If you cannot attend the *Atomic Blues Festival* on June 11, 2017, donations can be made by clicking the "Shop Now" button on our Facebook page or by visiting our Square Marketplace at: squareup.com/market/st-louis-blues-club

We look forward to seeing you at there!

St. Louis Blues Society Education Initiative Report

(1st Quarter January - April, 2017)

Blues In School

St. Louis Blues Society in partnership with Center For Artistic Expression, another non-profit organization that promotes youth involvement in music, has collaborated on presenting Blues In The School Program in Elementary - Middle School.

The goal was to introduce the history of St. Louis Blues and the influence and impact it has in the music world and highlight St. Louis legendary artist(s) and entertainers from early 1700 – present day.

- Established two Blues In School Events for Black History Month, February 2017.
- Musicians and Artists Performed at Barrack Obama Elementary School & Jefferson Elementary School where over 100 kids from 4th to 7th grade attended.
- Joe Pastor Legacy Ensemble Group performed at Barrack Obama Elementary School.
- Marquise Knox performed at Jefferson Elementary.
- The presentations received many accolades from the kids and staff, who requested additional performances to be scheduled.
- We are scheduling more schools to participate in this program throughout the 2017 school year.

Youth Band Project

The Youth Band Project was created by Center For Artistic Expression and teamed up with St. Louis Blues Society to engage youth between the ages of 12-17 to form youth bands to allow teenagers to pursue their passion for music.

The goal was to form small bands where young musicians could perform at various music events throughout St. Louis City and County.

- We partnered with National Blues Museum for space where youth groups can have regular rehearsals in the Lumiere Room, on the 1st and 3rd Saturday of each month from 10:30am – 12:30pm.
- National Blues Museum has agreed to schedule a special event at the museum for the youth band to perform a live show and promote the music project.
- Youth Band will participate in live musical performances being planned throughout the year; (Atomic Blues Festival, fundraisers, and art fairs).
- Currently, we have five youth participating in the program, ages 12 – 16.

Studio Recording Session

This program will offer introductory sessions at a professional recording studio.

- Participants will learn facets of planning, recording, editing and distributing music.
- The Youth Band will be scheduled to attend a session in the near future.
- KDHX Radio station has a similar program and offered to schedule the youth band to participate in a workshop at the radio station.

The new 2017 STLBS shirts are here!

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Mark your calendars folks for The Second Annual St. Louis Piano Festival! If you are a fan of piano styles such as ragtime, barrelhouse, blues or boogie-woogie, then this event is for you! Featuring pianists from St. Louis and around the country, this year the festival will be held over three days, from Sunday June 4th to Tuesday June 6th. There will be two concerts at BB's Jazz, Blues & Soups and a casual ragtime gathering at The Scott Joplin House.

The St. Louis Piano Festival will honor our city's rich piano legacy that stretches back to the late 1800s and continues to this very day. Each of the two concerts will highlight different styles with deep roots in our city. BB's Jazz, Blues, & Soups is the ideal location for the shows, itself a shrine to our piano blues heritage (just inspect the artwork), the stage was even christened by Roosevelt Sykes. At BB's, we can have a world-class concert, but without the stuffiness of a concert hall, and with food and beer!

And for those of you wondering, there will indeed be an acoustic piano for the event. Our local piano shop, Jackson Pianos, has generously agreed to donate a baby grand piano!

TUESDAY, JUNE 6th – THE SHOWCASE. Similar to the inaugural festival, the main concert will feature an eclectic, but blues-focused, line-up. We are thrilled to announce that our own Silvercloud will be making a rare special appearance. Performing in St. Louis since the 50s, Silvercloud now retired, represents our heritage. He has helped to keep piano blues thriving in our city. The other local piano player will be Ethan Leinwand, organizer of the festival and author of this article. I'll be playing old barrelhouse blues, including the sounds of 1920s and 30s as heard in St. Louis.

Our headliners, though not from St. Louis, are no strangers to our city, having performed here over many years. Returning from last year's festival is the one and only Carl Sonny Leyland (Cuyama, CA), world-renowned boogie-woogie extraordinaire. Few players in the world can approach his finesse and depth of repertoire. Gene Taylor (Austin, TX) is a true heavyweight in the blues piano tradition. He's worked with Canned Heat, The Blasters and The Fabulous Thunderbirds. This is a rare opportunity to hear Gene play solo! Rounding out the show will be up-and-comer Christopher Parrish (Indianapolis, IN). His eclectic and virtuosic style will be a treat to all in attendance.

MONDAY, JUNE 5th – THE TREBOR TICHENOR RAGTIME CONCERT. In 1897, St. Louis pianist, Tom Turpin, published "The Harlem Rag," one of the earliest ragtime compositions. St. Louis was an early hotbed for ragtime, and can make serious claims for origins. Scott Joplin lived and worked here in the early 1900s. The tradition continued, and at the heart of it all, was local pianist Trebor Tichenor (1940-2014). A scholar, collector, researcher, radio DJ, and composer, Trebor was St. Louis's great ragtime ambassador and we honor his legacy with this concert.

The event features four wonderful, world-class ragtime pianists, including members of Trebor's family. We are thrilled that his daughter, Virginia Tichenor, will be performing, as will her husband, Marty Eggers. Though the two currently live and work in Oakland, CA, they are, in many ways, our own hometown players. Also performing will be Trebor's longtime friend, Terry Parrish (Indianapolis, IN) and rising ragtime star, John Reed-Torres (Los Angeles, CA).

SUNDAY, JUNE 4th – THE SEDALIA AFTERGLOW PARTY. We're thrilled that The Friends of Scott Joplin have agreed to include their annual event under the umbrella of the St. Louis Piano Festival. Held at the historic Scott Joplin House, this free event is a sort-of "after party" for the Scott Joplin International Ragtime Festival, which wraps in Sedalia MO the night before. Many of those performers will head here, and there will be a great mix of local and internationally pianists casually sharing the two pianos throughout the afternoon. Fun for the whole family! ♫

Harmonica Players of St. Louis

By Bob Baugh

Harmonica players in St. Louis are something special. The quality and quantity of talented harmonica players past and present support the claim that St. Louis is one of the greatest harmonica cities in the world. Styles range from delta blues to klezmer and the community supports each other, shares ideas, and celebrates each person style, tone and approach. You'll notice that we've left three harmonica players off this list: Big George Brock, Arthur Williams and Boo Boo Davis. Clearly, these are our elders and the legends of St. Louis Blues harmonica and they have had a huge impact on all St. Louis musicians. However, for this piece, we wanted to feature some of the younger musicians who are playing on the streets of St. Louis every day.

Eric McSpadden

There's always been music in Eric McSpadden's head. It's been that way since he was a kid in Decatur. He played trumpet in school and soul bands, sang in the glee club and church choir and he loved rock. His big natural bass voice led to training in light opera, but it was a harmonica boogie that captured his soul.

When McSpadden heard Alan Wilson playing with Canned Heat in 1970 at the *Incident at Kickapoo Creek Rock Festival* in Heyworth IL, "that was it," he says, "I wanted to play harp." He bought one and started listening to the greats. But, the Chicago tongue blocking style eluded him and he became "more of a riffer like Lee Oskar" and found that "he thinks more like a horn player than traditional blues."

In 1979 his cousin, Gary Craft, one of the originals in the Soulard Blues Band invited him to visit. "I came for the weekend and stayed seven months," Eric admits, "and played in the Monday night jams." It was the start of a musical career that would include his own band, Mojo Syndrome, Clayton Love, Rough Grooves, Crying Shame, piano bars and a who's who of STL musicians.

Eric carries special memories of Oliver Sain because of "the way he played and conducted" and times with Bennie Smith and James Crutchfield at the Venice Cafe. He remembers one special night when he sat in with Rory Block: "I was excited but also terrified because of her nontraditional style."

McSpadden says the STL harp community "is open and welcoming." He says we are blessed "with all kinds of genres and players from jazz and blues to jam bands, country and the Grateful Dead." He promises to play his Hohner Big River and Special 20' "as much as I can as long as I hold up."

Look for Eric playing Larry Griffin (various venues), The Bottoms Up Blues Gang, Margaret Bianchetta (Wed-Hammerstones), and Tuesdays at the Venice Café

Tom Papa Ray

Growing up in a northeast Florida home with his father's honky-tonk and country record collection fed Tom Ray's obsession with music that began when he was five. He lived in a land where James Brown was a god and New Orleans top 40 stations played Slim Harpo. By fourteen he had his first harp and played along to records drawn from a deep well of rhythm music, blues and soul.

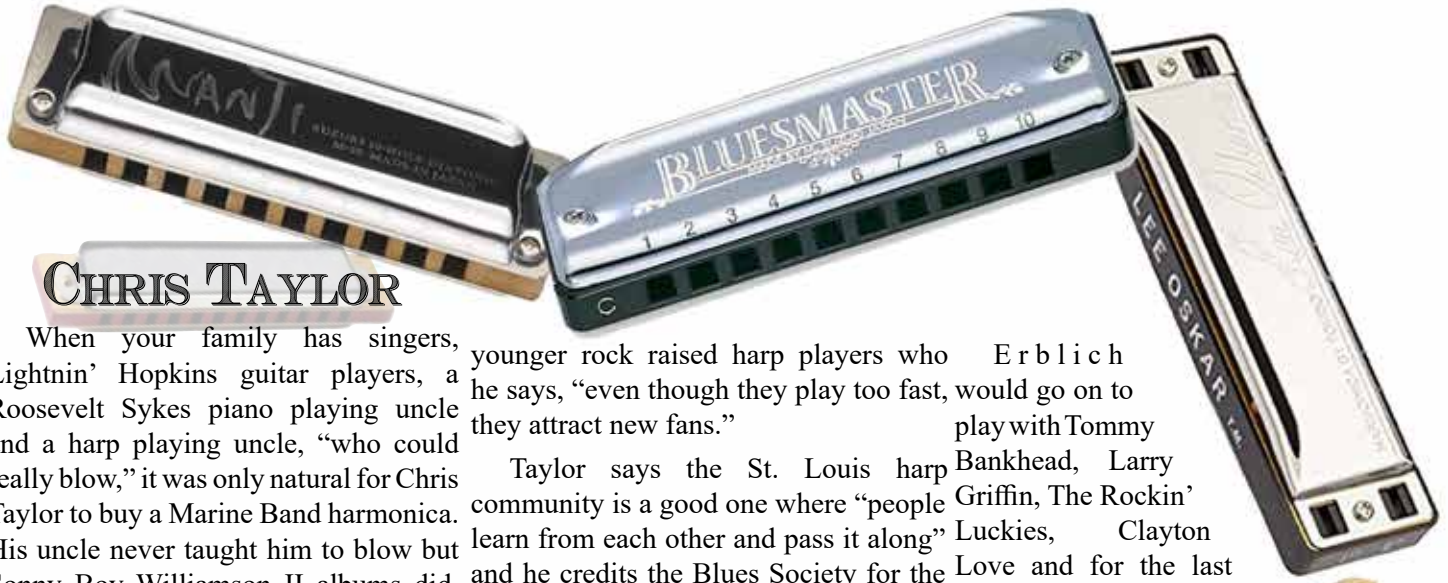
Ray would occasionally sit in with a popular regional band, Lynyrd Skynyrd, before moving to St. Louis in 1971. Moving here meant, "I could see and get the music of people I had heard of, Chuck Berry, Albert King, Fontella Bass." He played his first gig at Old Duffs and within a year he was sitting in with Tom Maloney. It was the start of a career that includes hard core country, playing sax with Riot Act, world travels, Silver Cloud, Oliver Sain, George Brock and much more.

Tom says his style isn't unique but admits, "I have a broad palette that includes reggae and Afro-Cuban music." He says he is "influenced by saxophone players and the phrasing of Miles Davis" Today he uses fewer notes on his Hohners and Lee Oskars to tell a story: "learning that you sacrifice tone for execution and what you don't play is important was a big insight for me."

Some of his favorite local players include Jon Erblich, the late Keith Doder, and Arthur Williams. Hearing Williams for the first time he says, "Made me quit playing for three weeks…he was so good I despaired," He takes pride in the *Harp Attacks* he started with Dr. Dave Foley and Jimmy Miller but says, "It was like herding cats."

To Ray the harp is "a sonic glue that fits in the context of a band or song" and he intends to "continue to enjoy the blessing of playing music with musicians you admire." And, there's lots to admire, according to Tom: "People are as good here as befits a city that is one of the great mythical foundations of American music."

Catch Tom playing with Jeremiah Johnson every third Saturday at Beale on Broadway and on his own song "St. Louis Gunshot Blues" on the St. Louis Blues Society '16 In 16' CD.



Chris Taylor

When your family has singers, Lightnin' Hopkins guitar players, a Roosevelt Sykes piano playing uncle and a harp playing uncle, "who could really blow," it was only natural for Chris Taylor to buy a Marine Band harmonica. His uncle never taught him to blow but Sonny Boy Williamson II albums did. When he could play his version of "The Sky is Crying" he was hooked.

While Taylor was mostly self-taught in the 80's, he was also surrounded by masters like George Brock, Arthur Williams and Keith Doder. "Keith was very sharing," Taylor says, "he would identify your weaknesses and show you what he knew." Chris says his style has "a bit of Sonny Boy, Little Walter and Lee Oskar."

Doder and his "Blue City Band" also gave Taylor his first stage appearance. He would practice by going to shows and playing along in the audience until one night Doder said, "You get up here," and Chris played Slim Harpo's "Scratch My Back." on his Marine Band harp. Getting on stage, playing in *Harp Attacks* and a 2000 Battle of the Blues with Big George Brock rank among his favorite memories.

Over the past two decades he has played extensively with "Skeet Rogers and the Inner City Blues Band" and his own "Chris Taylor and the Blues Crushers" with his drummer brother, Will. His local favorite players include Doder, Jim McClaren and Eric McSpadden. He is encouraged by younger rock raised harp players who he says, "even though they play too fast, they attract new fans."

Taylor says the St. Louis harp community is a good one where "people learn from each other and pass it along" and he credits the Blues Society for the exposure it provides. He wants the world to "to come here and listen to a town loaded with versatile harp players."

To see Chris check The Inner City Blues Band schedule at the Blues Society webpage or STLBlues.net. You can also hear him on "I Wonder" on the '16 In 16' CD.

Jon Erblich

Hearing Muddy Waters and Jerry Portnoy at the 1974 New Orleans Jazz Fest turned Jon Erblich on to the harmonica. In St. Louis, he found a teacher when he heard Tom "Papa" Ray playing with Silver Cloud at Calico's. They made a deal—he sold Tom's records at the Soulard Farmers Market for lessons and free albums.

St. Louis harp legend Keith Doder also became a mentor. He schooled Jon in Little Walter, Sonny Boy Williamson II, James Cotton, Lee Oskar and his own style that Jon says was "very funky and brilliant on chromatics." Ray and Doder pushed Jon to play and he joined them in playing clubs all over town gaining the respect of black and white audiences and musicians alike.

Erblich would go on to play with Tommy Bankhead, Larry Griffin, The Rockin' Luckies, Clayton Love and for the last 15 years with Jeremy Segel-Moss and the Bottoms Up Blues Gang. His Hohner Crossovers and Golden Melodies have shared the stage with blues royalty: "I got to back up Johnnie Johnson and Chuck Berry and open for Albert Collins and John Lee Hooker." That's why Eric McSpadden gave him the moniker "Johnny Diamond."

While Jon "can still hear Doder in his playing," he says his earlier "study and replicate method has changed." The BUBG collaboration has led to "more jazz type lines and shifting to a wet (Kim Wilson) type of sound." He is encouraged by younger players like Jason Ricci who seem inclined to take more risks.

continued on page 12

continued from page 11

Jon loves being part a part of the St. Louis harp community and wants the world to know how good it is. He says it "is nothing like other competitive bigger cities" describing it "as a big circle of people that all get along, everyone doing their own thing with impunity, while sharing and learning from each other."

Look for Jon playing around town with the Bottoms Up Blues Gang, at the Venice Café on Tuesday nights and doing duos with Bill Edwards at various locations.

Jim McClaren

In grade school Jim McClaren was all about classical music until a friend bought a Beatles album. Cream's *Disraeli Gears* focused him on the song writers and set him on a blues path. Buying Muddy Water's *Fathers and Sons* and hearing Paul Butterfield's harp simply "tore me up," he says, "it made me say I gotta play."

Initially, McClaren was self-taught and didn't use records: "I didn't know Little Walter and the typical Chicago licks." He played for himself while working in his father's bowling alley. One night at work, while humming a Jack Bruce tune, he thought, "I can play this," and did it. He began studying solo's and remembers "the day I learned to bend a note was the day I decided to do this." He loves the harp's "bent notes and hunks of chords that sing, cry, and laugh."

McClaren, like many others, cites Keith Doder as a big influence: "He had this deep tone sound I wanted." So was Art Dwyer, who recruited him for The Soulard Blues Band and the start of a beautiful 23-year gig. Locally, he admires Jon Erblich's sound and Sandy Weltman's technical virtuosity, "no one can touch him," he says. And, he credits the years of *Harp Attacks* founded by Dr. Dave Foley and Tom Ray in 1986 for improving everyone's quality.

Jim's Hohner Marine Band and Special 20's have created some sweet memories. A *Summerfest* in Germany and the resulting *Live in Stuttgart* CD is one. Having Chuck Berry tell him, "take a solo," while sitting in at a UAW holiday party is another. He hopes to create a new one with his 2017 Little Walter birthday show.

McClaren says there is a St. Louis harmonica sound: "It is a full bodied tone with little distortion." He is proud that his community "has a higher quality of players here per capita than any town in the world and they are always getting better."

Look for Jim 'Ribtip" McClaren playing with the St. Louis Social Club at BB's on Tuesdays and the duo Ribtip and Rodgers at CJ Muggs.

Sandy Weltman

At 14, Sandy Weltman loved folk and bluegrass and bought a banjo to impress a girl. Lessons, a mandolin, a bass guitar and ukulele and many genres of music followed. He was all about strings and "learning different music language and styles" into his 30's, he says, "until a harp solo on the radio grabbed me."

Sandy tracked down that Trapezoid song, soloist Howard Levy and a West Virginia workshop he was holding. He went there. Levy's overblowing technique—hitting all 32 harmonica notes—was how he learned to play. They became friends who shared a "love of the tambour and how it sounds in different genre's."

Weltman dove in, achieving a technical mastery on his customized Marine Band and Golden Melodies acknowledged by every local player. A fan of Sonny Terry, Paul Butterfield and Little Walter, he laughs when asked about his style and says "as soon as I find out I'll let you know." He loves "how the harmonica emotes" in all his genres from blues, bluegrass and jazz to klezmer, Iranian and spirituals.

His local favorites include Keith Doder who gave him lessons, Jim McClaren, Jon Erblich's "musical spirit" and Eric McSpadden's "big sound tone." He sees Jason Ricci's overblowing techniques "taking this fabulous way in blues." Weltman also works to encourage new players through kids programs like the Springboard Harmonica School, the Sheldon Concert Hall series and online training videos.

Sandy sees the St. Louis harmonica community "as a blues hub with more of a Chicago style influenced by Little Walter and Keith Doder." He says it's the real deal "a place that loves and supports the blues…it's thriving and I'm proud to live in a community that take this instrument seriously."

Check out Sandy Weltman's new CD 'Cigar Box Hymns' or live with The Carolbeth True Trio, Hot Club Caravan, Farshid Etniko, or, New World Harmonica Jazz.

Glenn Changer

While stationed in Ft. Bragg NC in 1974 Glenn Changer used the last five bucks from a month's pay to buy a harmonica. He wanted to play cross harp blues. The Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin led him to the blues but it was Library of Congress Records that took him to the roots.

Changer says, "I was lucky to be living in the Piedmont region where all of this music was so accessible." Little Walter, Sonny Terry and James Cotton became part of his education. By 1980 he was at Truman State playing with "Low Guys" a blues rock band and starting his own, "The Glenn Changer Band," that was more country. "You gotta be diverse to play," he says.

By the mid 80's Changer was in St. Louis where John May hooked him up with the "Mojo Tooth Band." His Hohner Golden Melodies then migrated to the "The Blues-O-Matics" and finally "Patti and the Hitmen" where his west coast jump/Piedmont blues style has resided for the past 25 years. He loves the harp's emotion and "that in your face ballsy hard punching harmonica tone… that's me."

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Glenn's highlights include opening for the Fabulous Thunderbirds, Marcia Ball and Kim Wilson. He brags on his peers Jim McClaren, Eric McSpadden and Jon Erblich and the St. Louis fat tone sound saying, "the competition is all about tone here." He also recognizes players like Magic Dick (J Geils Band) and John Popper (Blues Traveler) who have helped popularize the harp with younger audiences.

The musical excellence of the STL blues community continues to impress Glenn as does "its remarkable kindness in looking out for each other." He also wants the world to know that "our harp players are as good as anywhere but have never gotten the recognition of Chicago or West Coast players."

To hear Glenn check the Patti and the Hitmen Facebook page for upcoming shows at 1860 Saloon or Johnny's in Soulard and the Broadway Oyster Bar.

Bill Edwards

Bill Edwards grew up in a Georgia home in the 70's where there was a record collection of 45s from Bo Diddly, Little Richard, Elvis and country stations on the radio playing Jimmy Reed and Chuck Berry. He got his first guitar at 12 but he was always drumming on stuff. It came naturally.

Working his way through college, Bill used music as a release for any tough times. He learned acoustic guitar while drumming for a blues rock band. Hearing Muddy Waters for the first time was life changing "I immediately went out and bought a Hohner Marine Band harmonica." He had a natural ability and soon realized "I was a drummer with a harmonica problem."

Edwards wanted to play harp but drums paid the bills. His band, The Urban Shake Dancers, toured with The Black Crows. Their breakthrough never happened and eventually the music took a back seat to career until the Great Recession led him to move to his wife's hometown. The harp came back out "to keep busy and keep the blues away." He also changed careers and began working as a teacher.

In St. Louis, Edwards found "a blues town where people know what they expect to hear. They have high standards because there is so much good music here." He credits Eric McSpadden with helping teach him how to have a stage presence and encouraging him to play.

He remains impressed. "There are so many good harp players here…they have melodic lines and know how to hear different tones and scale." More than that, "St. Louis likes to entertain people…there's a culture of people here, it's like a fabric, one big blues band where folks sit in and play with each other."

Look for Bill Edwards around town playing duets with Jon Erblich and gigging in different combinations.

Chuck Loeb

Playing in bands started in grade school for Chuck Loeb. Back then trombone was his instrument. During summer break in 1968 he bought a $3 harmonica because "it was cheap, fit in your pocket and you could walk around with something to play." Then he heard Paul Butterfield and his next band was The Miff Mole Blues Band.

Loeb ended up in St. Louis in the early 70s but life, marriage, a child and work, intervened with his playing for nearly 20 years. He picked up his harps again in the early 90s, began jamming at Off Broadway and eventually landing a gig with Dutch Schultz and the Untouchables. His own band, Chuck Loeb and the Blues Haulers, followed and he is currently playing with Marty D. Spikener's On Call Band.

Loeb says he learned by listening to British invasion bands like John Mayall with Duster Bennet, Little Walter and James Cotton. He uses his Lee Oskar and Suzuki Manji harmonicas "in a Paul Butterfield or James Harmon style." Defining the St. Louis style "is hard," he says, "because here the guitar is usually the lead."

Chuck admires local players like Eric McSpadden and John Erblich for their talent and friendship. He smiles when he says, "Keith Doder used to piss me off because he was always better than me but what a sweet guy." It's a talent pool "so deep," he says, "that in any other city I'm first tier but in St. Louis I'm second tier."

Chuck thinks St. Louis has the greatest blues scene anywhere with music seven nights a week with good quality players. The harp community is special to him because they are "sweethearts…I can't think of a player in town who isn't easily approachable and willing to reveal their secrets."

You can hear Chuck playing with Marty Spikener's On Call Band and on their track "Crawlin Back" on the St. Louis Blues Society '16 In 16' CD.

Howard Young

The flute was Howard Young's instrument until he heard two guitars and a harmonica in 1967 in a college coffee house. When he heard that harp, "it was the sound and feeling," he says, "I knew I wanted to play music from emotion not just paper." A 'C' harp and Tony 'Little Sun' Glover's guide fixed that problem.

Two years later Young was practicing in a Mizzou echo chamber stairwell when another guy showed up with a bottleneck guitar. Three weeks later they were appearing in local coffee shops. Howard learned "from the bottleneck play, practicing guitar riffs and the music of Paul Butterfield, John Mayall and Charlie Musselwhite." Sonny Boy and Sonny Terry bargain bin records pitched in too.

Life and work led to a 20-year break from music until a friend heard him playing at a 1995 company picnic and recruited him to a Mike and Mins jam session. The harps came out and he later began playing with bands like The Melissa Neels Band and Rob Garland and the Blue Monks. One of his fondest memories was the night Victor Wooten asked him to sit in with Bela Fleck and the Flecktones.

Young says he "never paid much attention to what his style is although people tell him it's smooth." He "keeps it simple" while using his Bushmen harps to play all kinds of music. He says, "I am an accompanist… you don't overdo it, you play your part in the band." He also admires players like Sandy Weltman for his "mastery of the instrument" and "the lines and feelings in Jim McClaren's playing."

Howard says he had no idea when he started "about the connections and good people I would meet." He says St. Louis "is a marvelous blues music scene with an inviting inclusive harmonica community where we all know each other and you are always invited to join in."

See Howard at the Highway 61 Roadhouse Tuesday jam or with these bands: Pocketchange Blues Band, The Bedlam Brothers and Bag Lunch Blues Band.

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♪ Young ♫ Harp Players of St. Louis

by Jeremy Segel-Moss

While there are quite a few harmonica players who have been on the scene for decades, there are also a handful of younger musicians who have really come into their own in the last few years. Adam Andrews, Ryan Koenig and Greg Hommert have been influenced by many local harmonica players, have found their own sound, and have been performing on stages all over the world.

Adam Andrews photo by Bob Baugh

ADAM ANDREWS

Adam Andrews has been performing in St. Louis for over 15 years with such groups as The Bottoms Up Blues Gang, the Dust Covers, Brian Curran and Annie & The Furtrappers. He got his first harmonica at Shattinger Music on Broadway when he was 18 years old. "I had just started listening to blues music on records and my first live show was Tommy Bankhead with Eric McSpadden on a Tuesday at BB's." He bought a harmonica book, got more books from the library and played around the house until he met Eric McSpadden who started showing him the tricks of the trade.

"Back when I first started Keith Doder, Eric McSpadden, Jon Erblich, Jim McClaren, Chris Taylor and Arthur Williams were playing a bunch. Every night of the week you could go somewhere and find one of those guys playing and on the weekends they all had shows. It was hard to decide which of them to go see play." Andrews said.

"I've been playing live since 2001 which is so crazy to think about. When I started I didn't really think that far ahead. I never thought I would still be gigging like this…or turn it into a career. Music can be amazing and also a struggle, but it's totally worth it in the end; connections with other musicians, being able to change the mood of people with your sound. I do feel like I wouldn't have had this opportunity anywhere else not without the welcoming of the community. I worked hard but wouldn't have been able to do it without the community. Every single other harmonica showing you everything you need to know, even if you don't think you need it, they'll tell it to you anyway. They keep me in check and keep my musicality up so I can represent St. Louis as it should be."

Several years ago Adam started diving into the harmonica literally by working on his own instruments. "One thing that has changed my playing is learning the physical parts of the harmonica. And how your adjustments affect your playing…the overall affect is that the actual tone can be brightened with the type of material you use in the comb, and it also ultimately makes it louder when you open it up more, when you adjust the reeds and the reed plates it makes it a little easier to hit all the notes you're looking for." He said.

"From the past bands that I've played in from the Bottoms Up Blues Gang to the Dust Covers, they are all a different approach. Even the musicians…each gig you have to prepare mentally for the difference in personalities and bands and attitudes of the performance or what equipment to bring. One of the best parts about it is that I get to have that difference which keeps it interesting and hopefully keeps the audience interested in coming to different shows. I haven't spent a lot of time in Chicago or New York, but the time I have spent in those places I haven't found the variety of harmonica styles I find in St. Louis. Sandy could be playing klezmer or gypsy jazz and on the same night you can go ten minutes away and see Eric playing Louie Jordan songs or delta blues songs and then go five minutes away and then see Jim McClaren playing the horn lines in the social club. I really feel lucky to be a St. Louis musician."

Ryan Koenig photo by Erik De Klerck

RYAN KOENIG

Ryan is most well-known for performing in Pokey LaFarge's group, but also works with the Rum Drum Ramblers, Southwest Watson Sweethearts and occasionally the Hooten' Hollars. He was around nine years old when he got his first harmonica and played trumpet in middle school, where he had a teacher that shared old Motown records with him.

"I tried to copy big band licks. I was listening to Cab Calloway and the super horn driven music. I started playing guitar after that until I was 18 or 19, when I got the harmonica connection with the Rolling Stones records. I quickly realized that everyone already knew how to play guitar so I fell into the role of harmonica player." Koenig said.

Ryan likes that the harmonica is extremely portable and versatile, but mostly that it is a melodic instrument. "You can be very tasteful with it; jump up with anyone and add to the sound. It's a really old instrument and mostly unchanged since it hit the market." He was definitely influenced by many St. Louis harmonica players, particularly Eric McSpadden. "I remember one thing he said to me specifically, when I was still trying to figure out the world of harmonica gear. Eric always had just a basic set up and I asked him about it. He said the tone is in your mouth not your gear. I carry that with me all the time."

"St. Louis is definitely a very healthy scene. I find that most of the people who complain about it don't realize that it doesn't get that much better. If you're going to be playing roots music or creative music...it's going to be hard no matter where you are. People forget that it's the quality to quantity level. I think that the quality in St. Louis is very high within the quantity. Every time I get frustrated hearing that we're in this little box, I'll stumble across a band or venue that I haven't heard or been to before and be impressed all over again."

Gregory Hommert
photo by
Charles A. Johnson

GREG HOMMERT

Greg got his first harmonica at Silver Dollar City as a gift from his grandmother when he was ten and kept it in his pocket from then on. He was hooked when he heard John Popper in his early teens, bought a bunch of records and learned them by ear. Like so many musicians in St. Louis, one of his first mentors was Eric McSpadden who he met at the Broadway Oyster Bar.

"I met Eric while he was on set break getting food at White Castle and he just scooped me up. He took me down to BB's and put me on stage with Rich McDonough, John May and Joe Pastor. That was terrifying because I had never played with a band before. After that I was glued to Eric's heels for the next few years." Hommert said.

Greg then attended a SPAH Convention, the annual harmonica convention that moves around the country and often stops in St. Louis. It was there that he was introduced to heavy hitters like Howard Levy, Jason Ricci and Carlos Del Junco, as well as blues players like James Cotton. He then spent time taking lessons with St. Louis' own heavy hitters like Keith Doder and Sandy Weltman. Sandy blew his mind after just coming from the SPAH convention. "He encompassed everything I had been teased with at the conference all packaged up in one person…and in my own city!"

Of course, playing harmonica and performing it on stage are two different talents. "I got the technical stuff from SPAH, but Eric taught me a foundation of music. Everything from how to dial in the mic to what you're supposed to be doing when you're not playing."

Greg will be the first to brag on St. Louis. "My favorite thing is the diversity. We are a harmonica town. And I think it is cool that everyone's tone reflects their character. After being in Nashville for a few years—where there are not that many harmonica players—the harmonica players didn't interact in the same way as here. I play because there is a community here for it, Gateway Harmonica Club, and the players that are here—people to take lessons from. You don't have that in very many other places."

"My first peer relationship on the harmonica was Adam Andrews. Access to great teachers was helpful, but I also had someone to go through the experience with, nerd out and talk tech. Adam was perfect for that because he is so tasteful in what he does. St. Louis is perfect for a player like me. I'm a very melodic player. My style changes, its blues with a lot of jazz and my style changes depending on what I'm learning. We have one of the world's most authorities on klezmer music and at the same time we have Arthur Williams—one of the last outposts of tongue blockers—and they are all right around the corner and accessible."♫

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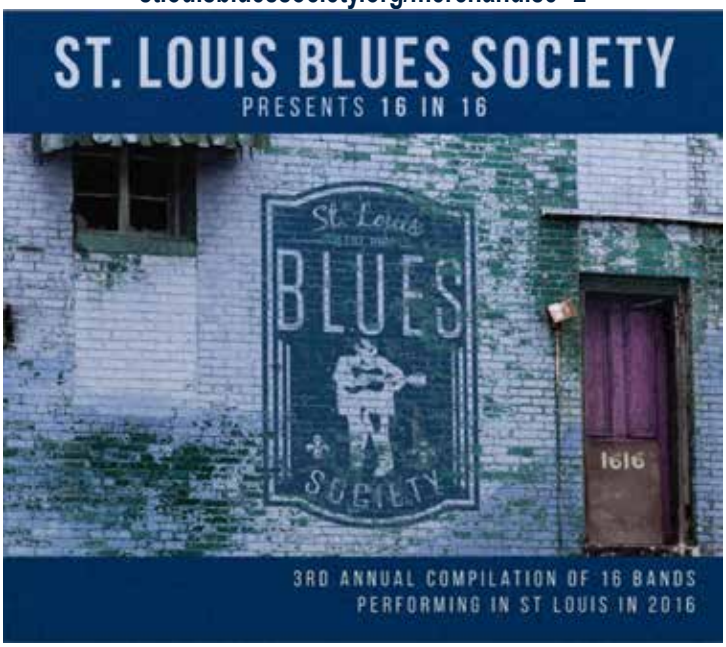

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