



The BLUES LETTER

DAVIS BROS. BAND

by Joel Slotnikoff



John, Sylvester, Russ and Boo Boo Davis

The Davis Brothers Band plays at Tubby's Red Room in Centreville, at the south-east end of East St. Louis, every Friday and Saturday night from 2 A.M. until dawn, but their story begins nearly a century ago in Port Gibson, Mississippi, on Highway 61, in the hill country south of Vicksburg. There, in 1895, Sylvester Davis was born. Little is known of his early life, but by 1925 he had moved to Drew, Mississippi, in the heart of the Delta. South of Memphis about a hundred miles, this region at the time had been cleared of swamp and forest and turned into the richest cotton land in the South. The huge harvest was worked manually, and along with the large influx of laborers, there was a corresponding influx of musicians from surrounding areas, particularly the hill country to the south. The entire Delta region was profoundly rich with blues music, and the town of Drew was a particularly fertile one. Charley Patton, the first broadly known performer, stayed at Will Dockery's plantation near Drew for many years; and several other legendary performers spent time there, including Willie Brown and Tommy Johnson.

Sylvester Davis farmed cotton and was proficient on a variety of instruments, but was known primarily as a violin player and vocalist. He appeared with the Rabbit Foot Minstrel Show, the second largest one, and probably perfected his legendary dancing skills there. Musicians he played with include Robert Petway, John Lee Hooker, Elmore James, Lee Kizart, and Tony Hollins, the author of *Crawling Kingsnake*. He also must have been exposed to Patton himself. His oldest son, Sylvester, known as Russ, born in 1934, remembers his father playing regularly with a guitarist named Pete Williams, and a man called Bo who played an instrument called a jazz horn. One inserted a cigarette paper, and achieved a sound like a kazoo. By the time he was nine Russ was gigging with his father at a club called The Blue Room in Vicksburg on acoustic instruments.

After Russ came John Davis. While the elder Sylvester was a short man, John grew to six four and became the lead guitar player. In 1943 the next son was born. He was named after several of his uncles, James Oscar Davis, and has always been known as Boo Boo. By five Boo was playing harmonica, and singing in church with his mother the hymn "Wonderful Time". By thirteen he was playing guitar, and by eighteen he was playing out with his father and older brothers under the name of The Lard Can Band. The name came about when his father carved Boo a set of hickory sticks and sat him behind a lard can covered with a towel to beat out the rhythm.

The Lard Can Band traveled throughout the Delta to towns including Tutwiler, Clarksdale, Greenwood, Greenville, Chambers and Rolling Fork, playing taverns, jukeboxes, and picnics. At home in Drew they played across the tracks for Mr. Honeycups, and for Dr. Johnson's yard party every fourth of July. Songs they played included "Oh Baby", "The Tap Dance", which Russ would play while his father danced, "I'm In Love With You Baby", "My Baby's Crying", "Annie Mae", a lot of Elmore James and Howling Wolf, and an original called "House Lady" that

Continued inside

Artist Profile

BIG BAD SMITTY

by Joel Slotnikoff



Big Smitty

John Henry Smith was born February 11, 1940, in Vicksburg, Mississippi. His family, two boys and two girls, farmed cotton. His mother passed away when he was four. When he was ten his father bought his older brother a Stella guitar, which he would play when no one was looking. By then the family had moved to Schalter, Mississippi, near Greenwood. The first song he learned to play was "Still A Fool" by Muddy Waters. When he was ten his father died and he lived on his own from then on. By age sixteen he was living and playing in Jackson and driving a truck for the Canada Dry Beverage Co. At that time he saw artists such as Elmore James, Sam Myers, Robert Nighthawk, and Johnny Littlejohn in and around Jackson. He cites as his main influence Lightnin' Hopkins, as well as Little Son Jackson, and the Louisiana artists, Slim Harpo, Lightnin' Slim, and Lonesome Sundown. The group he played with during those early days in Jackson included Sonny Dishman on bass, Mattie Boy on drums, and a guitarist called Little Walter. They would play joints such as Sammy Lee's, Richard's Playhouse, and Estelle's, as well as picnics and "frolics out in the country."

At age eighteen he moved to Oakland, California, where he boxed briefly and wrestled professionally for several years. It was at this time that he adopted the name Big Bad Smitty.

In 1962 he came to St. Louis and began a five year stint playing guitar with Big George and the Houserockers at the old Club Caravan at Garrison and Franklin, and continued working as a truckdriver.

By 1970 he returned to Jackson and played with King Mose and Nolan Struck. It was at this time that he was recorded by Johnny Vincent at his Capitol St. studio for the Ace label. These recordings were eventually released on the Ace anthology "Genuine Mississippi Blues" which also featured Fred McDowell, Sam Myers and Johnny Littlejohn. Smitty sang "How Many More Years" and "Smokestack Lightning", as well as backing Elmore James Jr. on two cuts on guitar.

By 1979 he had returned to St. Louis and has been here since, driving truck and playing with various groups at various clubs on the North Side. In 1987 he began a two year stint at Spraggin's Hacienda on Martin Luther King Dr., fronting for Robert Doll and his band. In 1988 he cut the album "St. Louis On A High Hill" on the local JCE label with this band.

In 1988 he teamed up with the Davis Brothers Band and they may be seen at various venues around town. The music is rough and genuine, with a distinct Delta flavor, and when Smitty puts his guitar aside and ventures out into the audience to testify, the results are dynamic!

Inside Features: Leroy Pierson
Doc Terry
Nighthawk Records

Upcoming Events

- JULY 13** BUGS HENDERSON and THE SHUFFLEKINGS at Cicero's
Opener by Jimmy Lee and The Joint Jumpers
- JULY 19** DOC TERRY & THE PIRATES and THE LEROY PIERSON BAND on the BLUES CRUISE
on The President
- JULY 24** SIN CITY DECIPLES...Blues from Kansas City at Cicero's
- AUG 4** DENIECE LASALLE and LATIMORE at Club 54
- AUG 31** BLUES CLUB ANNUAL MEETING at Blueberry Hill, Meeting at 8:00 PM. with Big
Bad Smitty (acoustic set) and Benny Smith & The Sportsmen featuring Vernon Guy

Local News

Blues great JAMES DESHAY wed the former Olivia Maria Smith November 23.
Look for a new single soon from DAVID DEE to be released on Pulsar.
Also check out soul singer GENE JACKSON'S new single on the JCE label.

National News

The sixth Chicago Blues festival, June 9,10,11 saw good weather and great music with a special Louisiana tribute featuring Allen Toussaint, Irma Thomas, Dr. John, a red-hot Snooks Eaglin, and a Rockin' Dopsie opener that had five thousand in the Petrillo Shell on their feet and dancing. Attendance estimated at 150,000 included a nice St. Louis contingent.

We note with regret the passing of Chicago artists guitarist HIP LINKCHAIN in February and drummer ODIE PAYNE in March.

Reviews

A.C. REED and the SPARKPLUGS at Off Broadway. Reed, who cites as influences Gene Ammons and the late, great Arnett Cobb, played with a fat, solid tone and inventive phrasing. He has an easy way with vocals, not unlike his half-brother Jimmy Reed. His presence and projection are extremely convincing; this is a man who played with T-Bone Walker in Amarillo, Texas in 1957. The Sparkplugs were hot, particularly lead-guitarist Vance Kelly.

New Members

Frank Absher	Mike Hall	Ed McGue	Jerry Pruce
Janet Becker	Penny L. Hunst	Earl Moore	Roy Short
Robert Bentzinger	Larry Isgrig	West End Music	Kenneth B. Smith, M.D.
Herman Booker	Richard & Pat Jones	Albert K. Nakanishi	Alice Sutton
Jimmy & Peggy Clark	Paul Klauber	Kim Nash	Marcia Townsend
Carol Essen	Edward G. Lott, Jr.	Ben Park	Larry Weir
Mark A. Feichla	Ron McDonnell	Dick Pressler	John A. White
			Anthony S. Wippold

St. Louis Blues Club News

The 1989 St. Louis Blues Club Annual Meeting will be held Thursday August 31 at Blueberry Hill, 6504 Delmar, at 8:00 PM downstairs in the Elvis Room to elect a new Board of Directors. Please be sure to attend. The meeting will be at 8:00 PM with entertainment afterwards by Big Bad Smitty playing a rare acoustic set followed by Benny Smith and The Sportsmen, a fine group with deep St. Louis roots.

The Board of Directors has approved a new membership category, the Blue Ribbon Membership, which will provide honorary dues-free membership for blues artists and enthusiasts in the greater St. Louis area who have made substantial, long-term contributions towards accomplishing the Club's goals. Any current member may nominate a person for this membership. Approval by the Board of Directors is required. Write to the Blues Club Membership Committee/for details at Box 21652, St. Louis, MO. 63109.

Directors Bill Greensmith and Sam Valenti have resigned from the Board. We thank them for their years of service.

The new membership premiums, shirts, mugs, buttons, bumperstickers, and can holders are available at Blues Club Presentation events, and at West End Music, or with new or renewal memberships.

The photos of Big George and Oliver Sain in the last issue were by Bill Greensmith.

SOAP BOX

The St. Louis Blues Club is a not-for-profit organization established in 1984. We are comprised of hardworking volunteers who generously donate their time and expertise as musicians, concert promoters, club owners, historians, radio programmers, graphic artists, and business leaders.

We are dedicated to supporting Blues musicians, and in particular our own St. Louis artists, by providing them with the opportunity for public performance locally, nationally and internationally. It has been our aim to work both visibly and behind the scenes in their behalf. These talented musicians are a vital part of our St. Louis heritage and constitute an important resource in our community.

Since our inception, we have produced almost 40 Blues concerts. Our St. Louis artist's festival held at Mississippi Nights in March of 1986 presented 18 acts in a one day, 16 set marathon. We also co-produced the 5 day Benson & Hedges Festival last October at various locations throughout the Metro Area. These events were the largest concerts of their kind ever held in the history of St. Louis and received rave reviews from both critics and audiences alike.

This year we have begun publishing our "Blues Letter" to help keep you informed with the latest news about artists, clubs, radio programs and special events. Also we are producing a "Hometown Series" consisting of rediscovered or less well known musicians of merit at Blueberry Hill. We are currently planning a Fall line-up of larger programs.

We sincerely hope that you will become a member and help us by participating in these endeavors.

Ron Edwards



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The St. Louis Blues Club is a Missouri non-profit corporation dedicated to preserving Blues music, to fostering growth and appreciation of Blues music, and to providing Blues artists the opportunity for public performance and individual improvement in their field, all for the educational and artistic benefit of the general public.

EDITOR:
Joel Slotnikoff

ADVERTISING:
Luana Hayes

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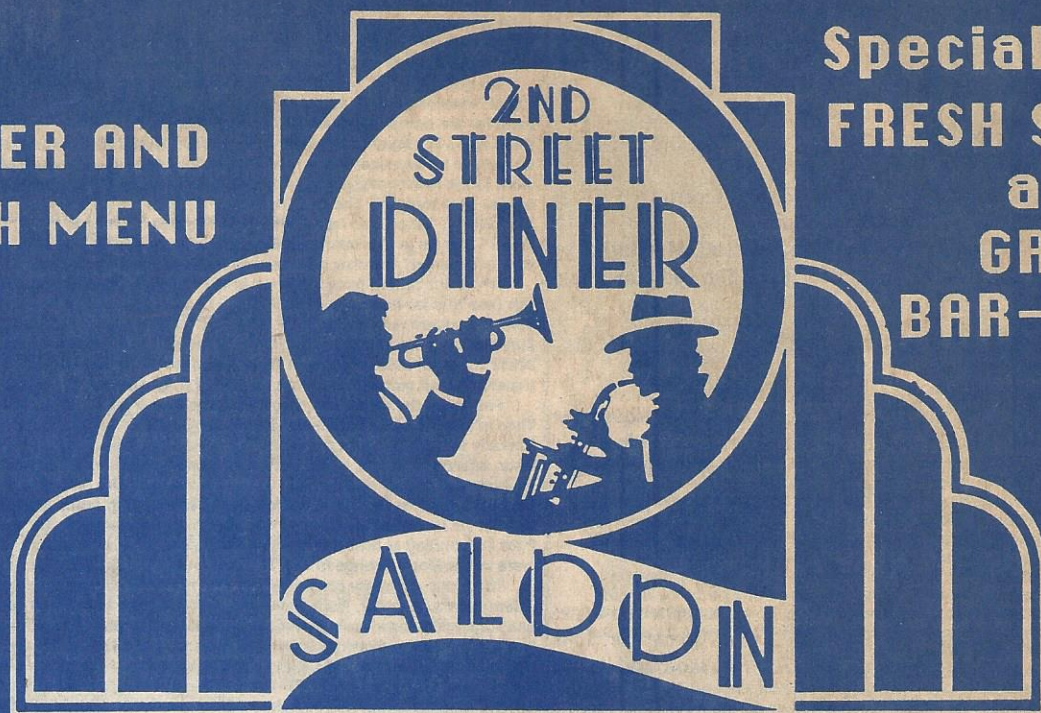
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Feature Artist DOC TERRY

by Joel Slotnikoff

Doc Terry has been a fixture on the St. Louis blues scene for over four decades. He is a fine harmonica player with a mournful tone that evokes the lonely expanses of the Mississippi Delta, and a convincing blues vocalist as well.

He was born in 1921 in Sunflower, Mississippi, some twenty miles south of Drew. His grandfather and grandmother, Jake and Martha Burns, played music.

His mother and father, Ella Mae and Ralph Adall, were musical, as were many other relatives, so Doc developed an interest in music at an early age. It is said that he is a distant relative of Muddy Waters. He was raised in Scotts, Mississippi, at the Delta Pineland Company and did not leave there until he was nineteen, when he moved to Greenville. There he heard the likes of Willie Love, Robert Nighthawk and Sonny Boy Williamson. He also heard Charlie Patton and his wife Bertha at picnics and ball games, as well as Howlin' Wolf, Memphis Minnie, and Washboard Sam.

His mother bought him his first harmonica when he was twelve, a twenty five cent model, but he soon moved up to a fifty center. He met and hung out with Sonny Boy in Lula when he was nineteen. He also began singing and dancing. He tap danced when he was in the Army in the Philippines. He went in the army in 1944 and spent two years. During this time he studied harmonica from Sonny Boy's records.

After the war he came to St. Louis and found employment at the Army Depot in Granite City, Illinois, and played weekends at clubs including the Cotton Club on Route 3, the Polka Dot Inn, Ned Love's Moonlight Inn, Huff Garden at 16th and Division, the Red Top,



Doc Terry

Photo by Kathleen Hanrahan

The Early Bird at Garrison and Franklin, and the Clark bar, all vanished now. He recalls Big John Wrencher at the Red Top, and Memphis Slim at the Chesterfield Bar at 18th and Franklin and at the Forrester Club in East St. Louis. He played with Robert Nighthawk at Ned Love's, and has also played with Frank Frost and with Little Walter Jacobs.

His given name is Terry Adall. His first real gig with his own band was at the Yukon Bar at Newstead and St. Louis. When he booked the gig he wrote down the name of his band for the owner: Terry and the Pirates. When he showed for the gig several days later there was a big sign in the window saying DOC TERRY AND THE PIRATES. As they pulled up outside his drummer asked him "Who is Doc Terry? Ain't we supposed to play here?" He went inside fearing the gig had been stolen and asked the barmaid "Is the band supposed to play here tonight?" She said "Yeah." He asked "Who is it?" She answered "Some Doc Terry or another". "Who's Doc Terry?" he asked. She said "Don't you know? Say, ain't you in the band?" "Yes I'm in the band but I don't know no Doc Terry", he answered. "Well bring your stuff in anyway!" And that's how the name Doc Terry came about.

When Doc retired from the Army in 1971 he took up music on a full time basis. It was at this time that he cut his two 45's on the DTP label at Technisonic Studios on Brentwood Blvd. They were released as "Rock With Doc" backed with "Hoodoo Blues" and "Things Can't Stay the Same" backed with "Dr. Boogie". Personnel on the session were Long John on bass; Amos Stanford, better known as Little Amos, who had learned slide from Robert Nighthawk, on lead guitar; Fred Grant on second lead; and Doc's son, Doc Terry Jr., on drums.

Following the recordings, Doc took a vacation from active playing for several years. Then in the late seventies he played regularly with Silvercloud, after which he jammed informally with a variety of bands until the death of Earthquake, the legendary St. Louis blues drummer, in 1983, when Doc became so depressed he again took a leave of absence. He came out to play again in 1986 at the First Annual St. Louis Blues Festival presented by the St. Louis Blues Club, and afterwards began sitting in again with different bands. That summer he met Patti Thomas and together they re-formed Doc Terry and the Pirates, with Patti functioning as booking agent and manager, as well as doing vocals. Their first gigs were at the Metro Lounge in East St. Louis and at the Red Witch in St. Charles.

The group presently consists of Doc on vocals and harmonica, Patti on vocals, Tommy Johnson on lead guitar, Nate Thomas on drums, Marshall Dunn on bass, Jesse Gill on sax, and Johnny Coleman on keyboard. They can be seen every Friday from 9 to 11 at the Broadway Oyster Bar, and every Saturday, outdoors, at the S&P Oyster Co. from 8 to 11.

Information for this article was liberally borrowed from Mike Rowe's interview with Doc in Blues Unlimited #121. We urge our readers to subscribe to this fine publication by writing to Blues Unlimited, 36 Belmont Park, Lewisham, London SE 13 England.



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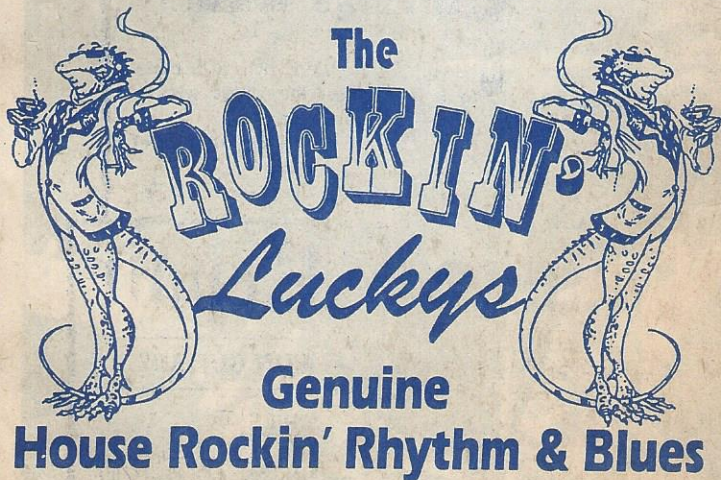
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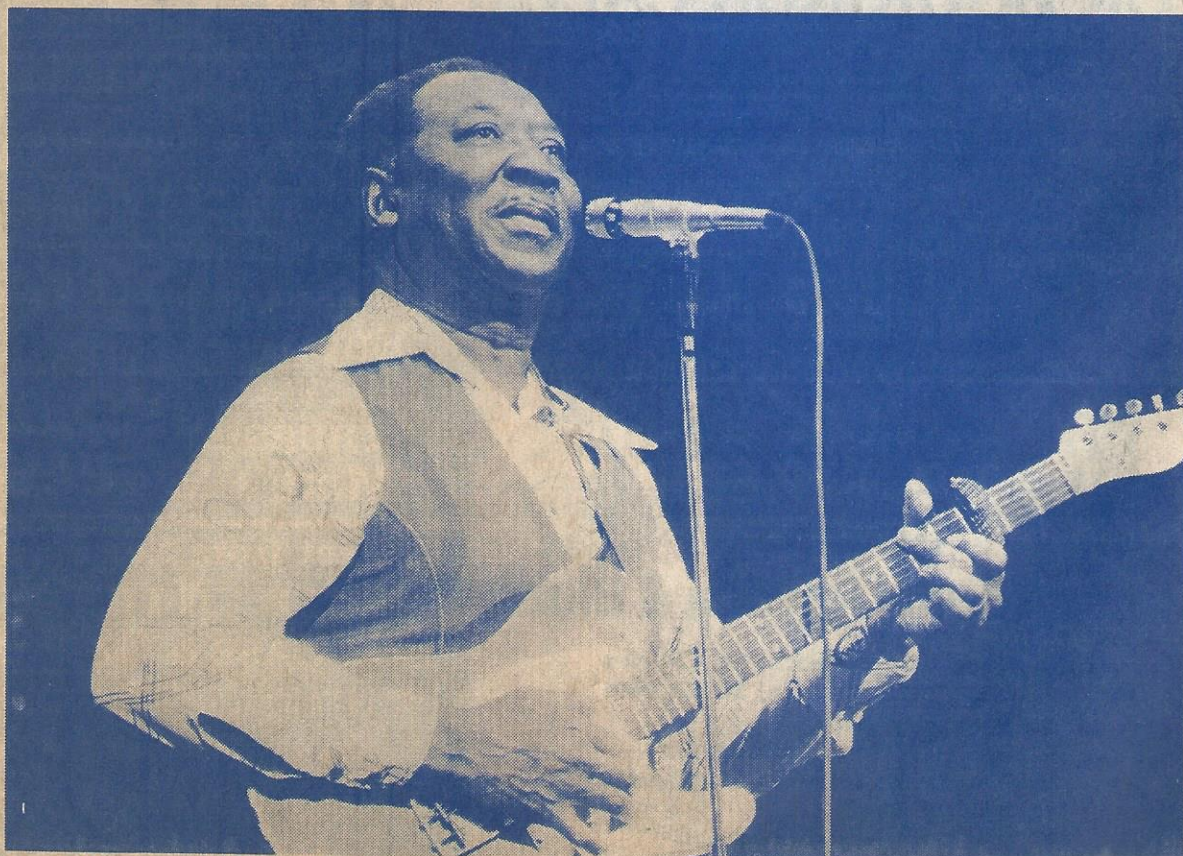
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Blues Portraits



RAY CHARLES: At Singer Rink—Central Park, N.Y. (Summer of '76)

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MUDDY WATERS: S.I.U. Edwardsville, Mississippi River Festival

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NIGHTHAWK RECORDS

by Victoria Cardillo

Bob Shoenfeld was introduced to Leroy Pierson by Tony Cabanellas in 1970. Two years later Leroy pressed five hundred copies of a two volume anthology of rare 78's from his collection entitled "Take A Little Walk With Me". The album, released on the Boogie Disease label, is today a collectors item. Shoenfeld suggested that with more professional packaging the reissue anthology concept could address a market beyond hard-core collectors to include folklorists and even casual listeners. Bob and Leroy formed Nighthawk records in 1975 and brought in graphic designer Liz Shepard to give the line its distinctive look.

The first releases were in 1976. Drawing on Leroy's superb collection and original research, the two released "Windy City Blues", documenting the transition from pre- to post-war styles in Chicago. Each subsequent release has had a tight regional, conceptual and chronological focus. "Chicago Slickers" Vol. I and II picks up where Windy City leaves off. "Low Down Memphis Harmonica Jam" and "Detroit Ghetto Blues" focus on these two regions, while "Lake Michigan Blues" returns to the mid-fifties Chicago sound and features cuts by the label's namesake, Robert Nighthawk. Leroy's purchase of a fine collection from Oklahoma facilitated the release of "Down Behind The Rise", featuring the work of Jesse Thomas and others, and the only one-artist album in the series, "Mardi Gras In New Orleans", which features the father of New Orleans blues, Professor Longhair, and includes his earliest sides from 1949 on from the Star Talent label. The last volume of the series, "Downhome Delta Blues", focuses on Mississippi post-war rarities. While many of the records reissued are extremely rare, the focus is on musical excellence rather than simply obscurity. Leroy's liner notes are an education in the blues, and many packages contain rare photos as well. Nighthawk's 200 series of albums includes "Mule" by Henry Townsend, who has been recording for fifty years. It is the finest recording ever done of Henry and the one he is proudest of. Nighthawk 202 is "Rusty Nail", Leroy Pierson's own fine debut album.

Shoenfeld had been traveling to Jamaica since 1973, and by 1978 he turned Leroy on to Jamaican blues. The two went to Jamaica, met Bob Marley and saw a ground-floor opportunity to record another form of black roots music. Their first issue came in 1981 with the anthology of seminal Rastafarian reggae called "Wiser Dread", followed by an album by the Morwells, also known as Roots Radicks, the premier session group in Jamaica after Sly and Robbie. The third release, by the Ital, called "Brutal Out Deh", came to the attention of rock critic Robert Palmer, who hailed it as the reggae album of the year in the New York Times, precipitating a flood of orders. Subsequent issues include the anthologies "Knotty Vision" and "Calling Rastafari", and records by the Gladiators, Justin Hines and the Dominoes, and Junior Bials. An album by Winston Jarrett is slated for fall release.

Nighthawk is moving into cassette and CD releases and promises more blues in the future. A Nighthawk catalogue can be obtained by writing to Nighthawk Records, PO Box 15856, St. Louis, MO 63114.

BLUES ON THE AIR

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MONDAY: Midnight to 2 AM, BUCK NAKED—Tom Hall

TUESDAY: 4-6:30 PM, BLUESDAY AFTERNOON—Dennis Clancey & John McHenry

10-Midnight, TUESDAY NIGHT DANCE PARTY—Ed Vigil

THURSDAY: 12-4 PM, BIG BUCKET OF BLUES—Tony C. & Michael D.

9-11 PM, CRESCENT CITY CLASSICS—Miss Q

11-2 AM, THE NIGHT CRAWLER—Michael Finney

FRIDAY: 4:30-6:30 PM, BLUES IN THE NIGHT—Art Dwyer

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Artist Profile

LEROY PIERSON

by A.J. Cabanellas

St. Louis is fortunate to have in its homebase an artist with as many talents as Leroy J. Pierson. Not only is he a gifted performer with special talents on guitar and vocals, but is also a noted scholar of early black music history, both blues and Carribean-based reggae music. If that wasn't enough, Leroy's skills as a record producer and radio announcer clearly point to a blues Renaissance man.

Leroy was first exposed to blues music on D.J. Gabriel's show on KATZ in the 1950's. At the time Leroy just thought the sounds he heard were pop music, but in retrospect he thinks they served as an early grounding in good taste. The folk hootenanny fad around 1962 is when Leroy first picked up a guitar. The first performer to really influence him was Lightnin' Hopkins. Hopkins' "In New York" album on the Candid label so shocked the young high school aged Leroy that it prompted him to experiment with the weird and different tonalities and chords he heard. The early to mid sixties saw releases of pre-war blues starting to be marketed on albums and Leroy bought them all as they were released. About 1966 while in college at Beloit, Wisconsin, his attention to the guitar left the apprentice stage and with the help of blues masters he moved into his journeyman stage. While at Beloit College he gained skills in producing blues shows and festivals. He also spent time in the deep South interviewing and performing informally with many blues legends who helped shape the identity that Leroy has attained. Some performers he interviewed and/or produced shows on include Mississippi Fred McDowell, Son House, Arthur Crudup, Johnny Shines,



Leroy Pierson

Robert Jr. Lockwood, and of course Henry Townsend. One lesser known but no less influential musician from the Mississippi Delta was singer/guitar player Hayes McMullin, whom Leroy co-produced on an album worth of tapes.

In addition to attending school from 1966 to 1970 Leroy found time to hang out in Chicago and hear the great blues in the clubs of that era. He also made contact with such noted blues record producers and scholars as Bob Koester, Paul Garon, and, while down south, with Gayle Wardlow. Leroy also had the distinction of producing some of the first all blues festivals in Beloit; Ann Arbor, Michigan; and South Bend, Indiana. He tried to book so many traditional blues performers so that he could woodshed with the artists too. It was at one of the early Beloit shows that Leroy made his first public performance, when Son House brought him out on stage.

In 1970 Leroy moved back to St. Louis. He taught some classes at Washington University on blues and, along with Barry Bergey, helped to start the Missouri Friends of the Folk Arts. That organization helped produce many successful blues shows around St. Louis with artists such as Henry Townsend, Roosevelt Sykes, Yank Rachell, Johnny Shines and Robert Jr. Lockwood. 1970 also brought Leroy into the record producing field, a double album on the Boogie Disease label that reissued much rare post-war Chicago blues. This project was so successful that Leroy, along with Bob Shoenfeld, formed the highly acclaimed Nighthawk label, producing many fine reissues of rare blues at first, and later expanding to reggae and Leroy's own fine "Rusty Nail" album.

Leroy's association with radio goes back to 1974 with a program called the Missouri Tradition on KWMU. This show later changed to Beat Down Babylon, a fine reggae show, and for blues, the Baby Face Leroy show.

Leroy's main talents are as a blues musician. With a fertile imagination he adds to the blues legacy he's so well grounded in, performing adeptly on National steel guitar and on an electric Gretsch. His repertoire is largely Mississippi Delta based, but incorporates rags, reggae and rockabilly. With able and solid support from Russ Horneyer on bass and Geoff Seltz on drums and violin, the traditional blues hasn't ever rocked in a hipper manner. The Leroy Pierson Band has completed several successful world tours including Jamaica, the Middle East, and North Africa. Fortunately we don't have to travel that far to see them perform. They are at the Broadway Oyster Bar, just south of Busch Stadium, every Saturday night. Check him out there, on his fine Nighthawk 202 album "Rusty Nail" or on KWMU every Saturday night.

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Davis Brothers—Cont'd

went "if you ain't got no whiskey, just a little drink of coffee would do". The band by this time was electric, and in addition to Sylvester's dancing, another show element was Russ and John occasionally playing one guitar simultaneously, John playing lead while Russ played bass. Boo recalls a Battle of Music between the Lard Can Band and a young B.B. King. In 1965 Big John, as he had come to be called, moved to East St. Louis, followed by Boo, then Russ, their sisters Clara and Iola, and finally Sylvester. The brothers played Spike's Dynaflo, Frank's (later the Twenty Grand) and the Red Top. Sylvester lost the sight of one eye and would only occasionally sing or dance a song. During the sixties the family would load all the stuff up and return to play in Mississippi. With the retirement of Sylvester, Russ became the leader of the group, then Boo, and then John at one point. The brothers also played with other groups, notably ones led by Doc Terry and Little Aaron. It was in Doc Terry's group that Boo learned how to drum on a kit with coaching from Chuck Berry's drummer, Ebby Hardy, who told him "be slack, be limber".

By 1972 the Davis Brothers were playing at The Brothers in Centreville, which had been in business since 1955 as the Red Rose. In 1973 the ownership was taken over by Margaret Tubby Stepp and it became Tubby's Red Room. Initially Boo played drums, John lead guitar, Russ rhythm guitar, and Junior Applewhite, now with the Robert Doll band, played bass. Sylvester might jump out there and cut a buck or two, dance, turn the flip and occasionally sing. Russ Salso did a lot of singing in those days. At first the gig began early and sit-ins were discouraged, but over time the brothers took early gigs in St. Louis. A long running one was at Walker's Tavern on Hodiamont with Doc Terry, Little Aaron and Earthquake, and the Red Room show got later and later. Boo played the Caravan with Big George and Big Smitty, at the Blue Note with Eugene Neal, and live over KATZ with Big George and a guitarist named Elliot Johnson.

Sylvester Davis passed away in the late seventies. The gig at the Red Room was now an all night affair, and sit-ins were encouraged. Musicians would come by after their regular gigs to jam, among them Little Aaron, Junior Sims on tenor sax, Weasel on trumpet, drummers Ebby Hardy and Billy Gayles, Little Willie Johnson, bassists Robert Weaver and Chisem, Little Oswald, Skeet, Jessie Lewis, Derek, Little Dave, John Smith, Q.T. Macon, Clayton Love, Willie Kizart, Roland Clark, David Dee, Doc Terry, Big Smitty, Arthur Willie Williams, Charles Taylor, Al Green, and a one man band called Willie Wade. The first white player Boo recalls



Boo Boo Davis and Arthur Willie Williams

Photo by Joel Slotnikoff

was Billy Peek, who would come in barefoot, followed by Bob Lohr on keyboards and Keith Doder of the Blue City Band, on harp.

Big John's guitar style was totally unique. Bob Lohr describes it as a cross between Curtis Mayfield and Albert King with a little Chuck Berry thrown in. Some of the songs he played include "Right On, Are You Ripplin'" and "Doin' Your Own Thing" by Boo. "My Baby Was Standing Behind The Door With A Baseball Bat", "Walkin' Down A One Way Street", and "Killing Floor". In 1984 John suffered an injury to a finger when a woman at Homan's Hole dropped a purse with a loaded gun in it. Although he recovered the use of the finger, he died in 1986.

A half-brother named Lee King Lewis had a blues career in Detroit and Akron before turning to the ministry. The remaining brothers, Boo on drums and vocals, and Russ on guitar, together with ace bassist Darius Montgomery comprise the present Davis Brothers Band. They can be seen every Friday and Saturday from two to dawn at Tubby's Red Room, always with special guests. Though many think he is Tubby, and he will answer to the name, the large man with the cigar is Speedy, who supervises the attached and highly recommended bar-b-que stand. Tubby herself can be found tending the bar. The dancing is vital, the lights and much of the decor is red, and the blues are hot. This is truly the heart of the blues in the St. Louis area. The Davis Brothers may also be seen playing with Big Bad Smitty at various locations.

Thanks to Russ and Boo Boo Davis, Margaret Stepp and Bob Lohr for information provided. Photo of the Davis family courtesy of Iola Davis.

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