

The BLUESLETTER

WOMEN & BLUES A WINNING COMBINATION

BY JANET BECKER

I grew up in Philadelphia. I had memorized my older brother's record of Maxine Sullivan's St. Louis Blues, but that was the extent of my blues education prior to age 16. That's when a friend took me to a room upstairs at the Academy of Music (home of the Philadelphia Orchestra), where Kansas City piano player Sammy Price had put together a series of Sunday afternoon jazz concerts. Mezz Mezzotint was playing clarinet that day, with his soprano sax-playing buddy Sidney Bechet. Mezz had just written his autobiography, "Really The Blues," and was autographing copies at the concert. That concert and that book introduced me to a whole new world. My love for the blues has grown ever stronger over the last 43 years. It has taken me to some interesting places and has even caused me to become something of a producer of blues concerts! That role began when I became President of Redevelopment Opportunities for Women (ROW) in 1984.

ROW is a program that works with disadvantaged women. Many of these women are homeless. Most have been abused at some time in their lives. All of them suffer from poverty, sexism and, for most, racism. They come in full of distrust, feeling depressed and worthless. Seven weeks later, they graduate with information they have received, skills they have acquired, and a new attitude toward life. They have achieved something very important- they now care about themselves, as worth-while persons, deserving a life of their own. ROW is the first step toward that new life.

Shortly after I became President of this marvelous program, governmental funding was reduced drastically. We decided, among other things, to hold a fundraising event. It didn't take me long to figure out what kind of an event I would want to attend. My friend Charlie Wells, producer of jazz concerts, put me in touch with Mae Wheeler, Jeanne Trevor, Jean Kittrell and the Carolbeth Trio. Since we had asked them all to donate their performances, we picked a Wednesday evening- October 23, 1985. That turned out to be a night the Cardinals were playing a home game in the World Series! Somehow we managed to net \$3000-not bad, considering. And the audience loved it! A new annual tradition had been born!

This year is special. I discovered KDHX 88-FM, the blues capitol of the airwaves. Station Manager Dave Taylor agreed to collaborate, and suggested adding Joel Slotnikoff, Blues Society President. Joel was especially helpful, introducing me to Barbara Carr, Fontella Bass, and Johnny Johnson's Trio. These wonderful artists will be joining Trevor and Kittrell this year- a first-rate line-up, you must admit.

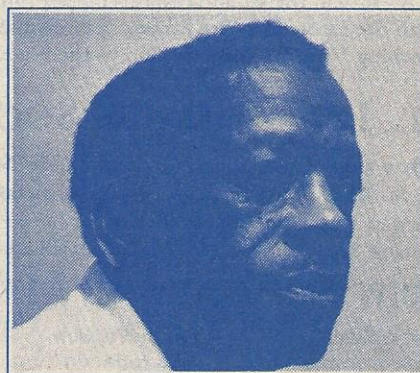
Our Fifth Annual WOMEN & BLUES CONCERT will be at the Ethical Society, 9001 Clayton Road, Saturday, October 28, 8 P.M. Get your tickets (\$10 or \$25 in advance) at Left Bank Books or Vintage Vinyl. Or call ROW, 531-6373.

TOMMY BANKHEAD

By JOEL SLOTNIKOFF

Tommy Bankhead has been a fixture on the St. Louis blues scene for thirty-five years and today enjoys unprecedented popularity. A look back at Tommy's deep blues roots helps to explain this. He was born in 1931 on Bufford's Farm at Lake Comorant, Miss., just south of Memphis. His father played guitar at jukes and picnics but quit while Tommy was very young. Tommy attempted to play a pump organ his father had, but his first real playing was on harmonica and jew's harp about age eleven.

By thirteen he had a Silvertone guitar, and began playing picnics and ballgames, emulating Howlin' Wolf, who came



TOMMY BANKHEAD

through town with a guitar slung over his shoulder and a belt full of harmonicas, playing for money on the street. Tommy's musical ambitions soon took him to Helena, Ark., where he played on the King Biscuit Flour Hour with Sonny Boy Williamson (Rice Miller). He met Houston Stackhouse, Willie Love, and James Peck Curtis, and began playing out with Sonny Boy. "By me being too young to go in on my own, Sonny Boy would tell people that I was his son...they let me in!" His acoustic guitar had gained a pickup. "Some guy had converted a radio into an amplifier. This is what we played on. It would play awhile then it would get that bad sound in it." Tommy cruised the fertile Memphis area blues territory of the late forties. He played with the Howlin' Wolf band, sans Wolf, but with Willie Johnson, in West Memphis. In Memphis he learned to be a DJ at

INSIDE FEATURES

RONDO
ACE WALLACE

WDIA from Ford Nelson, Maurice Herbert, Jr., and Nat Dee. He played Memphis with The Three B's: his friend Woodrow Adams, Fiddlin' Joe Martin, and Big Boy

Crudup's brother. They played down into the Delta at Robinsonville for a while. The country jukes they played featured craps ("cards took up too much room"), bootleg whiskey, and dancing. "If there would be room enough they would be kickin' up dust...the Big Apple, Truck, Suzy Q, Blackjack, Ball The Jack." He traveled to Jackson with Sonny Boy, Joe Willie Wilkins, and a drummer called Carousel. They traveled to Indianola, to Belzona, where they played Jake's place and

Continued on Page 8

LOCAL NEWS

☛ The 1989 National Conference on Black Music Research will be held Oct 12-15, 1989 at the Sheraton St. Louis. For further information and registration contact the Center For Black Music Research, Columbia College, 600 S. Michigan Ave. Chicago, IL 60605 (312-663-9463). The program includes papers on St. Louis blues, jazz, and gospel music. Included in the concert roster is Sparky Rucker.

☛ Doc Terry & The Pirates vocalist Patti Thomas has been injured in an auto accident. A benefit will be held beginning at 3 PM Sunday Sept. 10 at the Casa Loma Ballroom, 3354 Iowa at Cherokee. Scheduled to perform are: The Soulard Blues Band, Tom Hall, Doc Terry, The Heaters, Tommy Bankhead, The Leroy Pierson Band, and Henry Townsend. Food available from The Broadway Oyster Bar. We wish her a speedy recovery.

NATIONAL NEWS

Vivian Carter passed away June 12 of complications from diabetes. With her husband, James Bracken, she founded the largest black-owned record label of the fifties, VJ. A lifelong resident of Gary, Indiana, she started the label with two Gary acts, Jimmy Reed and the Spaniels. Also prominent on the label were Eddie Taylor, John Lee Hooker, and The Staples Singers. Her brother, Calvin Carter, who died in 1986 was the A&R man for VJ and responsible for much of it's success. Vivian began her career as a disc jockey, then owned a record store before launching VJ. Her contribution to the blues is immeasurable.

ST. LOUIS BLUES SOCIETY NEWS

☛ By a vote of the Board of Directors The St. Louis Blues Club is now The St. Louis Blues Society. ☛ Carl Kuelker has resigned from the Board of Directors. We thank him for his service. ☛ We would also like to thank Scott Simpson for his help with accounting.

NEW & RENEWAL MEMBERS

Scott Arbogast	Randy Funsch	Lloyd "Al" Rodgers
Gregory Aubuchon	Nels & Sandra	Niles & Carol Ross
Dennis Barbeau	Holmberg	Ray Schoch
Stephan H. Braun	J.A.M.	Robert Singer
Marietta Buechner	Stacy Johnson	Pat Stamp
Richard Buller	Robert W.	Paul J. Stewart
Rob Burns	Michelmann	Dave Taylor
Candy S. Christopher	Derek P. Morgan	Ronald T. Taylor
Jeffrey S. Collier	Gail Morse	Bill Tucker II
Jim Colter	David G. Nasser	Mark A. Velleca
Jorge Diego	De Lora Nobuo	Ed Vigil
Tino DiFranco	Jim Paunicka	Mark Warning
John Dutemple	Linsay L. Pickens	John Wegrzyn
Robert E. Fleming	D. Pierron	Marcia Whisman
Laura Franck	Jim Reese	Gordon Whit

REVIEWS

CONDITION YOUR HEART *Red Lightnin'* RL 0069 For fans of St. Louis R&B this new album is indispensable. Fifteen vintage cuts from '57 to '63 ranging from hard R&B to gospel-tinged vocal groups. The Blues Society's Bill Greensmith has written superb liner notes that are a course in St. Louis R&B history, erring only in prematurely reporting the retirement of ace guitar player Bennie Smith who is back in action with his group The Sportsmen, most recently at the Blues Society Annual Meeting August 31st. Includes fine, rare cuts by Ike Turner, Clayton Love, Fontella Bass, Oliver Sain, Little Herbert and the Arabians, The Emeralds, The Rockers, Fred Green, Robert T. Smith (Piano Slim) and Art Lassiter, and plenty of Bennie's fine guitar work.

BLUES DIRECTORY 1989 *Living Blues Magazine* has put out this useful guidebook to clubs, artists, festivals, societies, radio stations, and more. Available by mail for \$6 (Includes P&H) from The Blues Foundation, 352 Beale St. Memphis, TN 38103

SOAPBOX

The St. Louis Blues Society is fortunate to have a wide variety of members that represent many factions and functions as far as skills relating to the blues. For example, we have musicians historically rooted in the early blues as well as contemporary performers. We have historians with great collections of records, tapes, books, and videos, and record business people. Finally our membership includes radio people who by virtue of their public performance provide some educational functions in that they inform their listeners of the historical importance of blues and its artists. DJs also tell where folks can see and hear this music in a live environment. I would like to see this resource of skills and knowledge utilized in an organized fashion to speak and perform on the blues in elementary to advanced forms. To this end I offer my services to any member of the public at large that knows of any elementary or secondary educational facilities that would want this service. Feel free to contact me at 351-2838 if you have further thoughts or leads to speaking engagements. Support the blues in St. Louis!

Tony Cabanellas



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The St. Louis Blues Society is a Missouri non-profit corporation dedicated to preserving Blues music, to fostering the 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.

THE BLUESLETTER

Editor	Design	Advertising
Joel Slotnikoff	J.M./R.T./M.O.	Luana Hays

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1/4 Page	\$75.00	\$60.00
1/2 Page	\$140.00	\$125.00
Full Page	\$250.00	\$200.00

Articles & Photos to:
St. Louis Blues Society Newsletter
P.O. Box 21652
St. Louis, Mo. 63109

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sept 3	Otis Clay at the Coluseum
Sept. 8,9	The Belairs at Off Broadway
Sept 10	Benefit for Patti Thomas at Casa Loma Ballroom (3PM)
Sept 15	Tom Hall at COCA (Focal Point)
Sept 21	Bugs Henderson at Casa Loma Ole & The Emigrants at Cicero's
Sept 27	RONNIE EARL and the Broadcasters at Off Broadway
Sept 27	Leroy Pierson at COCA (Focal Point)
Oct 2	JR REED at Cicero's
Oct. 7	Bobby Bland at the Coluseum
Oct 9	Ian Moore at Cicero's (call to confirm)
Oct. 10	TINSLEY ELLIS at Off Broadway
Oct. 12	Joanna Connors at Cicero's
Oct. 15	Little Milton Campbell at the Coluseum
Oct 16	The Mannish Boys at Off Broadway
Oct 26	LAZY LESTER at Cicero's

* Mitch Woods and the Rocket 88's at Off Broadway

* Albert King at the Coluseum

(* No date available at presstime)

WOMEN & BLUES

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Georgia Guitar Wizard
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(\$4 members)

Louisiana Harmonica Legend
LAZY LESTER
Oct. 26 at Cicero's \$5
(\$4 members)

THE ST. LOUIS BLUES SOCIETY HOMETOWN SERIES **J.R. REED**

and the Real Blues Band

Reed and band have been raising the roof at the
Just The Two Of Us Lounge on Natural Bridge.
This is your chance to catch them at Cicero's.

Reed is a triple threat on guitar, harp, and vocals.

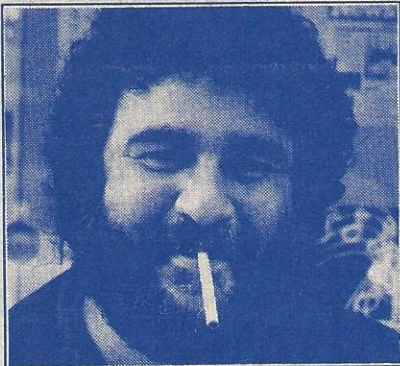
Monday, Oct. 2 at Cicero's \$2

RONDO

BY JOEL SLOTNIKOFF

Rondo's Blues Deluxe is one of St. Louis' most popular blues bands, drawing big crowds at their Blueberry Hill base, and all over the area. Bandleader Ronald Leewright

was born in Brockton, Mass. 43 years ago. His mother, of Spanish descent, and her sister "...were out at a thing when Germany surrendered the war. She went out with the singer in the band." He was black. When her husband, who was in the Air Force, returned from the war, she was very pregnant and explained the situation to



RONDO

him. He was very understanding. He was transferred to Selma, Alabama, where the young Ronald's skin began to darken. The racial climate at that time in Selma made life unbearable for the family, by then numbering five. "There was always somebody throwin' rocks at me from across the street, all that shit." For the sake of the family, Ronald was placed with an inter-racial couple in California. This didn't work out, and he was placed with a black couple in Robertson, Mo., "A poverty pocket between Bridgton and Hazelwood." His mother's husband delivered him to the Leewrights there, "I knew that when he let me off that I was never going to be able to go home. When I hit Robertson I hit it at a time when everybody was conkin' their hair, everybody else doin' the white boy thing, and boom, here I am, I already got conked hair, my skin is already bleached out. All the girls think I'm cute. All the guys hate my goddam guts." Raised black in a black world, Ronald's nickname was Whiteboy. He grew up fighting.

"When I heard music it was just an outlet for that melancholy thing." The first music to attract him was gospel. "I was comin home about ten o'clock, a fullmoon night, and these cats were at Big Eddie's old house, J.W. he's dead now, George Nichols, he's dead now, Clarence Jackson, he's a preacher, Jesse, he's dead. I think it was Raymond Ball, and these cats was doin' some gospel stuff, I snuck over in the weeds up to the door...man these guys were good." He sang in a Baptist choir but had to quit or get excommunicated. "My teenage years I had more vocal groups. The first one was called the Turbans, we wore towels around our heads. We would walk the whole neighborhood trying to find the right echo."

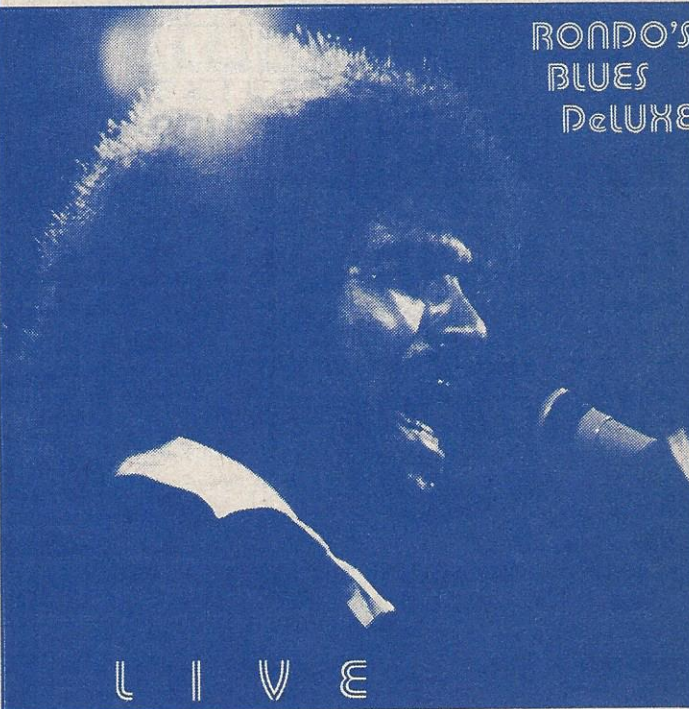
"The first band I ever saw was Earthquake. He had a little three piece group playin' Miss Sara's...I peeped in the door and saw big Earthquake singin' Shake Your Money Maker. It was the most incredible thing I had ever seen. This cat must have weighed close to 400 pounds. He could just stand in one spot and his whole body would go back and forth, ears, everything. The big ugly sonofabitch was just so good. He called me in that door and let me sing."

The Leewrights were "the most angelic people I had ever seen," but when he came home crying his mom told him, "If you come home cryin' again I'm gonna kick your ass myself." His first job was at the Skylark Bowling Alley. The owner insisted Ronald be the singer. The band were burglars. They'd go out on break and work. It didn't last long. The next job was at the El Rancho out on the Rock Road. No one black had played there, the material was black,

and so was born El Rondo, an attempt to play Spanish. The El was later dropped, but the Rondo stuck. During the late sixties and much of the seventies, Rondo sang rock. There was small market for blues and he had a family to support. At one point he went to New York and sang with an eleven piece band whose members would follow each other home and rip each other off. Rondo returned to St. Louis, quit music and went to school to repair photocopiers. He found employment and made good money but the blues was in his soul. He sat in one night with the Soulard Blues Band and quit the copier job. With Soulard he played Hutto's, Caleco's, Club 54. One night "a chick said 'Rondo, you guys suck', fell off her bar stool on her face, blood all over her nose...I said 'That's it!' I walked out of the club. I called the band in the morning. I told 'em I had a heart attack, I can't play ever again in life. Doctor says it'll kill me. Plus he says I can't talk to y'all." Again he quit the business, this time hanging out for a year with his friend Elmer Lou, drinking beer and listening to blues.

At the end of that year an argument with bass player Craig Thornton about how hard or easy it is to play the blues led to the formation of Rondo's Blues Deluxe and "from the moment I made up my mind things have gotten better." The release in 1987 of the live Rondo's Blues Deluxe album on Joe Edwards' Blueberry Hill label has helped immensely, and a new studio album is planned. The current Blues Deluxe consists of Thornton on bass, Dennis Lindsay sax, Jack Ingles keyboard, Rich McDonnough guitar, and Bob Spitzfaden drums.

Rondo has been a black man in a white man's world, a white man in a black man's world, and an orphan. No one should question this man's right to sing the blues. "To me, to come and play is the bright spot of my day. If I'm good tonight I'll slip over that line...slip off into that purity of music."



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Hacienda Lounge	382-4503	The French Quarter	947-1343
Hidden Cove	427-9679	The President	621-4040
Hits	256-4949	Tubby's Red Room	618-875-6128
Houlihan's Biergarten	863-9116	Webster Bar & Grill	962-0564
Kinloch Cotton Club	524-2460	Whitt Lounge	535-3680
Lemp Mansion	664-8024		

BLUES PORTRAITS

BY JOEL SLOTNIKOFF



Lisa Chicago 1989



Walter Horton Chicago 1969



Smokey Smothers Chicago 1989

ACE WALLACE

BY JOEL SLOTNIKOFF

Guitarist Ace Wallace is one of St. Louis' hidden blues treasures. In the fifties and sixties Wallace played with many groups in St. Louis, doing long stretches in bands with legendary blues trumpet player/disk jockey Gabriel, and with Big George and the Houserockers.

He also taught many younger musicians including Bennie Smith.

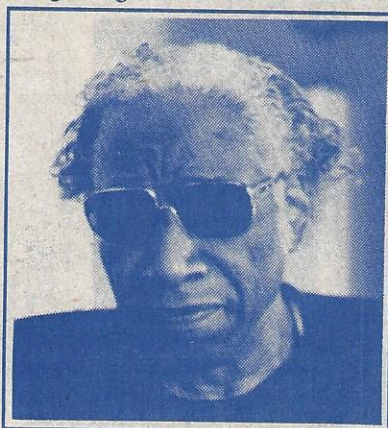
Wallace was born in St. Louis June 18, 1925. His father was from Alabama and played guitar, and his mother was from Tennessee. When Ace was three his family moved to Indiana Harbor, Indiana, part of East Chicago, where his father worked for steel companies including Inland Steel, Southern Steel, and Harbor Steel. His father

would sit on the porch and play a tune called "Aint't Gonna Ship No Steel Today." The family returned to St. Louis when Ace was 11, and moved into an upstairs tenement at 2634 Franklin. At a party at his home, a man smashed a mandolin over another man's head. Ace and his young brother Calvin, with the help of their father, repaired the smashed instrument and began to learn to play. They also obtained worn out harmonicas from a neighbor and learned to play those as well. His parents' marriage ended, and Ace dropped out of school and joined the army. While in the Philippines he heard a Filipino guitarist who inspired him to pursue the instrument upon his return. He attended "jazz school" under the G.I. bill, studying guitar and upright bass. He felt he was as good as his teachers by then and attended mostly for the money.

When he was 25, in 1950 he developed an eye condition resulting in blindness, and the government sent him to a rehab center in Dayton, Ohio to learn to adjust. While there he married briefly and continued his musical studies. In 1951 he was introduced by friends to Yank Rachel who was then in St. Louis. Rachel used Ace on backup guitar. Yank would take him into alleys in the area of Beaumont and Lucas where he knew there were gamblers, and the two would play on acoustic guitars for tips—often \$10 or more. Ace knew Yank was from Brownsville, but not how big his reputation was, and neither knew the other played mandolin. Yank would "stomp it off" and Ace would fall in on rhythm.

When Yank left town under mysterious circumstances, Ace formed his first group. It was at that time that he took the name Ace, using the initials of his sister Anita, and his brothers Calvin and Edward. The group was called Ace Wallace and the Trumps, though the female vocalist joked that it was Ace and the Tramps. They played at a place at 16th and Franklin called James Jump Palace. He continued to learn music from the latest records and cites Jimmy Reed, Lightnin' Hopkins, and Elmore James as influences. The bass and 2nd guitar in the band were brothers George and Doc Perry. Due to marital troubles Ace left St. Louis and went to Detroit where he had family. On that first visit he met John Lee Hooker who borrowed his amplifier, and in return taught him Boogie Chillun in spanish tuning. He also played with Earl Hooker there.

When he returned to St. Louis he joined Big George and the



ACE WALLACE

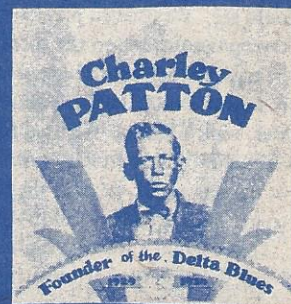
Houserockers at the Early Bird on Franklin, renamed the Caravan when George took it over. Ace and his wife ran the food concession serving fish, polish, and such. He also played with Ike and Tina and Billy Gayles at a place at Vandeventer and Delmar.

For many years he played in a group led by Gabriel and appeared on 45's Gabriel produced including the first, "I'm Gabriel," playing lead on the instrumental flip "Ginza." Look for these rare Gabriel 45's to be reissued on an album later this year. Besides Ace and Gabriel, the group included Vernell Andrews on bass and Robert on drums. They played at Nora's on South Broadway. At the time Ace remembers having a Les Paul Gibson and a Fender Concert. On an ill-fated trip to Columbus, the gig fell through and he had to pawn these prizes to get out of town but was later able to retrieve them. He had occasion also to play with a guitarist whom Gabriel recorded named Guitar Tommy Moore. Ace remembers Tommy playing everything with tremelo but little else. (Note: anyone with information about Tommy Moore please contact The Bluesletter Editor.) Ace's last public gig, in '75, was with Big George outdoors at Fairgrounds Park. Since then, he has occasionally played at churches for weddings and funerals, and at nursing homes. After living for a time with his brother Calvin (who plays many styles of lap steel guitar, including blues and gospel), Ace moved into a home in the Central West End. While he says the music business was cut-throat with the bandleader always making more money, he has no regrets, having raised two children on his music. He appreciated the other musicians providing transportation and protection.

Ace still practices three or four hours a day with a drum machine or self-made tapes as well as teaching several youngsters. Due to health problems he can't play out at this time but we wish him a speedy recovery and hope to present him with his brother Calvin in the future.

MUSIC GALLERY

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TOMMY BANKHEAD CONTINUED

Sonny Boy wrote the song about Gonna Tell Fannie What Her Boyfriend Say, Fannie being Jake's girlfriend. "Joe Willie learned me lots about lead. We'd start playing and when the time come to take the lead, he'd hunch me, so I had to do something. He told me later, "If I'd never did that you'd never have played lead." They played Greenville, Greenwood, Leland, and Goodman, where what seemed like a whiskey bottle when he when to sleep turned out to be a marmasis (snake) when he awoke. "I think we scared each other. He went crawlin' out the door. Joe Willie killed him." Jobs came readily due to Sonny Boy's fame, and days "we'd sit around the room and have rehearsal. As soon as somethin' new hit the radio we rehearsin' on it."

Next Tommy played with Boyd Gilmore and a harp player named Dan. Dan had family in East St. Louis and on a visit sat in at Ned Love's. Asked if he had a band, he said he could send for them, and Boyd and Tommy came to East St. Louis, where Ned bought them brand new equipment at Son B. Shield's music store. Adding Albert Davis on drums, they played a long stretch at Ned Love's. Next he sat in across the river at The El Morocco at Theresa and Franklin. He soon led the band there, at first commuting from Firewood station on foot ("Just exercise for me, I had never owned a car. What messed it up was when I got my first car. I didn't want to walk to the bathroom then."), then moving into the Harlem Hotel next door. Tommy named this group the Landrockers, then gave the name and the band to one of the members and formed the Blues Eldorados in the late sixties. They played the Pinto Lounge on the South Side, Sadie's, a place on Grand with a revolving bandstand, and Miss B's on Chouteau where they were approached by Lew Prince and Tom Ray to cut a record: *Tommy Bankhead & the Blues Eldorados* (Deep Morgan 001). At Sadie's a white harp player sat in and later offered to get Tommy a job as a deputy sherrif, a job he still holds today. While waiting for the Deep Morgan album to be issued, Tommy cut a single issued on Hot Cam, *Have You Ever Seen A One Eyed Woman Cry*, a tune Tommy says he authored. He also appeared as the bass player on Henry Townsend's Prestige Bluesville album cut at Technisonic. Over the years Tommy has had four marriages, but none of the women deterred him from his blues. "I tells 'em before I marry 'em, if you don't think you can handle it, don't jump in the pot."

When I mention to him I'm working on a story about Ace Wallace, Tommy tells me the following irresistible anecdote: "Ace Wallace has played with me, I had Ace Wallace and Meatball (Lamont Caruthers), and Snake, blowed horn, all three of them was blind, I was the only one could see. We used to play out here on Etzel and Hodiamont, little tavern used to set on the corner. We would get out the car, give 'em the equipment, just to have something in each hand, and they'd have one hand on each other's shoulder, and one have his hand on my shoulder, walk right in. We used to play down at the Clark bar, 23rd and Clark, until one Saturday me and Joe Porter...Porter was playing drums, Ace on guitar, anyway they had one of them old type pianos. I used to get high, I used to climb up on top of it and jump down on the floor. That evenin' I was too high, got up on the piano and fell down. Ace stopped and looked around, he said, "Did somethin' pass me?" After then I got up and I got me another drink. You know I couldn't get drunk. I was cold sober."

Today the Blues Eldorados feature longtime drummer, Ben Wells, Oliver Johnson on keyboards and trumpet, and Robert Thomas on bass.

They appear regularly at Mike and Min's on Saturday nights and can be seen at other area venues as well.

PATTI'S BLUES BASH

SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 10, 1989
AT THE BEAUTIFUL

DOORS
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2:00
P.M.

AIR-CONDITIONED

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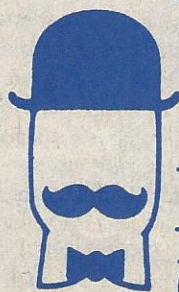
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