



# The BLUES LETTER

## ST. LOUIS AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSIC EXHIBITION

By SUZANNE JONES STOLAR

**F**rom the turn of the century to the present, St. Louis has been the cradle of African American music and musicians, giving the city a world-wide reputation for producing ragtime, jazz, blues, Gospel, and rock 'n roll.

Opportunities to perform regularly in the river city have never equalled the number of talented musicians with roots in St. Louis, and many left to achieve national and international fame.

"Ragtime to Rock 'n Roll: St. Louis African American Music" opens at the History Museum in the Jefferson Memorial Building in Forest Park on Sunday, February 4 with an exhibition and programs that will continue throughout 1990. Honoring St. Louis' black history, the exhibition focuses on individuals and music that brought recognition to their hometown.

Musical instruments, posters, photographs, record albums, sheet music, performance clothing and awards will be on exhibit, and music recorded by St. Louis artists will play in the gallery.

Musicians represented include Scott Joplin, who lived and worked in St. Louis at the turn of the century. Because ragtime was made popular through piano rolls, the exhibition will feature a player piano from the period with ragtime piano rolls.

As St. Louis' black population increased with migration from rural Missouri and the South, the city became a home for the blues. Largely a musical genre by and for African Americans, the blues expressed the joy and pain of daily life and traced its origins to the South. Blues singers who played piano and guitar found a ready audience in saloons and on the streets, though St. Louis' most talented bluesmen, such as Henry Townsend, did not receive recognition until the 1960's. He will be featured in the exhibition and will perform in a free program on Sunday February 18.

A new kind of sacred music—Gospel—also made its way to St. Louis. Though some of the founders of the Gospel movement came from a blues tradition, their mission was evangelism, not entertainment. St. Louis' most influential Gospel musicians achieved national recognition before Gospel moved into mainline black churches and commercial concert halls. Considered one of the pioneers of Gospel music, Willie Mae Ford Smith was a major influence on artists during the 1950's. The exhibit will include her performance robe and other memorabilia.

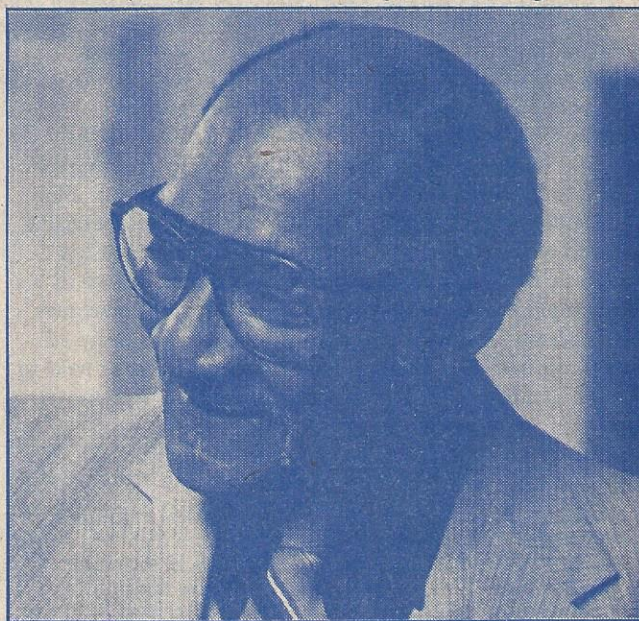
St. Louisans created some of the earliest and most innovative rock 'n roll music. Rooted in the cultures of working class Americans,

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## BENNY SHARP & THE SHARPEES

By BARRETT BRAUN

**B**enny Sharp was born in Tupelo, Mississippi March 27, 1930. When and where he began playing guitar and influences on him are presently unknown. It is known he moved to East St. Louis in 1947. Ace Wallace recalls teaching Benny fundamentals, and Bennie Smith also reports instructing him.



BENNY SHARP

By the late 1950's, he was leading his own group called Benny Sharp and the Zorros of Rhythm. At one point the group included Charles Drain and the Four Tabs. The group also included Jessie Smith, who later left to join the Ike and Tina Turner Revue.

In 1961 the band recorded the St. Louis Sunset Twist, an instrumental released on the Mel-o label. The song is a variation of Ike Turner's 'Prancin', in turn a variation of Gatemouth Brown's 'Okey Dokey Stomp'.

In 1961 Benny heard Stacy Johnson singing "All I Could Do Was Cry" with the Arabians. Impressed with Stacy, Benny hired him.

A short time later, Stacy introduced Benny to Vernon Guy whom he also hired. At that time, the singers were called New Breed. Benny also sang two or three songs each night, including Ray Charles' "You Be My Baby" and several B.B. King tunes. Chalmus

*Continued on Page 4*



## LOCAL NEWS

☛The West End Music Blue Monday jam at Cicero's is now being held at Furst Rock on the Landing. Call 3-MR-WEST for more information. ☛Gino's Lounge at 6161 Natural Bridge is now featuring a live blues jam Saturday afternoon from 4 to 9 and Monday evening from 8-11 with Little Eddie and the All Stars. Call 385-4546 for more information. ☛There is also a new Saturday afternoon jam at Soulard Preservation Hall from 2 to 6 hosted by the Loose Brothers. Call Les at 296-9244 for more information. ☛Local bassist extraordinaire Gus Thornton has been touring in the Katie Webster band, most recently to Italy.

## NATIONAL NEWS

At the Handy Awards in Memphis this year Albert Collins won in five categories, and Etta James won for female entertainer, displacing Koko Taylor who had won for nine straight years. Willie Dixon was honored as a National Blues Treasure, The Baltimore Blues Society won Blues Organization of the Year, Roger Nabor owner of Kansas City's Grand Emporium won for Club Owner, Ruth Brown for Keeping The Blues Alive in Theater, Jim O'Neal in Journalism and Benson & Hedges won for Blues Sponsor of the Year.

## ST. LOUIS BLUES SOCIETY NEWS

☛The Internal Revenue Service has granted the St. Louis Blues Society permanent 501-C3 (non-profit) status after the customary probation period. ☛The Board of Directors confirmed Joel Slotnikoff as Executive Director. ☛We are proud to announce the Society's first five Blue Ribbon members. They are Henry Townsend, Oliver Sain, Sam Valenti, Lou Thimes, and Richard Goldstein. Blue Ribbon memberships are honorary dues-free memberships that may be granted to blues artists and blues enthusiasts in the greater St. Louis area who have made substantial, long-term contributions toward accomplishing the Society's goals. Any current member may nominate a person for this membership. Approval by the Board of Directors is required. For details, contact a Society Officer or write to the Society's P.O. box, Attn: Membership Committee.

## NEW & RENEWAL MEMBERS

Eric E. Adams	Gary Freiermuth	Daniel T. Repple
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Mimi Fenwick	John L. Mulligan	Barbara Wilson
Roger & Marilyn Folk	P. Terry Nicholson	John Yock
Bob Fortado	Dennis Rainey	

## SOAPBOX

As the St. Louis Blues Society enters its sixth year and the 90's we can look back proudly on our accomplishments. We have produced numerous concerts of blues music, as well as several festivals. We have initiated the BluesLetter which has achieved widespread acceptance in the community. We have achieved permanent non-profit status. We promoted the Kings of Rhythm tour to Europe spreading the message of St. Louis music to many countries there. We have achieved marked growth in membership. More clubs than at any other time are featuring blues music.

As we look to the future we envision many exciting projects. There are the Spring and Fall Concert Series, the Hometown Series. The Blues in the Schools program and an archive to preserve our city's blues history are vital and discussions are underway to initiate them. In addition, this year we hope to have an amateur talent contest to select a representative band or artist to send to the national event in Memphis, and to organize an outdoor 'Blues Picnic' this summer. An annual Blues Festival is a goal of primary importance and much groundwork has been laid for one.

To accomplish these goals we must utilize the talents of more of our members and recruit new members with appropriate skills and talents. Professionals in production, management and organization, advertising and public relations, and fund-raising are essential to the growth of the Blues Society and its goals. If you are a lover of blues music and have skills or talents in these areas we invite you to join us in our endeavor to preserve and promote this unique American music and its important tradition in our city.

Frank Babcock



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



## UPCOMING EVENTS:

Jan 8 IAN MOORE at Cicero's  
 Jan 15 BUDDY GUY at Furst Rock  
 Jan 23 HARP ATTACK at Off Broadway  
 Jan 24 RONNIE EARL at Off Broadway  
 Feb 4 FONTELLA BASS at  
 Missouri Historical Society (2 PM)  
 Feb 18 HENRY TOWNSEND at  
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 SAT 20 TOMMY BANKHEAD  
 SUN 21 RUSS BONO  
 FRI 26 RONDOS BLUES DELUXE  
 SAT 27 DOC TERRY & PIRATES  
 SUN 28 DOC TERRY & PIRATES

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 SAT 4 RONDOS BLUES DELUXE  
 FRI 9 TBA  
 SAT 10 SOULARD BLUES BAND  
 SUN 11 JULES BLATTNER  
 FRI 16 JULES BLATTNER  
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## SHARPEES CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Ramone "Bellboy" Carter did some singing with the group as well.

In 1961, Horise O'Toole joined the group. Horise was a contemporary of Stacy and Vernon, both of whom knew him from his participation in yet another neighborhood singing group called the Originals.

Stacy states that Benny "gave me a lot of incentive and a lot of direction, in all facets of life. He was like a mentor to me."

The group was extremely popular at the time. The style and ability of Benny Sharp and New Breed quickly filled the void left by Ike and Tina who left St. Louis. Often working seven days a week, Stacy recalls "we didn't make a lot of money...but it was like a family thing."



**THE SHARPEES 1965: STACY JOHNSON, BENNY SHARP, HERBERT REEVES & (front) VERNON GUY**  
(COURTESY BILL GREENSMITH & STACY JOHNSON)

For a brief period of about a month Jessie Smith sang with the group along with Robbie Montgomery and Tori Wells, as they were on a brief hiatus from Ike Turner. Evidently, on returning to Ike, Robbie and the others said enough good things about Stacy and Vernon to Ike to interest him in hiring them. After a stint with Turner the two returned to Benny Sharp's group, by then called the Sharpees.

Stacy recalls the group was managed by Mack McKinney. The group also included Eddie Silvers as a horn player. McKinney and Silvers were connected with George Leaner of Chicago who primarily recorded Chicago artists. However in 1963 Leaner recorded "Do The 45" released on his One-derful label. The song was recorded at Oliver Sain's studio and features Oliver on sax with Herbert Reeves doing the lead vocal. The Eddie Silver song received modest success

in Chicago and St. Louis. To promote the record, the group was sent on tour by Queen's Booking Agency from New York. During this time Stacy rejoined the group and Horise succumbed to tuberculosis.

The group returned and in Chicago recorded "Tired of Being Lonely" featuring Stacy on lead vocal. They recorded other songs in 1965 and 1966 on the One-derful label.

Stacy recalls that in order to promote their recordings, it was necessary for the group to do more traveling. Prior to their recording, the financial splits among the members were down the middle. However Benny believed that as the leader of the group he should receive a greater share. Everyone did not agree. Benny decided if it wasn't going to be his way it wasn't going to be any way. For a period of time, Herbert and Stacy sang with Eugene Neal and Vernon and Vernon sang with Willie Exon. Benny hired singers Bobby McNutt and Bobby Williams. After a short time, however, Stacy came back to Benny and prodded Benny into rehiring Vernon and Herbert.

In 1978 Benny changed direction entirely. Stacy recalls that Benny had always been an extremely religious person. He believed that all of his ability and success as a musician, touring and recording artist, and club owner had been brought about by his prayer. When Benny became very ill in 1980 he again turned to prayer. When he recovered, he began to believe that his religious faith was more important than music. He turned his back on music and has never returned. Stacy recalls Benny telling him "you followed me to Hell, now why don't you come on and follow me to glory?"

Today Benny Sharp lives with his wife in East St. Louis. He is a respected Elder in the Refuge Temple in East St. Louis. Although he has lost some hair and gained a few grey hairs, he looks and sounds the same as he did when I first saw him in 1960 at Sunset Pool. He still has the same charming smile and twinkle in his eye. It is easy to envision him on the bandstand playing "Sunset Twist" or "It's All Right", shifting from side to side, occasionally chewing gum, while he amazed a group of aspiring guitarists gathered below him on the floor hoping to learn some secrets from one of the real masters.

Although Joel Slotnikoff, Stacy Johnson and I tried repeatedly to interview him for this article, he declined by not being available. He should be respected for what he did in the past and what he is doing now.

## Stacy Johnson

Born in St. Louis, Missouri on April 13, 1945, the oldest of six children, Stacy began singing in organized groups in neighborhoods around Soldan High School. In 1958, Stacy joined a vocal group called the Superiors. The members included John Pearson, Robert Owens (Stacy's cousin), Eddie Madlock, Eddie Brooks and Morris Henderson. At that time, nationally and locally, singing groups were all the rage. Stacy heard and admired Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers, the Spaniels, and Little Anthony and the Imperials. Following that style, the Superiors duplicated and improvised their own do wop arrangements. Like other groups, they adopted an image. The group wore turbans with large green emeralds in the front of each turban. They began appearing in talent shows.

At the time, Dave Dixon, a popular and influential disc jockey with KATZ provided talent shows for local artists wanting to break into the business. It was at such shows that Stacy competed against and became more aware of another singer in the neighborhood, Vernon Guy, and his group, The Cool Sounds. At a show at Kiel Auditorium, the Superiors competed against other groups with backing by the Oliver Sain band. Working under the management and promotional efforts of George Hawkins, the Superiors not only competed in local talent shows but began to travel around to different night clubs in St.



## SHARPEES CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

Louis and East St. Louis. Typically, the group would go to clubs like the Whirlaway, the Red Top, the Manhattan. Their manager would obtain permission to have the young men sing a few songs with the house band, often Oliver Sain, Little Milton or James DeShay. Recalling the first time the group went to the famous Red Top, at the age of 15, Stacy laughingly says "that was the first time I'd ever seen somebody with green hair." Like others who went to the clubs at the time, Stacy remembers them as being "a different world".

Recollecting the Red Top particularly, Stacy remembers the woman with the green hair and recalls that "every time you went in there, she had a different hair color."

On such appearances, the audience would often throw or pass money to the stage for the Superiors. They would make three or four dollars each singer at each club before their manager George Hawkins would drive them to the next club. After going to several clubs, they would drive back to St. Louis and home at four or five a.m.. With a smile on his face, Stacy fondly recalls that group and those times by saying "It was just excitin'."

Group singing required constant rehearsals to learn new singing and dancing routines. But, their appearances and success provided other opportunities and demands for their time. Rehearsals became a problem for the group. Finally, Stacy left the Superiors to join another vocal group called the Arabians. Stacy replaced Perry Howard and joined Sonny Lane, Roy Hunt, Cozy Cole (not the drummer) and Herbert Reeves. Although the other members were a few years older than Stacy, he quickly fit into the style and direction of the Arabians, who were emerging as a popular singing group. Unlike the Superiors, the Arabians did arrangements which featured individual members of the group. Although Herbert Reeves was the primary singer, Stacy soon was featured singing the Joe Tex song, "All I Could Do Was Cry".

The Arabians became part of the Jules Carlos Revue featuring Carlos, comedians Bob and Papersack and the Bopadeers dancers, all playing behind Benny Sharp and the Zorros of Rhythm featuring Charles Drain and the Four Tabs. Laughingly recalling his first appearance as a 15 year old singer appearing with such established talent, Stacy talks about the first time he stepped out publicly to sing the lead at the Red Top. He was supposed to fall to his knees at the right moment as part of his routine for the song. He recalls that it suddenly hit him that he was surrounded by and was part of major talent. When he sang his song and fell to one knee, he almost collapsed completely because he was so nervous. In his words, "it just wiped me out."

Stacy also recalls that after having successfully completed his number, Benny Sharp told him "if you keep singing like that, I'm going to make you my next vocalist." Stacy knew that Benny Sharp was not only a local musical star, but was also achieving nationwide recognition, having just returned from a tour.

On a later night at the Red Top, after he performed his featured song with the Arabians, Jules Carlos told Stacy to come out front because Benny Sharp wanted to talk to him. Benny asked Stacy to

sing his song, "All I Could Do Was Cry" without the Arabians with Benny's band.

The song went well and Benny offered Stacy a job. In approximately 1961, at the age of 16, Stacy became a singer with Benny Sharp and the Zorros of Rhythm. His duties as a singer included singing a solo version of "All I Could Do Was Cry", singing back up to Charles Drain, and carrying Benny's guitar and amplifier. Stacy had definitely moved into the major leagues of music. As part of his move, he, along with other musicians, moved into an apartment with Benny and others. Stacy recalls the intensity of this training period and tutelage under Benny by saying they sang, talked, ate, and slept music. He began learning all aspects of his now chosen career through and from Benny Sharp.

After he had been with Benny for a relatively short time, Charles Drain, who had been Benny's primary vocalist, announced that he was going to Chicago to pursue his hit record of the time. Left without a singer, Benny turned to Stacy to become his lead vocalist. Having only progressed from singing one solo song to a few, Stacy acknowledges "I wasn't up to snuff". Stacy was aware he did not yet have the skills of Charles Drain. Evidently, however, Benny recognized that Stacy had the talent, as he encouraged him to sing.

On one night, Stacy virtually collapsed from exhaustion while

singing. While down on the stage, he looked up at Benny who told him, "If you are gonna be my singer, you better get up and sing." Stacy continued to work.

When the group was appearing at the Dynaflo, Charles Drain, who had returned to St. Louis, came back to discuss rejoining Benny. Overhearing the conversation between Benny and Charles, which he was not supposed to hear, Stacy recognized the challenge in front of him. Benny agreed to rehire Drain who would rejoin the group in two weeks, after Charles had completed his existing commitments. With a determined look still, Stacy recalls that he had two weeks to prove to Benny that he should be the lead singer.

After the time passed the band was playing at the Red Top. When satisfactory financial arrangement couldn't be made with Gene "Pop" Stallings, the owner of the Red Top, to rehire Charles along with Stacy, Charles did not rejoin the group. Stacy remained the lead vocalist.

Like his contemporary, Ike Turner, Benny Sharp knew how to develop a band and a sound. He began changing the band. Aware of the changes, Stacy recalled his former singing rival, Vernon Guy. After hearing Vernon sing "Shout", Benny asked Vernon to join his group.

Shortly afterward in 1961, the singing group with the Benny Sharp band was completed by the addition of the singer and dancer Horise O'Toole, another vocalist who had been with the Originals. They began playing at Sunset Pool, George Edick's Club Imperial and Danza in Gaslight Square, to name a few clubs. On finishing a gig on the St. Louis side of the river, the band would pack up and drive over to the Red Top where they would play until six in the morning. Stacy met and sang with other famous singers who would sing a song or set with the recently renamed singing group now called "New Breed". Stacy recalls singing with Robbie Montgomery, Jessie Smith and Tori



THE SUPERIORS: MORRIS HENDERSON AND STACY JOHNSON (CENTER) LITTLE HERBERT REEVES (WITH MICROPHONE)  
PHOTO COURTESY BENNY SMITH



## SHARPEES CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

Wells who were then singing and touring with Ike Turner. The pace was non-stop. The group often worked seven days a week playing two and even three jobs on Friday and Saturday nights. The group's popularity continued to grow. "Ike was gone and we just kinda like slid into his little slot."

Both Benny Sharp and New Breed achieved fame. New Breed (Stacy, Vernon, and Horise) traveled to Chicago to sing with Albert King on occasion. For the most part, however, they remained in St. Louis, singing with Benny Sharp, not only at club dates, but in national shows appearing in St. Louis at Kiel Auditorium. Soon however, Stacy began to accept solo singing jobs with Albert King and Big George, even though he remained with New Breed and Benny Sharp.

On one such occasion in 1962, while he was still 16, Stacy was singing with Albert King at the Club Caravan. While there, he saw Vernon come into the club followed by Jimmy "Popeye" Thomas, who was then one of the lead singers for Ike Turner. Along with Vernon and Jimmy, Ike Turner walked into the club, causing Stacy to think that Vernon had come to the club with Ike and Jimmy. Stacy knew Jimmy from years before and knew of Ike. Later, Jimmy introduced Stacy to Ike. Ike made a proposal to Stacy and Vernon for them to go on the road with the Ike and Tina Turner Revue. Stacy realized Ike was asking him to leave "his family" by leaving Benny Sharp. But, after some deliberation, he accepted.

When Stacy and Vernon went on the road with Ike Turner, Stacy learned that Robbie Montgomery had told Ike about Stacy and Vernon, praising their singing and dancing. Ike had come to the Club Caravan looking for Stacy and Vernon. Stacy also realized that he and Vernon were to be tested over the next few weeks as Ike, evidently, planned on keeping only one. Later, Ike decided. Stacy returned to St. Louis.

After his return to St. Louis, when the Ike and Tina Revue came to the Club Manhattan, Stacy went to see and hear the show. Although he was no longer a part of it, the audience remembered him and spontaneously chanted for "Stacy, Stacy, Stacy" to sing with the Revue. Aware of the situation, Ike called Stacy up to sing and rehired him in 1962. Stacy rejoined Vernon and traveled throughout the country as part of the Ike and Tina Turner Revue, featuring up to 18 musicians, and the Ikettes, Robbie Montgomery, Jessie Smith, Venetta Fields, and Florence Williams.

Early on, Stacy did many of the same chores with Ike that he had initially done with Benny. In addition to helping to set up and take down, he served as master of ceremonies, back up singer and occasional lead singer.

On joining Ike, Stacy and Vernon brought another facet to the Revue which was a hallmark of New Breed—dancing. Years before Stacy had appeared on an occasional substitute basis with the Bopadeers in the Jules Carlos Revue. Stacy and Vernon introduced their dancing from New Breed to the Ike and Tina act. Needless to say, Tina and the Ikettes then made it famous.

The IT & T Revue traveled around the country by bus. Ike often drove his '63 Fleetwood. Although they traveled eleven months out of the year and sang four to seven nights each week, Stacy loved the routine. He met and appeared with Johnnie Taylor, Freddie King, and one of his earlier idols, Jackie Wilson. Of Jackie, Stacy recalls that Jackie told Stacy "You keep on singin' like that, you gonna bust something." Stacy recalls that he replied, "It's the only way I know how to sing."

In 1963 Stacy recorded "They Ain't Lovin' You" and "You've Got Me" on the Teena label for Ike.

SHARPEES continued on page 9

*"Stands alongside Stevie Ray Vaughan  
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—GUITAR WORLD



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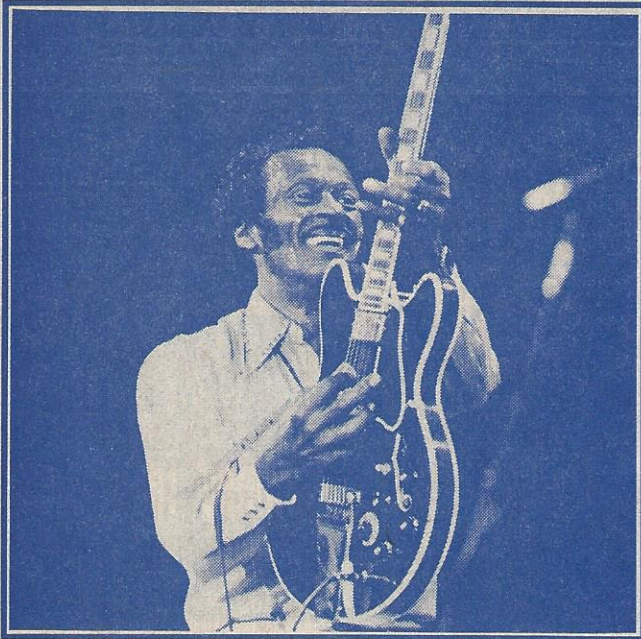
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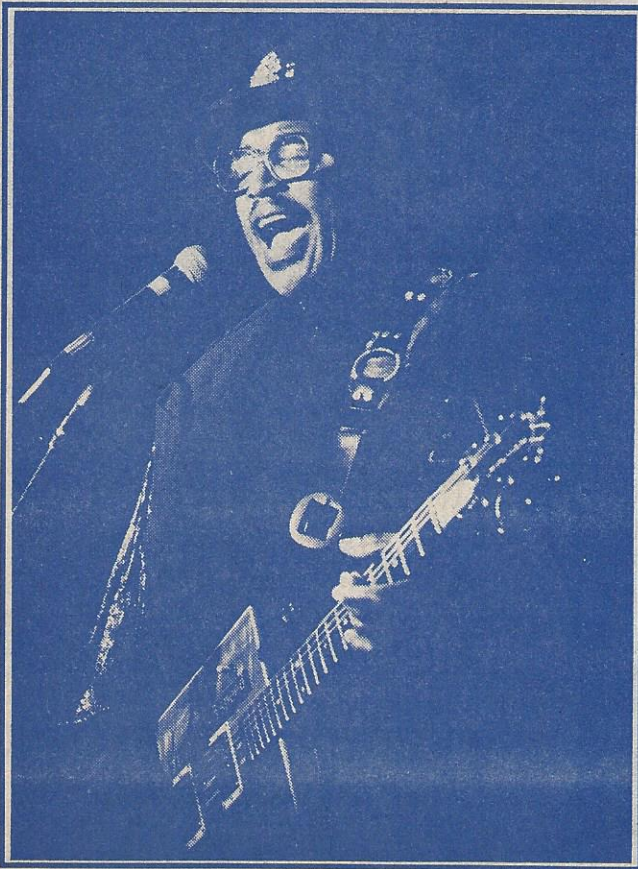
**Chuck Berry**

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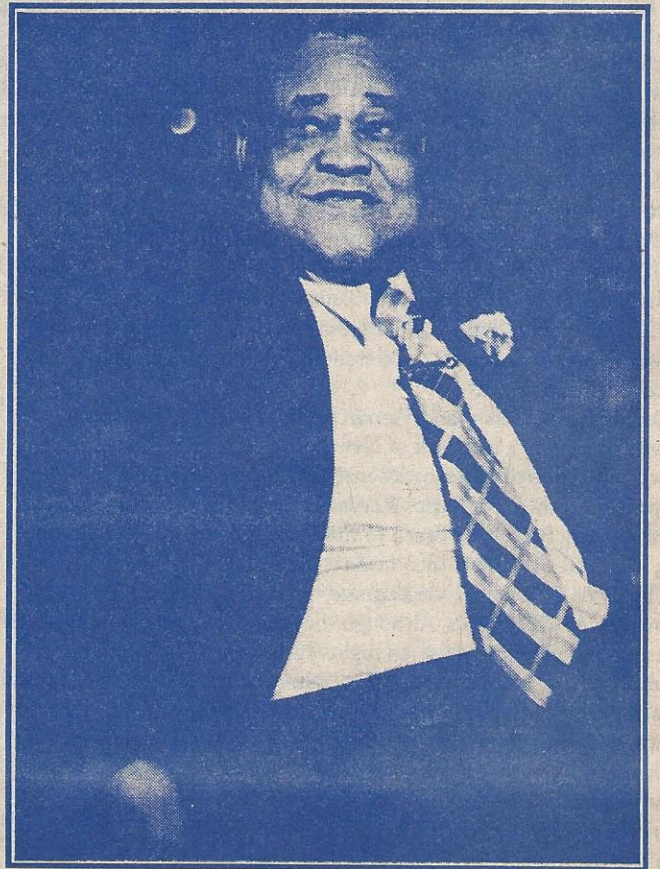
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**Roosevelt Sykes at BB's**

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## SHARPEES CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

In 1964, Stacy got married. With the urgings of his wife and other pressures, he quit Ike in Dallas, Texas when he felt he was being overworked, underpaid and not informed of recording opportunities.

At the age of 19, Stacy moved to Los Angeles and hired a manager to make bookings for him. He appeared as a solo performer for several months around the country, but rejoined Ike. Soon afterward, he recorded a hit song, "Consider Yourself" on the Modern label with Ike. His wife, however, did not like his career and wanted him to quit and get a day job.

In '64 or '65 Stacy returned to St. Louis. He learned that Vernon and Herbert Reeves (formerly of the Superiors) had recorded "Do the 45" with Benny Sharp who now billed his group as the Sharpees. Stacy went to Benny and asked for a job. Benny rehired him and told



STACY, BENNY & JESSIE PHOTO COURTESY BENNY SMITH

the others, "Jonesie's (Benny's nickname for Stacy) back."

Soon, the group began touring. They appeared at the Apollo Theater in New York with the Miracles. Stacy recalls that when they got off the stage, he, Benny, Vernon, Horise, and Chalmus "Bobby the Hollywood Bellboy" Carter all drove in Benny's '64 Cadillac to Miami, Florida to the Continental a Go Go where they appeared on stage less than twenty-four hours later with Wayne Cochran and Sam & Dave. Benny liked to air out his Cadillac.

The group's fame was such that they were asked to play Europe, but did not do so. The necessary paperwork was not completed in time to go.

While on the road in 1965, Horise began complaining of physical pain and difficulty, not only in performing but in doing anything. Shortly thereafter, while in Ohio, Horise was diagnosed as having terminal tuberculosis. He left the Sharpees to return to St. Louis where he quickly passed.

Tragedy stuck again in '69 when Herbert Reeves was killed following an argument.

Stacy and Vernon continued to work as the Sharpees with Benny for a while. However, the group began to change as its members changed. After Benny quit professional music in 1978, Stacy continued to sing with Vernon and Gwin Massey. The group sang top

40 tunes until the 1980's when Stacy quit singing entirely after his second wife died.

Stacy recalls that upon the death of his second wife, he became a recluse, withdrawing from professional singing as well as everything else.

About 1985, Vernon, together with Bobby Williams, prodded Stacy to return to a new version of the Sharpees featuring Paul Grady (Vernon's nephew), Keith Robinson, Duane Mitchell and Jay Russell. Ultimately, Stacy joined the group which appeared at Caleco's, the Carousel and other clubs. Soon, however, the group became too chaotic for Stacy. Again, he quit music and took a day job.

In July 1986 Robbie Montgomery called Stacy to see if he would be interested in going to Europe to sing with a revival of the Kings of Rhythm. In October '86 he joined the Kings of Rhythm to make his first tour of Europe. Stacy was amazed at their success. He recalls that while he was in Paris walking down a street a Frenchman stopped him to inquire "Aren't you Stacy Johnson?" In Stacy's words, "that just blew me away." Stacy realized at that point "Why was I doing anything else?"

Back in St. Louis, Stacy formed Broadway Rhythm. The group started to become successful when personal problems took Stacy's time and attention away from the group and singing.

Stacy is again singing in the neighborhoods. He is committed and dedicated to singing and recording "my stuff". Upon asking the meaning of "my stuff", Stacy replied that he has written and arranged a lot of songs. He considers himself a blues and soul singer. He and I both believe the best is yet to come.

You can hear this talented man around St. Louis, as he appears regularly with the Loose Brothers Band at their Saturday afternoon jam at Soulard Preservation Hall, and elsewhere, or when he teams up with Vernon Guy for one of Oliver Sain's talent laden revues.

## Vernon Guy

Born in St. Louis on March 21, 1945, Vernon Guy first began singing gospel music, often with his brother, in the Seven Gospel Singers. Ultimately, his interest in music broadened. By the time he was 12, he too was infatuated with the sounds of Frankie Lymon. In recalling Frankie, Vernon shakes his head when he states "he was unbelievable."

The inspiration worked. Vernon and the five other members changed from gospel to popular music and renamed the group the Cool Sounds. Instead of singing on street corners they began to enter talent shows, including Dave Dixon's Talent show sponsored through KATZ radio. Vernon recalls that "The Cool sounds were the guys everyone was afraid of- they were doin' it". As winners of the show they were invited to appear at Kiel Auditorium as part of Dave Dixon's Shower of Stars for a grand prize talent competition. When they won that Vernon knew he was going to "be in music." The promised prize of recording sessions didn't materialize, but Vernon continued to sing as a member of the Cool sounds for a few years. The group did its singing from street corners to talent shows to local clubs in St. Louis and East St. Louis, singing with the bands of Little Milton, Oliver Sain, and Albert King, at the Manhattan, the Riviera, the Dynaflo and the Red Top. Vernon recalls broadcasting live on Dave Dixon's Night Beat Show on KATZ.

One night he walked into the Club Caravan where he saw his former competitor from the Superiors, Stacy Johnson, singing solo with Benny Sharp and the Zorros of Rhythm. He was impressed. Stacy introduced him to Benny who put him onstage to sing "Shout". Benny was impressed enough to offer Vernon a job on the spot which he accepted.

The band was named after the popular television show. The year was '61. Charles Drain had left the band and the singing was done primarily by Stacy, with some help from Benny himself and from Bellboy. Vernon and Stacy began to do duets, including Jerry Butler's



## AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSIC CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

rock 'n roll transformed blues and southern hillbilly into a new kind of music. With its expression of rebellion against the establishment, rock 'n roll appealed to young people looking for a distinct voice. Working in St. Louis in the 1950s were Ike and Tina Turner and Chuck Berry, who will be represented in the exhibit.

Coordinated with the exhibition will be a series of programs featuring African American musicians in St. Louis. "Jazz in the Afternoon" featuring Fontella Bass, opens the series of special programs honoring African American music in St. Louis. On Sunday February 4 at 2 p.m., the renowned jazz singer will perform, accompanied by the David Hines Ensemble. Featured vocalist with the Oliver Sain Revue in the 1960s, Bass eventually moved to Chicago. In 1965 she recorded "Rescue Me" which rose to the top of the rhythm and blues charts and was one of the biggest selling records ever made by a St. Louis artist.

Following the performance, the History Museum will host a reception celebrating February as Black History Month.

Also scheduled in conjunction with the exhibit are the following programs:

"Henry Townsend Plays The Blues."-Sunday February 18, 2 p.m.

"Ragtime in St. Louis", with the St. Louis Ragtimers-Sunday February 25, 2 p.m.

"The Lady Sings the Blues" featuring Barbara Carr and her band-Sunday, March 4, 2 p.m.

Young Audiences Presents "A Salute to St. Louis," with musical selections written by hometown greats, performed by the Gateway Expansion Project, Sunday, March 11, 2 p.m.

"Rockin' with Johnnie Johnson," the original Johnny B. Goode, who played piano with Chuck Berry-Sunday, March 18, 2 p.m.

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## SHARPEES CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

"He Don't Love You Like I Love You" and Hank Ballard's "Thrill On The Hill". Soon Benny hired Horise O'Toole. As Vernon and Stacy recall, Horise was "another Aries" who was "just as young, enthusiastic and crazy as us". Immediately the three became a solid trio. "It was a mix", in their words.

The name changed to New Breed and later to the Sharpees. Occasionally, female vocalists would join tours or do stints with the group. They recorded "My Baby's Gone" in 1961 behind Jessie Smith (Little Miss Jessie) on the Mel-o label. Their success increased.

Horise O'Toole succumbed to tuberculosis and was replaced by Herbert Reeves. Vernon recalls an incident at the Regal Theater in Chicago where the group was appearing with Stevie Wonder, the Silvertones, Jimmie Ruffin, The Elgins, and Barbara Lewis. Backstage prior to the show Herbert was rehearsing a Stevie Wonder tune in his high voice when Stevie himself passed by, appeared to look around, and said "Don't sing my song, man. Don't sing my song."

Vernon and Stacy recall how Benny and they, along with Bellboy, drove on tour with Benny in his '61 Cadillac. They spent almost every moment together whether in town or on the road. They all lived in one apartment building, first in the 5200 block of Cabanne and later the 5500 block. Whatever one did, all did. If one bought a new suit or shoes, the others followed immediately. Vernon states "you were not going to have an original of nothin'. It became a uniform."

Practical jokes were rampant. If you fell asleep with your mouth open you could expect to have red pepper dumped into it. It was not unusual, when putting on a pair of pants to find your pockets filled with coffee grounds or egg shells. The closeness can be seen today when Vernon and Stacy sing together.

The night when Ike Turner walked in the Club Caravan and hired Vernon and Stacy, Ike and Jimmy Thomas went home with Vernon to meet his mother and his grandmother and get their permission for him to tour and assure them of his care. Vernon was fifteen.

Initially he did no solo work with Ike. Instead, he did back-up singing in order to learn songs and routines. When Stacy joined the two would rehearse with Ike on guitar or piano. Vernon recalls they rehearsed Temptations' numbers like "It's Alright", "Keep On Pushin'" and "Got A Smile So Bright" as a duet with Stacy. After a few weeks on the road they returned to East St. Louis where they stayed at Ike's house on Virginia Pl. and recorded their first songs for Ike. Vernon's efforts "You Got Me" and "They Ain't Lovin' You" appeared on Ike's Teena label, while Stacy's "Don't Believe Him" and "Remove These Doubts" were issued on Ike's Sonja label.

The Ike and Tina Revue toured extensively. Vernon recalls they were second only to James Brown's show. The pace was grueling. It was made more difficult because Vernon was called on to do roadie work, even with his star billing. Vernon recalls the final straw came in Dallas. Ike told Vernon to move a heavy speaker. Vernon replied "You hired me to sing." Reflecting on that event now, Vernon says, "I don't know why I got that attitude." When the group arrived in Ft. Smith, Ark. Vernon learned that he was due royalty money for one of his songs. Angry that he hadn't been paid, he went to the bus station and caught a bus back home without telling Ike he was leaving.

After he had been in St. Louis several days he was contacted. While he was at Butch's Barber Shop at Sarah and Page, Jimmy Thomas came into the shop looking for him. Jimmy said that "Bones" (Ike's nickname) wanted him back. After talking to Jimmy about it, he

SHARPEES continued on page 12



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## **SHARPEES** CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

decided to rejoin Ike in Detroit. The two picked up Ike's new Cadillac at Lindburgh Cadillac and drove it to Detroit. After rejoining the Revue, Vernon and Stacy were featured more. Ike also incorporated more of their dance routines for Tina and the Ikettes.

Tired of the road, and in love with a girl at home, Vernon returned to St. Louis, and with Benny Sharp, Stacy, and Horise, formed the Sharpees. In 1967 they were touring with the Drifters. After a show at the Regal in Chicago they were given directions to the next gig in another state. When they arrived they discovered they had been given bad information and the gig wasn't there. Whether the mistake was inadvertent or to get them out of the tour because they were a threat remains an unanswered question but Vernon and Stacy have very definite thought on the matter.

The Sharpees continued their success but changes began to occur. Herbert was killed. The ownership of the Blue Note on Missouri Ave. changed. Benny bought property for his own club, the Crossroads, at 42nd and Bond. Later he moved it to Missouri Ave., just west of the Blue Note. Benny played guitar less and less as James Foxworth began to substitute for him.

Then Benny fell ill and in the course of his illness and recovery he felt the hand of God pulling him away from his musical career to a life more in service to the ministry. He retired from playing in clubs completely in 1978.

Following the end of the Sharpees Vernon began singing on his own. In the early eighties he and Stacy tried to resurrect the Sharpees but the magic wasn't there anymore and the group disbanded in 1985.

Thereafter, Vernon has continued to work, primarily as a solo artist. He has joined forces with Stacy for the Oliver Sain Reunions. Vernon says that "annually me and Stacy get back together and zap 'em." Vernon can be seen performing with Bennie Smith and with Johnnie Johnson at various venues around town.

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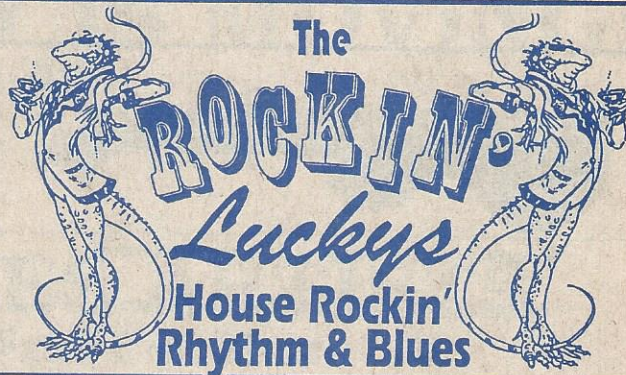
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### BLUE FLAME MEMBERSHIP \$15/YEAR

RECEIVE BENEFITS 1 2 3 4 5 6 AND 7

### BODACIOUSLY BLUE MEMBERSHIP \$30/YEAR

RECEIVE BENEFITS 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 AND 8

### BLUE TO THE BONE MEMBERSHIP \$50/YEAR

RECEIVE BENEFITS 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 AND 9

### BLUE PLATE MEMBERSHIP \$5/YEAR

RECEIVE BENEFITS 1 2 3 4 AND 5

### BLUE BUSINESS MEMBERSHIP \$25/YEAR

RECEIVE BENEFITS 1 2 3 4 5 6 AND 7

RECEIVE A LISTING IN 6 ISSUES OF THE  
BLUESLETTER

PLEASE CHECK DESIRED MEMBERSHIP  
CATEGORY, FILL IN MEMBER INFORMATION  
AT RIGHT, AND SEND THIS FORM WITH  
CHECK OR MONEY ORDER TO:

**THE ST. LOUIS BLUES SOCIETY**  
**BOX 21652**  
**ST. LOUIS, MO 63109**

## MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

- ☐ 1. NOTIFICATION OF CLUB CONCERTS
- ☐ 2. MEMBERSHIP CARD
- ☐ 3. SUBSCRIPTION TO THE BLUESLETTER
- ☐ 4. DISCOUNTS TO SELECTED  
BLUES SOCIETY EVENTS
- ☐ 5. BUMPERSTICKER: BLUES POWER!
- ☐ 6. BLUES CLUB BUTTON
- ☐ 7. BLUES CLUB CAN HOLDER
- ☐ 8. BLUES CLUB COFFEE MUG
- ☐ 9. BLUES CLUB T-SHIRT S M L XL  
(BLUE TO THE BONE MEMBERS CIRCLE SIZE)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (home) \_\_\_\_\_ (work) \_\_\_\_\_

Foreign Subscriptions \$12

I want to actively participate in the Blues Society by contributing my talent or expertise in:

I would be willing to help distribute posters, flyers, or THE BLUESLETTER \_\_\_\_\_

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**Address Correction Requested**