

BLUESLETTER

ST. LOUIS BLUES SOCIETY'S REGIONAL INTERNATIONAL BLUES CHALLENGE



THE ROAD TO MEMPHIS

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Also Inside! The Art of Robert Jr. Whitall at the National Blues Museum
CD Review: Leroy Jodie Pierson -- Bob Baugh's Blues Beat



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

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

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



Dear Readers and Blues Lovers,

I have been approached a few times recently with questions about what the Blues Society mission is, what we are working on, why become a member and what we have planned for the future.

First, the official mission of the STLBS is that we are dedicated to preserving and perpetuating blues music in and from St. Louis, while fostering its growth and appreciation. The STLBS provides blues artists the opportunity for public performance and individual improvement in their field, all for the educational and artistic benefit of the general public. That all sounds good, right? But what does it mean?

In this incarnation of the STLBS, we work to raise the visibility of St. Louis Blues Music and its musicians in several ways. To help expose new audiences to St. Louis artists we have created an annual compilation cd that so far has featured over 60 artists performing all original material. Another way we try to help musicians is by collaborating with venues and events such as the *Big Muddy Blues Festival* or Tuesday Nights at the Dark Room. We also provide a concert calendar on our website so interested music fans can find out who is playing where and when. If you are a venue or musician, please email your schedules to concertcalendar@stlouisbluessociety.org to be included in the calendar for free.

I should note that, generally speaking, the STLBS doesn't do booking of bands, but instead reaches out to stages that are already having music and suggest that they include blues. A good example of this is the work Rich Hughes is doing to encourage local community park events to include blues at concert series in the city and the county. If the producers of these events or other venues are interested, we point them towards the STLBS Musicians Directory which is at the back of the BluesLetter and on our website. MUSICIANS if you're interested in being included in that directory for the potential gigs please contact Lee Howland at musicianslisting@stlouisbluessociety.org. Ultimately providing resources instead of producing shows offers us the opportunity to help more, compete less, and use our limited resources to build relationships and infrastructure.

Some of our other ongoing programs include education such as *Blues in Schools* and our *Race and Blues Conversations*. Education about the blues and specifically the St. Louis story is ALWAYS needed. We can't get enough of it. So, if you're a teacher, school administrator, blues educator or want to find out about other ways to help with education please reach out to Mike Battle at msbbanquets@msn.com.

Clearly one of our more visible projects is the BluesLetter which you are reading right now. The BluesLetter is one of our best tools to share history, event information, biographies, cd release info, and to generally let people know what the Blues Society is up to. We are ALWAYS in need of more writers, article ideas, photographers, advertisers, and engagement at all levels. If you want to get involved with the BluesLetter please reach out to Mary Kay Tonnies at mktonnies@stlouisbluessociety.org

Membership is a key ingredient in the success of the STLBS. At the very basic level this is the best way to help the Blues Society pay our bills, create new programs and continue the programs we already have. A basic membership of \$30 will get you the BluesLetter mailed directly to your house and the new compilation cd when it comes out. We are currently working on reorganizing our membership benefits to include member shows and discounts around town. Stay tuned for that information and in the meantime go to the website to become a member today...or even sign up a friend!

The future of the St. Louis Blues Society looks very good. All of our programming noted here is moving forward. We have several new projects that will be announced in the near future as well as lots of other exciting news. As an all-volunteer organization with a working board we don't always move as fast as we would like. However, we are always open to new ideas, new programs, new music, venues to share, new fundraising ideas and especially new proactive people who want to make St. Louis Blues available to the world!

Finally, my door is always open. If you have questions, comments or concerns please reach out to me or any of the board members. We are here to serve the community as best as we can, but we need your help and input. Thanks to all the volunteers, board members, contributing musicians and everyone who fully supports the idea that St. Louis has and always will be one of the greatest music cities in the world.

Sincerely, Jeremy Segel-Moss, Chairperson, St. Louis Blues Society

E-mail Jeremy
I'd love to hear from you!

Please write me at jsegelmoss@stlouisbluessociety.org
and tell me your thoughts on my letter.

LABOR DAY WEEKEND

24TH ANNUAL

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2-3PM
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FEAT. ERIC MCSPADDEN

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JEREMIAH JOHNSON

4:40-5:40PM
DAVID DEE

6-7PM
UVEE HAYES

7:20-8:20PM
BIG GEORGE BROCK

8:40-9:40PM
HY-C & FRESH START
FEAT. ROLAND JOHNSON

10-11PM
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The Blues Beat ★★

Bob Baugh September 2019

Blues Art in Town

On June 14, amidst a citywide celebration for the St. Louis Blues winning the Stanley Cup, *Happy to Have the Blues – The Art of Robert Jr. Whitall* opened at the National Blues Museum. Among the forty-one colorful paintings you will find local favorites, Big George Brock, Marsha Evans and Gus Thornton. These were commissioned by the museum for the exhibit. Local blues artists Marsha Evans, Jimmy Hines, Little Dylan Triplett, Chuck Loeb, Bob Case, Paul Niehaus, Bob Kamoske, Hy-C and Roland Johnson all had a chance to see the art and meet Junior. (Story and photos on page 10.) You can check out the exhibit through September 3.

Whitall is also the publisher of *Big City Rhythm and Blues* which has been running St. Louis stories over the past two years. He says he has “become a believer that something special is going on in St. Louis and that the city’s important role in the history of the development of the blues has been overlooked.” He said he “hopes to help remedy that.” While he was here, Junior did a cover shoot with Hy-C and the Fresh Start Band in front of the museum for an upcoming issue that will feature St. Louis blues music scene.

A St. Louis Splash with Blues Blast

This year’s *Blues Blast* nominations had a big St. Louis presence. Fan voting to determine the winners began July 1, 2019 and continued until August 16, 2019 on the *Blues Blast* website. Winners will be announced September 13 in Rockford, IL. Tickets to the awards event are available on the *Blues Blast* website: bluesblastmagazine.com/blues-blast-music-awards-tickets-2/. St. Louis nominees included:

Paul Niehaus and his Blue Lotus label received a third *Blues Blast* nomination in the Soul Blues category with Ms. Zeno the Mojo Queen’s *Back in Love*. His previous nominations were for Roland Johnson’s *Imagine This* and Gene Jackson’s *1963*. **Jeremiah Johnson** whose album *Straitjacket* has been on the charts for months received two nominations. One was in the Rock Blues category and the other was in the Sean Costello Rising Star Award category. St. Louis fans know Johnson has paid his dues for this recognition.

Mike Zito who always points to growing up in south St. Louis and the music he learned here, was also a nominee in the Rock Blues category for his *Class Life* album. He and Jeremiah Johnson are both with Ruf records and have appeared together on several occasions.

Henry Townsend came up big in the Historical or Vintage Recording category with two nominations from the Omnivore Records reissues of Townsend’s *Mule* and the Henry Townsend and

Roosevelt Sykes collaboration, *Blues Piano and Guitar Washington University 1973*. The new release of *Mule* also includes updated liner notes and photos from original co-producer and Night-hawk founder, Leroy Jodie Pierson, who has co-produced with Grammy Award-winner, Cheryl Pawelski to create this definitive edition.

The Townsend Piano Project

The two *Blues Blast* nominations are a timely reminder of this important preservation project. A successful May 26 fundraiser was held at BB’s Jazz Blues and Soup to kick off the effort to restore the piano of Grammy-winning St. Louis blues musician Henry “Mule” Townsend. The piano, donated to the Missouri Historical Society in 2008 by Henry’s son, Alonzo Townsend, needs an extensive and expensive restoration for the Missouri History Museum’s 2021 exhibit on the history of St. Louis music. Please consider donating to the cause: Checks can be made out to Missouri Historical Society with “Townsend Piano” in the memo line, and mailed to Missouri Historical Society, PO Box 775460, St. Louis, MO 63177. Credit card donations can be made at: www.mohistory.org/piano.

Album Alert

There’s a lot of new original St. Louis blues music out there with more on the way.

Odds Lane held a release party at the National Blues Museum June 7 for their release of their third album *Lost and Found*. Critics have taken notice of the “jazzy blues infused” music of Doug Byrkit - guitar/bass/vocals and Brian Zielie - drums. Mike Zito (Ruf Records) weighs in as the producer and slide guitar player on this issue from Gulf Coast Records.

Tonina continues to amaze one and all with her multilingual jazzy blues. Her second album *St. Lost* is out, and she is touring in support of it. Her first album *Black Angel* resulted in a favorite new artist rising recognition by NPR and her song “Historia de un Amor” made former president Barack Obama’s top songs list of 2018. You can find her independent release at @iamtonina.

Al Holliday’s newest album, *The All St. Louis Revue Volume 1* is available on Gaslight Records. Holliday says, “it’s a community-based project that is a natural, living and breathing document featuring just a few of our city’s most celebrated contemporary singers and songwriters, recorded live to analog tape over only three sessions.” But that ain’t all, Holliday and the East Side Rhythm Band is hard at work on its own natural Christmas album and they have a fourth full-length album planned for 2020. Whew!

The Alley Tones held a release party May 10 at BB’s Jazz Blues and Soup for their new CD, *Old Stories*. Take it for a spin at: reverbNation.com/thealleytones/songs

Annie and the Fur Trappers keep us grounded in our 20’s and 30’s jazz and blues roots with a new CD, *Muskrat Ramble*. Following the release party May 31 at the Way Out Club, they left to tour the Great Lakes region.

Matt “the Rattlesnake” Lesch struck in late 2018 with his first album, *Furious Strike*. It’s a bluesy rock guitar journey informed by Albert King, Stevie Ray Vaughn and several years as Big George Brooks guitarist. It can be found on all major music sites and cd baby.

Big Mike Aguirre and the Blu City All Stars are putting the finishing touches on this long-anticipated album of original music. Al Holliday has been collaborating in the production of this Dogtown Records release. It should be out in soon. Big Mike has been building anticipation by releasing several singles from it for airplay on KDHX.

Roland Johnson one of our local masters of soul will be releasing his second original CD, *Set Your Mind Free*. This highly anticipated album is a follow up to his *Blues Blast* nominated 2017 album, *Imagine This*. Blue Lotus recordings has just finished the master and the album is expected to be out in August.

Bob Kamoske who appeared on the Blues Society *18 In 18* has followed up with a new album on the Blue Lotus label. *Lost Time* was released July 27 at Off Broadway.

Torrey Casey and the South Side Hustle are following up their two successful semifinal appearances at the IBC with a new all original album, *Hustle On*. The album will be a full-length record has an October focus date. See TeeC’a Easby and Torrey layin it out on the title single at: [youtube.com/watch?v=B-sLVYHYLYg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-sLVYHYLYg)

Amanda Fish is one of the newest members of the St. Louis blues community. Yes, she is the older sister of Samantha Fish. After moving from Kansas City early this year she showed her chops with a killer version of “Ball and Chain” at the *Sittin on the Porch* Jam Session at the NBM. Her first album, *Down in The Dirt*, won her the 2016 *Blues Blast* Sean Costello Rising Star Award. Her second studio album, a 2018 release, *Free*, on VizzTone Label Group, debuted at #6 on the *Billboard Blues* Album Chart and nabbed a 2019 Blues Music Award for Best Emerging Artist Album.

Musicians at Work - Albums Under Construction: There’s lots more music coming. Hy-C and the Fresh Start Band, Little Dylan Triplett, Marty Spikner’s On Call Band, Miss Molly Simms, Daniel “GogStleg” Hamm, and Jon Bonham and Friends are all working on new albums.

Venues and Open-Air Music

The Lumiere Legends Room at the National Blues Museum has added another night of music to their schedule with the start of their 7-10 pm Showcase Saturdays. This brings it to four music events per week with the *Sittin on the Porch* jam on Thursdays 6-9 pm, *Howlin* Fridays 7-10 pm and *Soulful* Sundays 4-7 pm. Check their schedule at nationalbluesmuseum.com.

Blues at the Arch: Fridays in August 6:30 - 9 pm
August 30 - Marquise Knox and Taz Niederauer

Big Muddy Blues Festival

The 24th Annual Big Muddy Blues Festival will be a free, one-day, one-stage show on Saturday, August 31 from 2 pm to 11 pm.

The lineup features the “heavy-hitters” of St. Louis blues artists. The Fab Foehnners with special guest Eric McSpadden at 2 pm; Jeremiah Johnson at 3:20 pm; David Dee at 4:40 pm; Uvee Hayes at 6 pm; Big George Brock at 7:20 pm; The 2018 International Blues Challenge Winners: Hy-C and Fresh Start with Roland Johnson at 8:40 pm; and Marquise Knox at 10 pm.

Despite the shortened schedule, the Landing needs to see the importance of keeping this event alive so please come out, support the musicians and the vendors, and enjoy the day. 🎵

Leroy Jodie Pierson

Rusty Nail with ten previously unissued bonus tracks

Omnivore Recordings, 2019

by Hound Dog Brown

Briefly said, this CD is a reissue of Leroy Pierson's ten track 1988 blues masterwork, *Rusty Nail*, with ten additional tracks that contain some musical sides of Leroy Pierson which you may have never heard before. They were certainly a pleasant revelation to me.

Tracks one through ten are the originals, and feature Leroy on vocals and guitar, with fairly spare accompaniment by Russ Horneyer on bass, and Geoff Seitz on drums and violin. This is guitar-driven blues by a St. Louis master of the craft. These include seven covers of well-known blues, yet with Leroy's own interpretations, including "Roll and Tumble", "Highway 61" and "Little Boy Blue". The other three original tracks are Leroy's own blues compositions, "Rusty Nail", "Easy Rider", and "Long Lonesome Road".

Back in the 1980s, Leroy had a five-man band, The Leroy Pierson Band, which played regularly at the Broadway Oyster Bar and elsewhere in the area. Though this larger band played blues, their repertoire also included rockabilly, rock and roll, country and reggae-influenced sounds. On this re-issued and expanded CD, we hear every bit of this on tracks eleven through twenty. Leroy of course provides guitar and most of the lead vocals, with Ken MacSwan on second guitar, Craig Spellmeyer and Benet Schaeffer on drums, Dominic Schaeffer on sax and harmony vocals, and Tracy Wynkoop on bass.

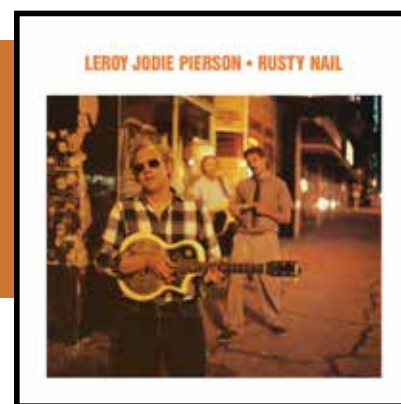
Since I had never personally heard The Leroy Pierson five-piece band, these expanded tracks contain some fascinating musical surprises. Track eleven is a cover of Eddie Cochran's rockabilly tune, "Twenty Flight Rock", with Leroy pulling off some of those hiccup-y vocals which you'd hear on rockabilly records of that era. Leroy explained,

"I always loved rock and roll," and he wanted to put his own spin on songs like this. His band would do three to five rockabilly numbers a night at the Oyster Bar, which were crowd-pleasing favorites. Leroy said that Eddie Cochran's 45 rpm record was his idea of a perfect rock and roll song.

Within five or ten seconds of listening to track 15, written by Leroy and titled "Far and Wide", I jumped out of my chair and exclaimed out loud to no one but myself, "This sounds like Leroy Pierson singing, but it sounds as if he's being backed by the Rolling Stones!" (I assure you; I am not making this up!) Leroy explains the sound on this track was achieved by both he and his long-time pal, Ken MacSwan (who died in 2018), each playing guitars, and each doing additional guitar overdubs. This was an intentional effort to arrive at what Leroy calls "the wall of guitar sounds" heard on the Stones' *Some Girls* album.

Now, I have been aware for a while that Leroy is a long-time fan of the Stones. Leroy describes the Rolling Stones, in the era when Mick Taylor was playing guitar in the band, as "the best rock and roll band I ever heard." He heaps high praise on Mick Taylor's slide guitar talent, particularly on the Stones' cover of Robert Johnson's "Love in Vain Blues", which he describes as "the greatest tribute to blues a rock band ever did." Leroy added the additional info that it was his friend, blues promoter Dick Waterman, who sent the Rolling Stones cassette tapes of songs he felt the Stones should cover, and Robert Johnson's "Love in Vain Blues" was one which Mr. Waterman felt the Stones could do well. Leroy says his five-man band would cover one or two Stones songs per gig.

Another surprise is the appearance of Hank Williams' "You're Gonna



Change". Leroy describes Hank's recording of same as "primal honky tonk" and "pre-rock and roll honky tonk", adding, "I've always had a thing for Hank Williams". But, don't expect this to sound a bit like how Hank did it; listen for some honkin' tenor sax by Dominic Schaeffer for a complete aural shake-up.

"Junko Partner" appears as track 14, which Leroy describes as a rhumba song credited to Bob Shad and first recorded by James Wayne from Texas. And the rhumba rhythm is all there in the percussion and sax fill-ins, something else to please those who are out on the town and looking for some fun in small venues.

And there are straight-ahead blues on the expanded tracks, too. Robert Nighthawk's "Sweet Black Angel" is track 13, done at slow tempo, with Leroy's blazing virtuoso-level bottleneck slide guitar, some sax fill-ins by Dominic Schaeffer, and a guitar solo by Ken McSwan. Willie Dixon's "Back Door Man", Sleepy John Estes' "Everybody Got to Change", and John Lee Williamson's "Good Morning Little School Girl" have all been re-imagined and re-arranged by Leroy Pierson for these recordings, with mid-tempo to fast-tempo, house-rockin' treatments.

So, if you missed out on Leroy's original release of *Rusty Nail*, this would be a good opportunity to avail yourself of that plus ten new tracks with new sounds, amounting to two albums in one. There's plenty of guitar and vocal-driven blues, plus a variety of crowd-pleasing material which was absolutely intended to engage live audiences. Highly recommended! 🎸



jeffchapmanmusic.com
618.292.7196

UPCOMING SHOWS

- Fri. Aug. 30 - CJ Mugg's, Webster Groves MO - 9p
- Fri. Sep. 13 - Evangeline's Bistro, St. Louis MO - 7p
- Sat. Sep. 14 - 1860 Saloon, St. Louis MO - 9p
- Fri. Sept. 27 - BB's Jazz, Blues and Soups, St. Louis MO - 10p
- Sat. Sept. 28 - CJ Mugg's, Webster Groves MO - 9p
- Fri. Oct. 25 - CJ Mugg's, Webster Groves MO - 9p
- Sat. Oct. 26 - Third Base, Springfield IL - 8p
- Mon. Oct. 28 - The Alamo, Springfield IL - 7p

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ST. LOUIS BLUES SOCIETY'S REGIONAL INTERNATIONAL BLUES CHALLENGE



THE ROAD TO MEMPHIS

**WILL YOU BE THE NEXT ARTIST TO REPRESENT THE
ST. LOUIS BLUES SOCIETY IN MEMPHIS?**

**Sunday,
September 22, 2019**

**WINNERS WILL COMPETE IN THE 2020
INTERNATIONAL BLUES CHALLENGE HELD IN
MEMPHIS TENNESSEE**

This Year's IBC Application Process is ON!

Hurry, time is running out.

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Deadline September 1, 2019

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the Solo/Duo or Band application**

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**For more information visit our website:
www.stlouisbluessociety.org**

Musicians Apply Here

The Road to Memphis

by Johnny Willis



The St. Louis Blues Society (STLBS) has been sending bands and solo/duo acts to Memphis for the *International Blues Challenge* (IBC) for several years. Many of our entrants have made it to the semi-finals and last year, Miss Hy-C and Fresh Start won it all—an achievement that did the Blues Society and our city proud. Now it's time to do it again.

The IBC is a worldwide battle of the blues bands that is sponsored by the Blues Foundation and is held in Memphis each January. There are around 250 entries in the band category and about 150 in the solo/duo category.

To determine entrance to each category, the Blues Foundation requires each of the individual blues societies to have their own local competition to determine who will be sent to Memphis to represent that society's region. This year's regional competition, *The Road to Memphis*, is scheduled for September 22 at BB's Jazz Blues and Soups. The window for applications for local musicians began July 1 and will end August 30, 2019. Applications are still available for a very short time on the STLBS website at: stlouisbluessociety.org/international-blues-challenge.

With the wonderful St. Louis music scene, our expectation is that we will always have lots of groups apply in each category, but sometimes it is just a handful. Those musicians that entered and were sent to Memphis are always willing to share their views and experiences of the event with other St. Louis musicians thinking about applying.

Jeremiah Johnson said he entered the competition to, "get a chance to represent my hometown, compete in the largest blues music competition on the planet, and to meet new people who could help me further my career as a musician." Big Mike Aguirre wanted to support the STLBS and noted, "not enough local music acts take advantage of such a great opportunity." Chris Shepherd who has competed both as a band (Kingdom Brothers) and as a duo (Kingdom Brothers Duo) said he was, "looking for exposure and

a chance to compete in Memphis." He also noticed a boost in local audiences and gigs after they had won the competition.

All three learned some important lessons in the process. One lesson for Aguirre was, "that looking and playing the part are factors that are graded as heavily as the music itself." He also learned that the primary benefit of going to Memphis is networking and branding, "The competition is the ticket, but there is much more to be gained outside of the competition if the time, effort and energy is put into it."

Chris Shepard found he deserved to be there, "Well first it was confirmation that we had the talent to stand toe-to-toe with awesome bands from all over the world. It also opened my eyes to how fortunate we are here in St. Louis to live in a place with so much blues heritage. There's a lot of great musicians around the globe that love blues music but don't have the access to people and places that are part of that history like we do right here in our backyard."

Johnson focused on having clear objectives when competing, "One, follow the rules as outlined by the IBC. Every meeting, every set, every form has points associated with them and the winner is often determined by fractions of a point, so get every point possible. Two, you are there to network, only one out of hundreds will win, but every band can make connections that can help expand your career." Johnson also reminisced about how the wonderful people he met helped move his career to the next level.

Many bands are worried about the commitment that it takes to enter the local competition and what that commitment might be if you end up winning. Johnson's drive shows in his response to this question, "If you're serious about your career as a musician, you should always look for ways to improve. The hard work and effort you put into the IBC should then be transferred to your local shows. That's the idea—everyone gets better and the genre improves. If you enter this

competition, you need to be committed to doing the best you possibly can and then take that and use it for every show you do from then on. It's worth the effort, you never know how far you can go until you push yourself."

Shepherd's advice for any band considering entering the competition was all encouragement, "I would say you will be surprised what an honor it really is to represent St. Louis at the IBC. We just did some double bill shows in Australia with one of our friends that we connected with at the IBC. Lastly, I would say bring your best blues. Don't get so caught up in being so different that you choose songs that are not that bluesy."

Aguirre's response was more introspective, "Look in the mirror, be honest with yourself, evaluate what you are and what you want to become. Collaborate. Create and present original music, put your game face on, and challenge yourself to bring nothing but your very best."

Johnson has great advice for any band considering the competition, "Don't be afraid to 'lose' because everyone who enters the IBC is a 'winner.' The experience of competing in the IBC is very motivating. I didn't win my first time I competed in the Houston IBC many years ago. The experience taught me what I needed to work on and gave me a goal. I practiced and came back to win three consecutive Houston Blues Society IBCs and then one in representing the St. Louis Blues Society. My advice is for you to get off the couch, out of the basement and on to that stage. The St. Louis *Road to Memphis* just might be the motivation that will help shape the future of your career. Good luck to everyone!"

If you have any questions about the local IBC competition, please do not hesitate to contact Jerry Minchey at: jminchey@stlouisbluessociety.org. Jerry will be happy to help you with the application process. But hurry! Time is running out as applications must be in by August 31. 🎸

Happy to Have the Blues

The Art of Robert Jr. Whitall

Now Showing at the
National Blues Museum
story and photos by Bob Baugh



Sometimes life comes full circle. Robert Jr. Whitall whose art show, *Happy to Have the Blues*, opened at the National Blues Museum on June 14 would certainly agree. His interest in art was discouraged by his parents but his creative talents would flourish through four decades of photography and music promotion and twenty-four years as the publisher of the nation's largest circulation blues magazine, *Big City Rhythm and Blues* (BCRB). The magazine grew out of an attempt with Charles Auringer (founder/photographer/designer of *Creem* magazine) to start a newsletter for the Detroit

Blues Society. The newsletter didn't work out, but the partnership led to their founding the Detroit based BCRB in 1995. Whitall's contributions to the blues have been recognized by Blues Foundation with a 1998 "Keeping the Blues Alive Award" and a 2019 Detroit Music "Special Achievement Award." It was a life changing event seven years

ago brought him both a new kidney from wife, Shirley Mae Owens, and a return to his long-abandoned pencils and paints. His Outsider Art reflects the vibrant colors of the Caribbean, the spirit of New Orleans the many blues personalities he has known over the years.



What was your first interest in art?

When I was in high school in the mid '60s I was into Gary Grimshaw who did poster art for San Francisco's Fillmore West and Detroit's Grande Ballroom. I loved the artwork and psychedelic lettering. I began drawing that type of art rather than focusing

on trigonometry. My dad threw everything out and banned me from taking art classes. He said, "You're going to be a doctor or a lawyer not an artist." I never did any art until I turned 65 when I got sick.

It took fifty years to pick up the pencils and paint, what happened?

In 2013, I was in Henry Ford Hospital for a long time with cancer and a kidney transplant. I published five magazine issues while I was there, but I got bored. So, I started drawing. I found I had a gift. I can sketch a decent likeness of a person in a couple of minutes. That's my talent. I didn't know I could do that. My first painting was, *Happy to Have the Blues*, which is also the name of my show.

One of your paintings is of the artist Frida Kahlo. That's not music, why her?

Frida Kahlo is my muse. I had seen a double show at the Detroit Institute of Arts that featured her and her hus-

band Diego Rivera's work. They were both in Detroit in the 1930s while he did his famous industrial murals. She spent a lot of time at Henry Ford Hospital due to back injuries from being run over by a bus in Mexico City. In the hospital she painted on her back with an easel overhead. I noticed that all those paintings had a little black water tower in the background. Out of my hospital window I could see Hittsville/Motown, Comerica Park and this little black water tower. One day, I asked the head of the hospital if he knew who Frida Kahlo was. He said, "Of course, she was here in the '30s, this was her room." I totally freaked. So, I started painting.

Pencils, sharpies and acrylic paints are your medium. What is your process?

Many of my paintings started in a hospital in a bed. At home I still paint on the bed because I'm physically impaired. It's hard for me to sit up with an easel to paint. First, I take a picture or look at the person and sketch it on canvas or I may even do it in a little book. If I can get their eyes right that's the key. I start the figure with pencil and later use sharpies and paint to fill it in with color and do background. That's my favorite thing, doing the tiny details that take hours. People notice. My Gus Thornton has BB's Jazz Blues and Soups in the background and the Arch is in Marsha Evans.

How would you describe your art/style?

It's outsider art. It's not supposed to be Norman Rockwell. It's supposed to be a close assimilation of who that person is. I never had training or art

classes. It comes out of my head. I love the breathtaking bright colors of the Caribbean artists. New Orleans is there too. One of my favorite NOLA artists is Richard Thomas. His Fats Domino on my wall took from Andy Warhol. Nothing is new. People learn and copy from each other. Doctor Bob is New Orleans' folk artist who puts bottle caps on his frames. I'm using bottle caps on a couple of mine.



My RL Burnside has his Budweiser bottle caps from his backyard.

How do you decide what to paint? Any favorites?

These are all my muses. I love all kinds of music. These are people that I'm attracted to. I thought Lena Horne was the most beautiful woman in the world until I met Sugar (spouse). I like the old school guys like Buddy Guy. John Lennon and Sly Stone are muses. New Orleans has been a muse and now I'm turning more to Detroit musicians. The next one is always my favorite but I'm never happy. I've done six Muddy Waters but I just haven't gotten it quite right.

Where does artwork fit in your world?

To me painting is the most relaxing thing I've ever done. If I had an hour to

live, I'd paint or dance with my wife. When I'm painting, I have no worries, the bills are paid, and the magazine is rolling.

The NBM is your first exhibit. What do you want viewers to walk away with?

I hope the story gets out that I did this when I was ill. I think that's the best idea I can bring to this whole thing—

Don't give up. Be happy. You're on the planet one time. Enjoy it. I want people to know that here's a talent I had hidden for 50 years. So, don't say you can't sing or play a guitar. Jump out and try it.

Your show runs June 14 - September 3. Any more shows in the works?

Henry Ford Hospital expressed interest in doing a big show but the NBM and the great people in St. Louis took notice

and asked first. I have been asked to do a New Orleans show next year that focuses on my art Indians and musicians rather than my portraits of blues artists. Some of these are in the St. Louis show.

What would you like your legacy to be?

That I shared music and opened doors for people. That's what I try to do. I'm blessed to be here and be able to do that. That I had a wonderful life and surrounded myself with wonderful music. That I inspired younger people. I tell kids, "start now." That's how I got started. John Sinclair told me, "Get a camera, take your own pictures." 🎵

*Happy to Have the Blues continues at the National Blues Museum's Scott and Diane McCuaig and Family Gallery through September 3.
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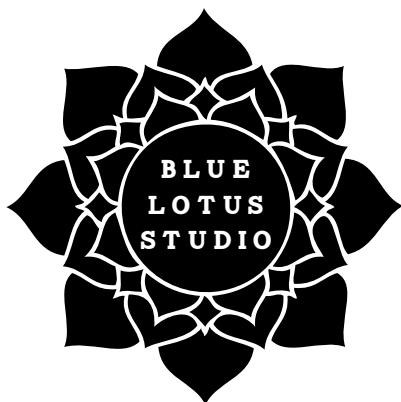
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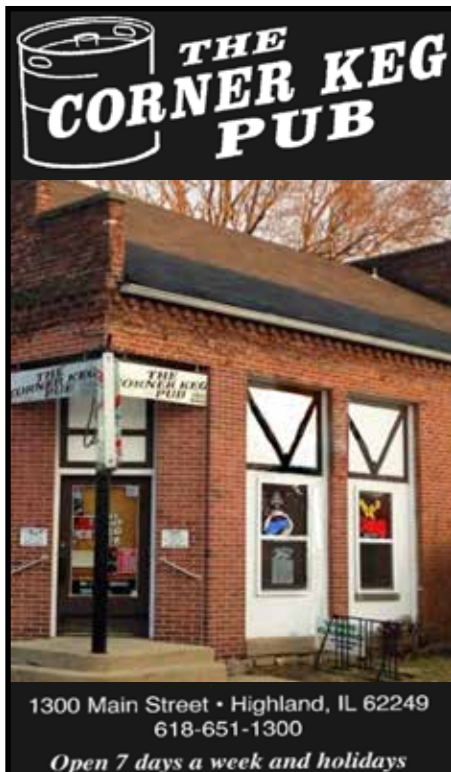
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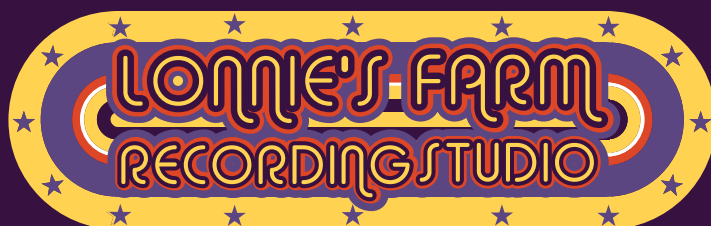
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