

THE BLUES HARMONICA
BY BRADLEY ALSTON/PAGE 12



**KEEPING
THE BLUES
ALIVE!**

Blues Rag

JARBLUES.COM

**BBS
MEMBERS
FREE
SHOW!**

**SPRING
FEVER!**

**JAMES
ARMSTRONG**

**MARCO HUNTING
& FISHING CLUB**

SUNDAY MAY 17



FACEBOOK

**FAST EDDIE
AND THE
SLOW POKES**

SHOW INFO PAGE 3

**BLUES NEWS NEAR & FAR/2 • BBS ON THE GO!/10
BLUESBEAT/19 • BLUES REVIEWS/31**



BluesRag is published by
Baltimore Blues Society, Inc.
PO Box 381, Arnold MD 21012

Send address changes to: **BluesRag**
c/o Baltimore Blues Society
PO Box 381, Arnold MD 21012

BBS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chairman: Bradley Alston
Anthony Bernicewicz
Mae Brooks
Larry Fogelson
Kevin Miskelly
Linda Wagner

OFFICERS

President: Jim Hamilton
Vice-President: Matt Kelley
Treasurer: Marrian McCormick
Secretary: Vacant

NEWSLETTER STAFF

Design: Joe MacLeod (443) 690-3275
joe.macleod@gmail.com

Contributing Writers: Bradley Alston,
Jim Hamilton, Dennis Rozanski, Jr.,

Blues Calendar Listings: Kevin Miskelly
blueslistings@aol.com

Photographers: Bradley Alston
and BBS contributors

ADVERTISING

Jim Hamilton
jim.bbs.prez@gmail.com

Advertising Rates

Full Page - \$100, 1/2 pg, \$60 1/4 pg - \$35

Advertising Dimensions

Full Page - 7 1/2" w x 9 3/4" H

1/2 Page Horizontal - 7 1/2" w x 4 3/4" H

1/2 Page Vertical - 3 5/8" w x 9 3/4" H

1/4 Page - 3 5/8" w x 4 3/4" H

**DEADLINE: EDITORIAL SUBMISSIONS, AD
COPY, OR ART MUST BE IN BY THE 15TH OF
THE MONTH PRIOR TO EACH ISSUE.**

WEB SITE mojoworkin.com

FACEBOOK

facebook.com/BaltimoreBluesSociety

WEBMASTER

Gabriel Yudken
gabrielyudken@gmail.com

The Baltimore Blues Society is an official
501(c)3 non-profit corporation
dedicated to the preservation of America's
Native musical art form - **THE BLUES!**



**The Blues
Foundation**
AFFILIATE

BLUES NEWS NEAR & FAR

BY JIM HAMILTON

Greetings, fellow Blues fans!

The BBS Board is excited to present the inaugural digital *BluesRag*—now in full color. This new flipbook format offers an enhanced viewing experience, with a two-page spread on desktop and a single-page view on mobile devices. A notable new feature—courtesy of our Blues album reviewer, Dennis Rozanski—is the inclusion of hyperlinks within his articles, allowing readers to sample music and view photos of the artists being reviewed. We hope you enjoy this new format.

Spring has finally arrived! We seem to have transitioned overnight from winter's chill to warm weather, blooming flowers, and budding trees. The pleasant conditions set the stage for our "Down Home Blues Party" on March 22 at the Marco Hunting and Fishing Club.

Headliner Brandon Santini and his band—Sean McKee (guitar), Geoff Murfitt (bass), and Ron James (drums)—delivered an outstanding performance. Opening the show, local favorites Pete Kanaras and the Hi-Fliers (Pete Kanaras, guitar; Bob Mallardi, bass/vocals; Roger Edsall, harmonica/vocals; Tam Sullivan, keyboard; Ezell Jones, drums) energized the crowd and set the tone for a fantastic afternoon of Blues music, dancing, food, drinks, and camaraderie. The well-attended event was a great success, with members and guests thoroughly enjoying the performances.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4





1986-2026

OUR 40th ANNIVERSARY

Spring fever

SUNDAY MAY 17, 2026



JAMES ARMSTRONG FAST EDDIE & THE SLOWPOKES

DOORS: OPEN AT 1PM | MUSIC 2 – 6PM

TICKETS: BBS MEMBERS FREE | \$30 NON MEMBERS
INCLUDES A ONE YEAR MEMBERSHIP

MARCO HUNTING AND FISHING CLUB

1307 WILSON POINT ROAD, MIDDLE RIVER MD 21220

www.mojoworkin.org

SOUND BY NAZ BROS

ALL SALES FINAL
FOOD AND BEVERAGE FOR SALE

PUBLIC INVITED
FOOD ALLOWED & BYOB

Looking ahead, our next event—**Spring Fever**—will take place on May 17 at the Marco Club and will celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Baltimore Blues Society. This is a milestone event you won't want to miss.

Headlining the show is internationally acclaimed artist James Armstrong, with Charlie Owen and Pocket Change opening. Born in 1957 and touring nationally by age 17, Armstrong is a renowned American soul and electric blues guitarist, singer, and songwriter. He has released three albums on HighTone Records and is currently signed with CatfoodRecords. His music has also been featured in the films *Speechless*, *Hear No Evil*, and *The Florentine*. [Take a listen.](#)

James Armstrong is the real deal—don't miss it! (See pages 3 and 8 for Spring Fever details.)

Important Reminder: *Spring Fever is free for BBS members.* Please ensure your membership is current. If you need to renew or are unsure of your status, contact me at jim.bbs.prez@gmail.com. When renewing or joining, consider making a small donation to Zeffy, which covers all BBS transaction fees—saving the organization approximately \$1,000 annually. [Join or renew here.](#)

BBS BLUES JAMS

Our second Blues Jam in partnership with Stages Music Arts will be held on Sunday, April 26, from 2–5 PM. This follows our first jam on February 22, which sold out.

The jam is backed by the Matt Kelley Band and is open to both musicians and spectators. Matt Kelley—BBS Vice President—is an accomplished guitarist and a driving force behind these sessions.

The event is free, but [reservations are required](#). *Note:* Depending on when this issue is distributed, the April event may have already occurred. BBS Blues Jams are held on the fourth Sunday of every other month. The next jam is scheduled for June 28—mark your calendars!

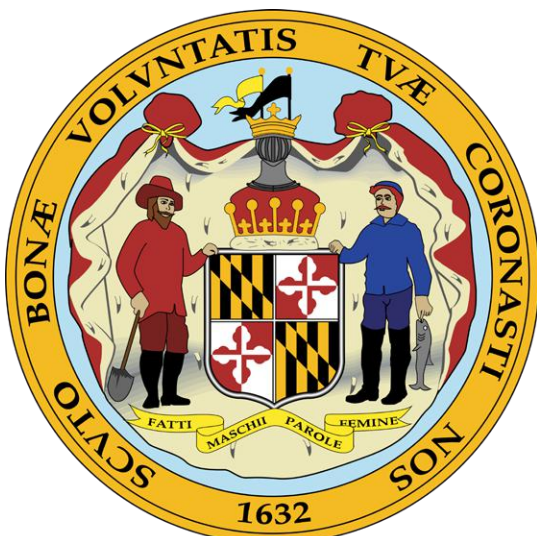
BBS BEHIND THE SCENES

After careful consideration, the Board has decided to discontinue use of the portable stage for the annual Alonzo's Memorial Picnic. Instead, we will rent a stage from our tent provider.

The Board also voted to delay any decision on selling the stage until March 2027. In the meantime, the stage is being stored securely at the American Legion Overlea-Perry Hall. In exchange, they may use the stage for their annual "Be the One"

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

ATTENTION ALL MARYLAND STATE EMPLOYEES AND RETIREES



We are excited to announce that the BBS has been accepted as a designated charity in the annual Maryland Charity Campaign. Please consider including us when you make your designation and encourage your coworkers, friends and family to support the BBS as well.

**You can find us by searching
BALTIMORE BLUES SOCIETY, INC.**

Thank you for your support in helping to keep the blues alive.

MUSIC MASTERS COLLECTIVE PRESENTS



**CATSKILLS
CROSSROADS**

BLUES CAMP

LEARN ★ PLAY ★ CELEBRATE!

Co-Produced by Luther Dickinson and Joel Harrison

CHARLIE MUSSELWHITE ★ BOBBY RUSH

ERIC GALES ★ JON CLEARY

DUKE ROBILLARD ★ LUTHER DICKINSON

RUTHIE FOSTER ★ JONTAVIOUS WILLIS

WITH SPECIAL GUESTS

SOUTHERN AVENUE

CROSSROADSBLUESCAMP.ORG

**MASTER CLASSES • WORKSHOPS
JAM SESSIONS • SUPERB LODGING
EXCEPTIONAL DINING • PERFORMANCES
100 ACRES OF NATURE**

AUGUST 11-14, 2026

Full Moon Resort • Big Indian, New York

veteran suicide prevention fundraiser, and they will have the option to purchase it next year.

This decision was based on several factors:

Storage costs increased to \$90/month (\$1,080 annually), and the stage was the primary item stored.

Renting a stage is approximately 38% less expensive than annual storage costs.

Liability risks associated with transporting and assembling the stage are transferred to the rental company.

Logistical challenges—transportation, volunteer coordination, and setup timing—are eliminated.

Other stored items (tables, canopies, equipment, and supplies) are now housed in a board member's garage. (Thank you, Larry!)

Additional Board initiatives include:

Exploring grant opportunities through the Maryland State Arts Council, Baltimore City Arts Council, Baltimore County Arts Council, and the Maryland Charitable Campaign.

Developing a “Blues in the Schools” program in partnership with Baltimore City Schools.

IN THE NEWS

We're proud to share that BBS member Karen McFarland authored an article titled “*Baltimore Blues Society Celebrates 40 Years*” in the April/May issue of *Big City Rhythm & Blues* magazine.

Her opening line perfectly captures our spirit:

“Blues with a Feeling” is the motto of the Baltimore Blues Society—and their website, mojoworkin.org, is just as cool.

These elements reflect the heart and soul of the BBS. The phrase “mojo working,” popularized by Muddy Waters, speaks to confidence, energy, and personal power—qualities deeply rooted in Blues tradition.

Karen conducted interviews with me, referenced past articles by Board Chair Bradley Alston, and incorporated insights from Board Director and photographer Larry Fogelson. Outstanding work, Karen!

Copies of the magazine will be available at the Spring Fever event.

TICKET GIVEAWAY WINNERS

We congratulate the following BBS members who have won ticket giveaways this year:

Ken & Peggy Kaplan; Mike & Betty Knott; Solon Webb; Mary Shorb; Karen & Barry Leech; Doc Bodine; Lar Ellison; Donna Misiak; Steve D'Adamo; Gayle Harrod & Chuck Ferrell; Elliott Gross; Charlie Heron; Jerry Davis; and Robin & Lou Suess.

Be sure to watch for future giveaway emails and enter for your chance to win!

BOARD SECRETARY POSITION OPEN

The BBS Board is currently seeking a Secretary.

Per Section 5.5 of the Bylaws, the Secretary is responsible for maintaining meeting minutes, membership records, and official correspondence.

Meetings are held virtually via Zoom (quarterly Board meetings and monthly Operations Committee meetings). Zoom's AI tools now provide recordings, transcripts, and summaries, significantly reducing the workload—though final review and editing are still required. Additionally, our Zeffy platform has streamlined membership and ticketing processes. Training will be provided.

If you are interested, please email a brief resume in confidence to: jim.bbs.prez@gmail.com

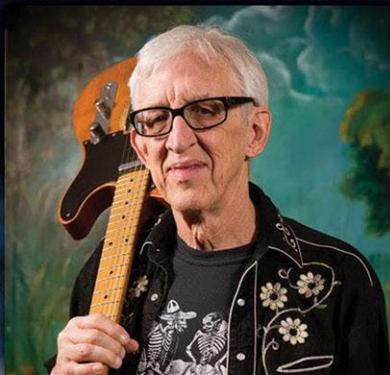
We look forward to seeing you at **Spring Fever!**

RAMS HEAD *On Stage*

COMING SOON



05.06 COLIN JAMES,
MATT ANDERSEN &
TERRA LIGHTFOOT



05.17 BILL KIRCHEN
BAND



05.23 INDIGENOUS



06.11 ORIANTHI



07.01 MARSHALL
MORLOCK BAND



07.25 FREDDY JONES BAND



08.12 SOUTHERN AVENUE



08.17 THE RECORD
COMPANY



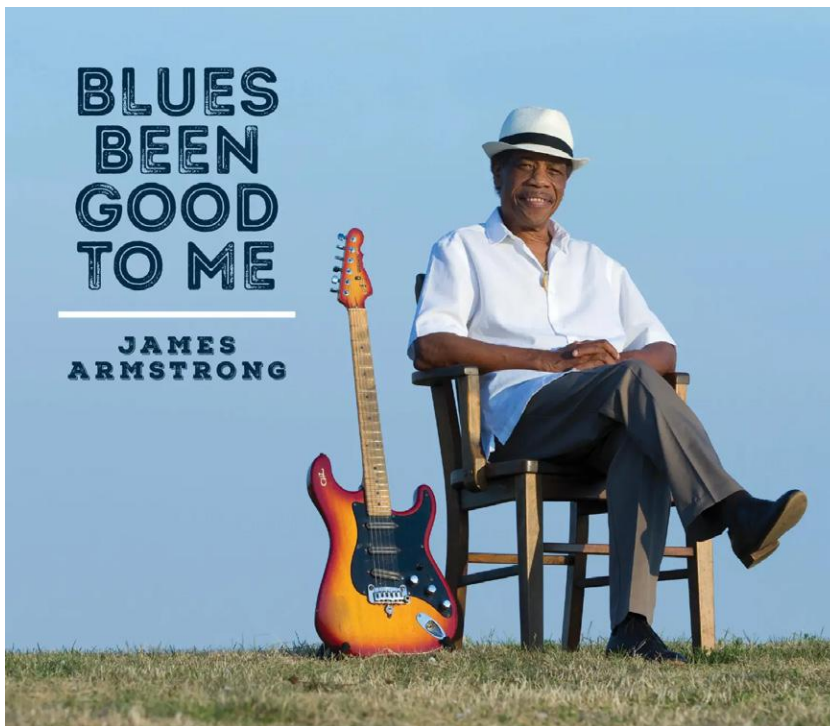
SCAN FOR
TICKETS

RAMSHEADONSTAGE.COM | 33 WEST ST, ANNAPOLIS, MD | (410) 268-4545

SPRING FEVER!



JAMES ARMSTRONG



Born into a musical family in 1957 in Los Angeles, James Armstrong had blues music in his blood from the very start. His Mom was a blues singer, his Dad played jazz guitar. Armstrong formed his first band in the 7th grade, and by age 17 he was touring the country.

James would start making waves on the local California blues circuit by his 20s, becoming the youngest member of Smokey Wilson's band. In the 1980s, James was a founding member of the band Mama Roo and received his first recording contract for Crescendo Records.

In the early 90s, James got plenty of exposure from his musical influences, including Albert Collins, and Sam Taylor. Shortly after that, he was discovered and signed by HighTone Records owner Bruce Bromberg, who had discovered and signed Robert Cray and Joe Louis Walker.

Armstrong was about to tour with his critically acclaimed first album, *Sleeping with a Stranger*, when tragedy struck. The events surrounding a home invasion left Armstrong without the use of his left hand and arm, including permanent nerve damage. This threatened to end his career forever; but thanks to the support of friends, fans and the blues community, Armstrong came back two years later with a second album, *Dark Night*.

What Armstrong lost in the tragedy he gained in “a whole new respect for the music itself, the power in slow blues, how the silences between the notes are as important as the notes.” Armstrong also turned his efforts to perfecting his songwriting, vocal and slide guitar skills, all the while developing his gift for turning hardship into song. The results were a third album, ***Got It Goin’ On***. The CD garnered two Blues Music Award nominations for “best blues guitarist” and for “best song of the year” with “Pennies and Picks.”

James was also noticed by the music industry, having songs in three major motion pictures. “Bank of Love” was used in ***Hear No Evil***, with Martin Sheen and Marlee Matlin. “Two Sides to Every Story” was featured in ***Speechless*** with Michael Keaton and Geena Davis, and also in ***The Florentine*** with Jeremy Davies and Luke Perry. Over the years, Armstrong has performed in many countries throughout North America, Europe, Scandinavia, Asia and the

Middle East. Armstrong has shared the stage with many artists like ‘Keb Mo’, Coco Montoya, Chaka Kahn, Tommy Castro, Shemekia Copeland, Tab Benoit, Charlie Musselwhite, Walter Trout, Doug MacLeod, Roy Brown, Ricky Lee Jones, Jan and Dean, Mitch Mitchell, and many more.

Blues Been Good to Me is his latest release on CatFood Records (October 20, 2017). Armstrong released two prior CDs with CatFood Records: ***Blues at The Border*** (2011) and ***Guitar Angels*** (2014). Both CDs ranked in the top 40 of the year ratings in Living Blues radio charts.

Armstrong continues to tour extensively. He pays tribute to the past with the traditional blues, and his unique songwriting skills. Using both slide and pick, James’ guitar playing is some of the smoothest in the business. James regularly brings his vibrant and welcoming live shows to people around the globe.



FAST EDDIE AND THE SLOW POKES

Fast Eddie & The Slowpokes are guaranteed to get you up on your feet! The Slowpokes playlist is inspired by classic blues material from Chicago to West Coast Swing, Motown to Muscle Shoals, and all the rock n’ roll in between.

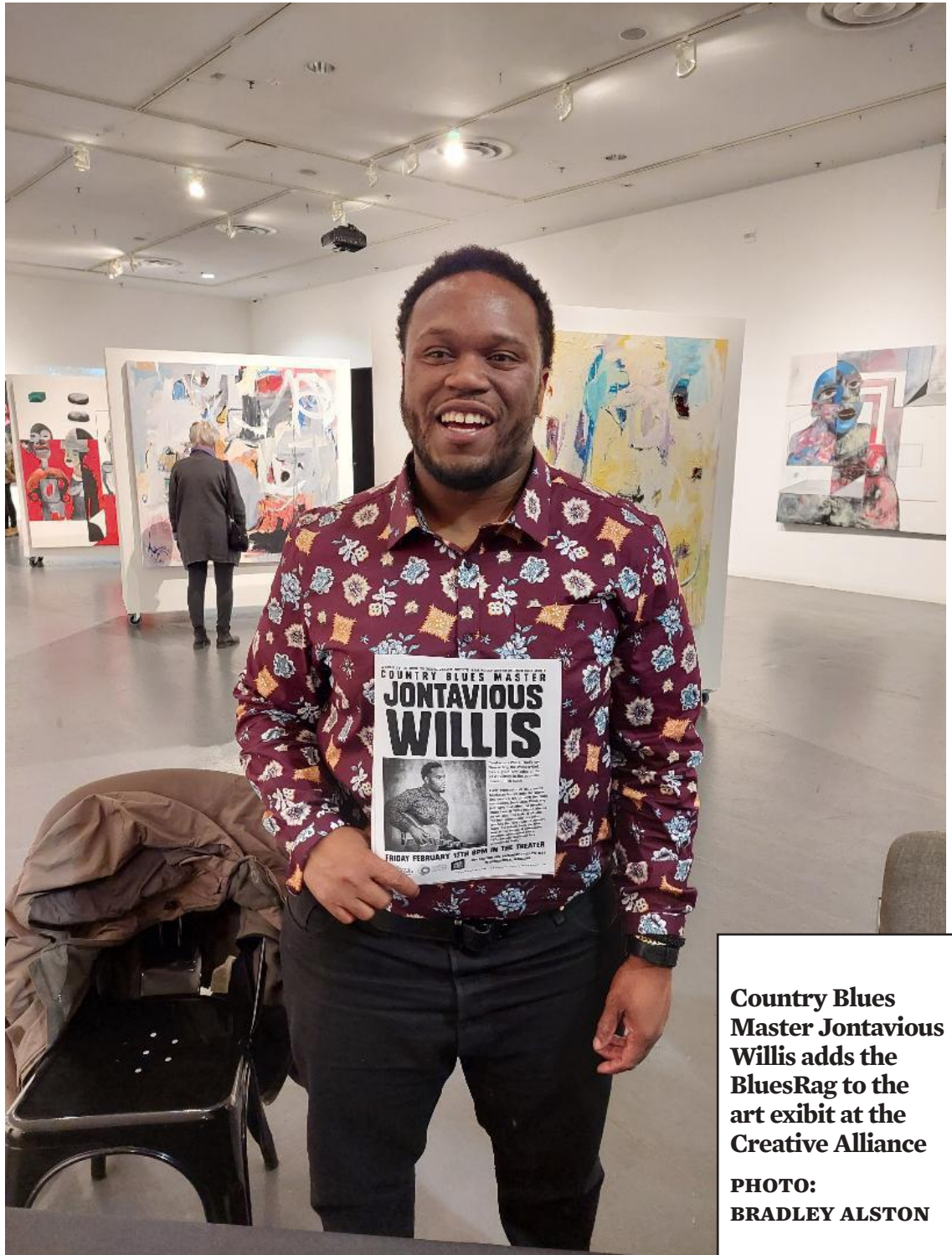
Fast Eddie & The Slowpokes have performed from Philly to

Memphis, from The Kennedy Center to festivals to roadhouses. They have shared the stage with Mark Hummel, Victor Wainwright (2016 BMA Entertainer of the Year), The Nighthawks, Junior Watson, Big Joe & The Dynafloes, The Andy T Band, Jimmy Thackery, and Phil Pemberton of Roomful of Blues. They won the 2016 and 2012 DC Blues Society Battle of the Bands and represented the DC Blues Society at the 2017 and 2013 The International Blues Challenge in Memphis! In 2017, they were Semi-Finalists at the International Blues Challenge! In 2024, they were finalists for Best Blues Band by the Maryland Music Awards.



BBS ON THE GO!

SEND YOUR
travel picture
featuring a
**Baltimore
Blues Society**
item (*BluesRag*
magazine, BBS
t-shirt, BBS
cap, etc.) and
we will
showcase your
travel memory
on our
Facebook page,
web site, or
in the next
BluesRag!
It's fun!



**Country Blues
Master Jontavious
Willis adds the
BluesRag to the
art exhibit at the
Creative Alliance**

**PHOTO:
BRADLEY ALSTON**

Just take your picture and send to: bluesguy0411@gmail.com
Be sure to include the location and your name! It's that easy!

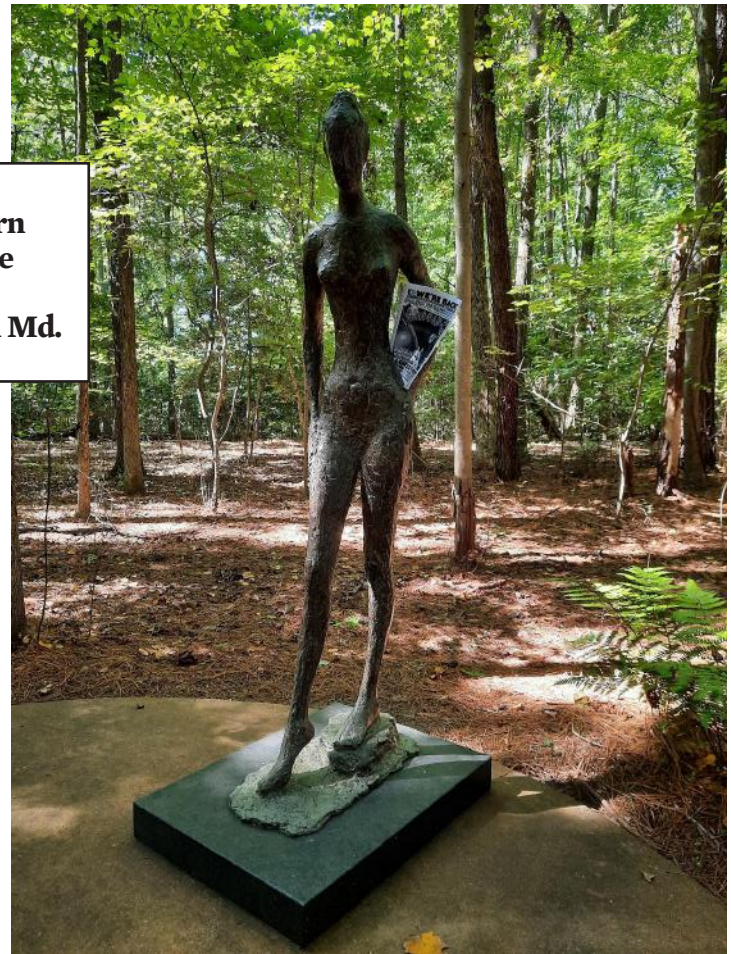


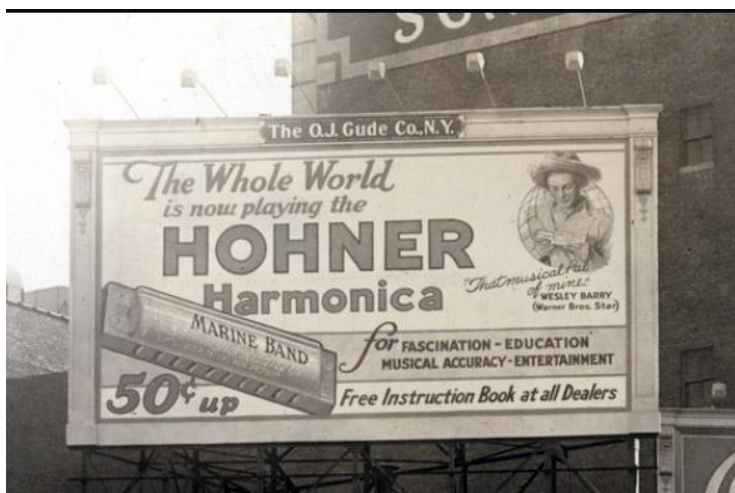
**Jazz Webb
Mae Brooks
Marcia Coffett
Charlie Frank
Vero Beach
Blues Festival
Fla**



**Roy Maddox
sporting the BBS
cap at St
Petersburg Fla's
Museum of Fine
Arts.
PHOTO: DIANE
LANGHORNE**

**Hirshhorn
Sculpture
Garden
Solomon Md.**



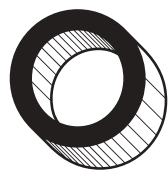


THE BLUES HARMONICA: A RETROSPECTIVE

BY BRADLEY ALSTON



BBS Harmonica Blow Out, June 2017. PHOTO: BRADLEY ALSTON



ON THIS THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY of the founding of the Baltimore Blues Society, we are going to look at various Blues histories. As we get further away from the founding, it may be prudent to look back on the road to today. WPFW-FM blues historian and announcer Bill Wax has a wonderful program on Saturdays he calls "Roots and Fruits." Today we are indeed seeing the fruits of the only music indigenous to the United States. The Blues roots can be traced back to at least the 1890's. At our March 2026 show was featured harmonica ace, Brandon Santini. Brandon is a gifted representation of a broad field of talented and versatile harmonica artists who stand on the broad shoulders of early Blues creators.

The Baltimore Blues Society logo design is a picture of famed, Chicago harmonica bluesman Little Walter Jacobs along with the title of one of his biggest hits, "Blues with a Feeling." The BBS has long had an affinity for the instrument from the society's early concert bookings in the 1980's to the explosive "Blow Your Face Off" all harmonica show with Johnny Sansone, Mark Wenner, and Lil' Ronnie Owens at Rosedale American Legion Hall. Modern harmonica blues players like Kim Wilson, Jason Ricci, Billy Branch, and John Nemeth regularly headline festivals, and regional talents like Mickey Junior and Dennis Gruenling have broken out into national prominence. The blues harmonica was not always the ascending instrument that it appears today. It never really caught on with the early Delta blues founding fathers and the Texas blues pioneers ignored the instrument. The harmonica found acceptance in the early 1900's in southern urban centers like Memphis, Louisville and St. Louis. It was pioneered by minstrel show musicians, early country music players and Jug bands. The harmonica traveled north along with the Great Black Migration that started during the first World War. Its growth in the north was greatly aided by electrical amplification. The 40's through the early 60's saw the grand heyday of the blues harmonica. Chicago was the incubator and spawned the instrument's first super star, John Lee Curtis "Sonny Boy" Williamson. Another Chicago transplant, Muddy Waters created a band at Chess Records, that produced a cadre of influential harmonica players whose musical impact can only be matched by Miles Davis proteges in jazz. Muddy's harmonica players included; Little Walter, Big Walter, Junior Wells, George "Harmonica" Smith, James Cotton, Issacs Washington, Paul Oscher, Paul Butterfield, Henry Strong, George "Mojo" Buford, Carey Bell and Jerry Portnoy. Many, if not most of our modern-day harmonica players claim one or more of Muddy Water's harp players as their formative influences and Little Walter is usually number one. But who were Little Walter and Muddy's other esteemed harmonica players, teachers and guides? Who indeed were instrumental in developing the early rudiments of the blues harmonica? That question is what



**Kim Wilson and Bradley at Rams
Head PHOTO STEVE GOMES**

THE BLUES HARMONICA

C O N T I N U E D

this article will attempt to address, so let us examine its history and start that journey with a visit to the origins of the blues harmonica....Asia.

China is credited with the invention of the harmonica a few thousand years ago. It had bamboo reeds and became important in the traditional music and ceremonies of the region. It was called the “Sheng” and the instrument was introduced to Europe in the late 18th century. Shortly afterwards European instrument makers started to experiment with it using metal reeds instead of the wooden ones in the Sheng. Several different people worked on the instrument throughout Europe and America but the credit for its invention can be credited to a young German named Friedrich Buschmann. He was a clockmaker, and around 1816 he devised an object used as a piano tuner and called it “mundaeoline”, which in



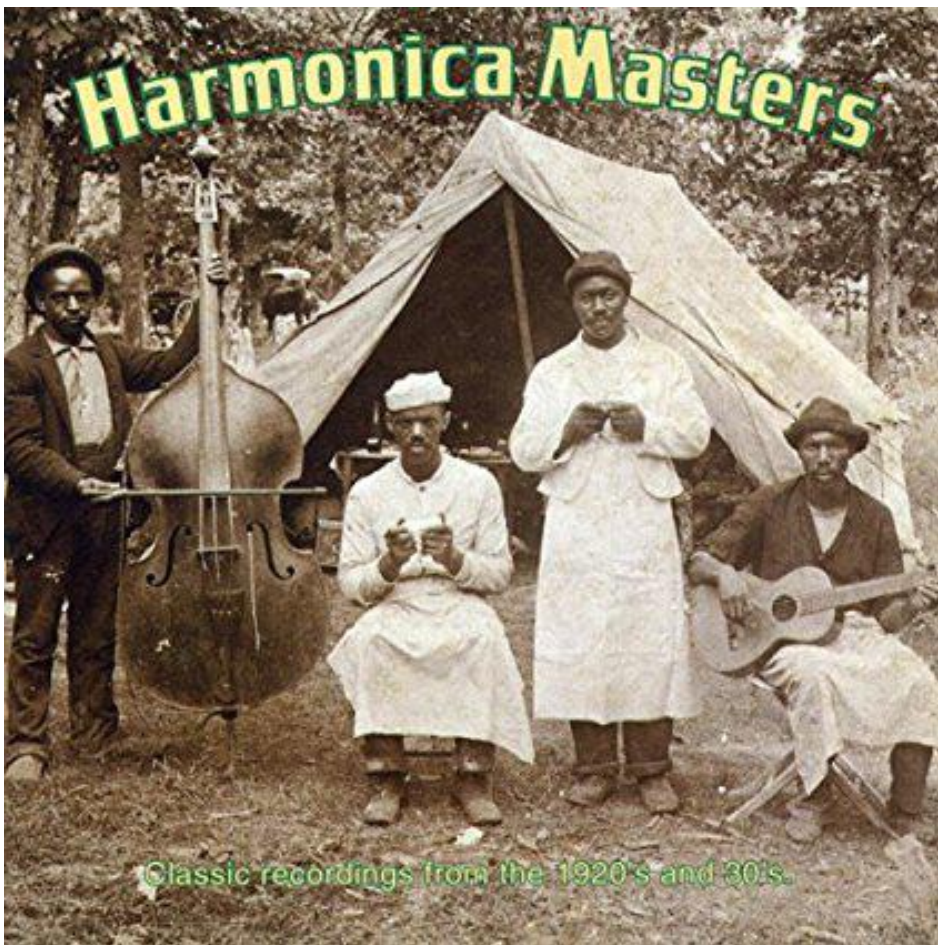
Deford Bailey

German means “mouth harp.” Friedrich Buschmann also created an instrument with metal reeds, which he called “The Aura.” This instrument became popular; however, it only provided blow notes. The term “Harmonica” was originally an all-purpose term, which referred to several different instruments. Around 1825, a European named Joseph Richter invented an instrument which has become the modern harmonica. This instrument had 10 holes and

two reed plates, each with 10 metal reeds. This meant that each hole had two reeds, one which sounded when blowing, the other which sounded when breathing in. The notes Richter chose for the reeds in his instrument are the same as current diatonic harmonicas.

Mass production of harmonicas began in Vienna in 1829. Harmonicas were soon produced in other cities as well. In Trossingen, a village in Germany, Christian Messner and his cousin Christian Weiss began producing harmonicas in their spare time (their main craft was clockmaking). This business became successful. Some years later, another Trossingen clockmaker, named Matthias Hohner, visited Messner and Weiss, and learnt their harmonica construction technique. He then began his own harmonica business.

By the 1870s, mass production began at the Hohner Company and they started an aggressive overseas marketing campaign; the harmonica now looked very much like the ones we know today. The American Civil War made the harmonica very popular in the USA. Hohner had already sent harmonicas over and the soldiers found it easy to play and carry. Within a comparatively short space of time, the Hohner company was shipping millions of Richter “Marine Band” harmonicas to America every year. Around the 1900s, half of the harmonicas made in Germany were sold to the United States. In the 1920s, Hohner was making millions of harmonicas every year, and distributing them all over the world. From then on, they have been the leading harmonica company. Up until then, harmonicas could only be played in a major scale (or natural minor), so by blowing naturally,



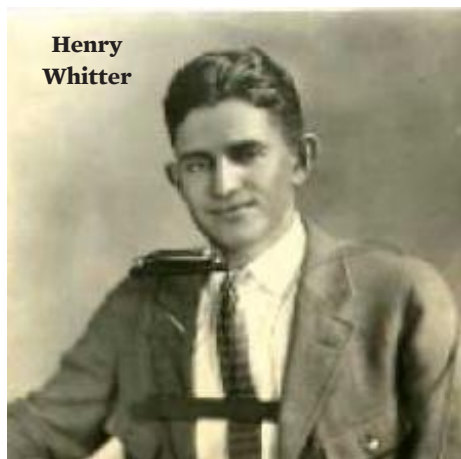
you could not get any half steps or sharps and flats. Hohner developed a chromatic harmonica that could play all 12 notes of a scale, making it a very versatile instrument which is used for music which requires a great variety of notes.

The first blues artist to be recorded according to the *"All Music Guide to the Blues"* was the mysterious **George "Bullet" Williams** who disappeared "into the mists of time." Williams was born in Alabama, probably around 1910, either in or near Selma. In the late 1920's he was primarily a street performer in Jackson and Meridian, and in the 1930's he often played with Bukka White. He was described by Ishmon Bracey as "a big ugly man" who "played the harmonica through his nose." Other sources cite **Pete Hampton** (April 7, 1871- March 16, 1916) as probably the first blues harmonica player to be recorded. Despite a productive recording career in the early 1900s, he only seemed to have used the harmonica for one song titled "Mouth Organ Coon", where the harmonica probably adopted the term "Mouth Organ". He already used many effects including vocalizing through the harmonica, the use of fox chase and train-like rhythm arrangements and simultaneous whistling. Hampton's musical performances are of various musical genres. Although he was not a blues musician in the general sense, he is regarded as an important blues harmonica pioneer. In his performances he played the five-string banjo and the harmonica. Besides being an instrumentalist, he was also a composer and singer.

Soon after that, **Henry Whitter** (April 6, 1892 - November 17, 1941) was the first to record in the cross-harp position. Even though he was a white musician, he had adopted a remarkable African-American influence on his harmonica playing. He



Peter Hampton and wife, Laura Bowman, 1910



Henry Whitter

claimed to have made test recordings in March 1923 and recorded the final tracks around December 1923 in New York City, recording the first three harmonica solos as well as "Lonesome Road Blues." Whitter also made many outstanding early country recordings like "Rose Conley" with the blind fiddler, G.B. Grayson.

Another early country music star was **DeFord Bailey** who became the first African American performer on the Grand Ole Opry, which was a weekly country music stage concert in Nashville, Tennessee

that presented different artists from the genre from 1925. Bailey could play various instruments but he was best known for playing the harmonica and he played every Saturday night for 15 years. A grandson of slaves, Bailey was born in Smith County, Tennessee and learned to play the harmonica at the age of three, when he contracted polio (or, as it was called at the time, infantile paralysis). The months that he was laid up in bed was used to develop his distinctive harmonica style. At the end of World War I, he found himself in Nashville play-

THE BLUES HARMONICA

CONTINUED

ing for tips on the street. One fall day he was discovered by Grand Ole Opry pioneer Dr. Humphrey Bate, who insisted upon presenting and sponsoring him on the Opry. His first radio appearance was on June 19, 1926, on Nashville's WSM. On December 10, 1927, he debuted his trademark song, "Pan American Blues" (named for the Louisville and Nashville Railroad's Pan-American), on a program then known as the WSM Barn Dance. At that time Barn Dance aired after NBC's classical music show, the Music Appreciation Hour. While introducing Bailey, WSM station manager and announcer George D. Hay exclaimed on-air, "For the past hour, we have been listening to music largely from Grand Opera, but from now on, we will present 'The Grand Ole Opry.'" "Pan American Blues" was the first recording of a harmonica blues solo.

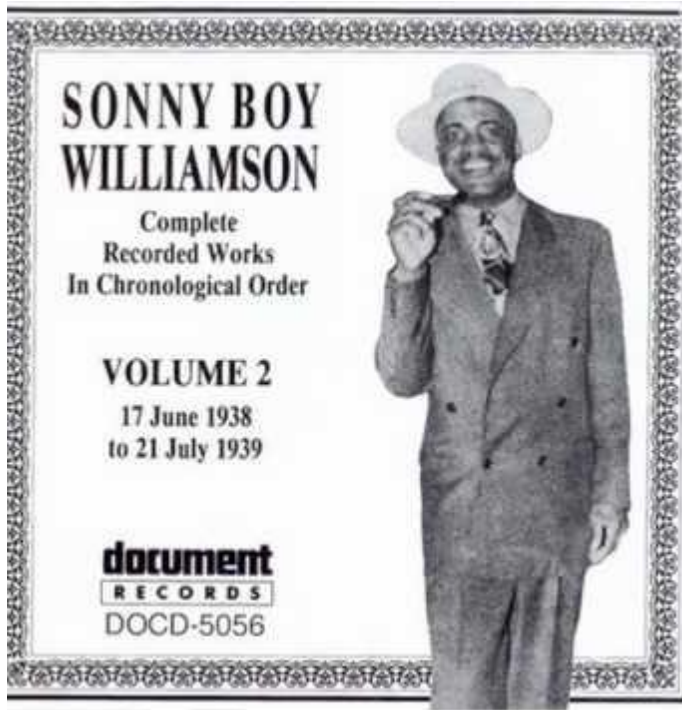
Prior to World War II, the blues harmonica was not a prominent instrument in blues bands. In the urban south a popular band ensemble were the "Jug" bands. A jug band is a band employing a jug player and a mix of conventional and homemade instruments. These homemade instruments

are ordinary objects adapted to or modified for making sound, like the washtub bass, washboard, spoons, bones, stovepipe, and comb and tissue paper (kazoo.) Generally, they did not employ a harmonica but one of the best, Gus Cannon Jug Stompers, did just that with **Noah Lewis**. Lewis (September 3, 1891 – February 7, 1961) was born in Henning, Tennessee, and learned to play the harmonica as a child. He moved to Memphis, Tennessee, in his early teens, where he met Gus Cannon in 1907. By that time, he was already a respected original stylist on the harmonica, noted for his liquid tone and breath control, which allowed him to generate enormous volume from the instrument. By then he was also noted for his ability to play two harmonicas at once – one with his mouth and one with his nose, a trick he probably taught to Big Walter Horton, who recorded briefly as a teenager with the Memphis Jug Band some 20 years later. Lewis developed unusual levels of breath control and volume from playing in string bands and brass marching bands on the streets of Memphis. He was an important component of the Cannon ensemble and was on the group's debut recording on Paramount Records in 1927. He was on all their recordings until the final in 1930. The band's song "Walk Right On In" became the nation's bestselling record in 1963 by the Rooftop Singers and the Grateful Dead mined the bands tunes for some of their early blues influenced

recordings. Lewis later recorded with Yank Rachell and Sleepy John Estes but slipped into obscurity during the lean depression years.

Another alumnus of early jug bands who influenced modern players was the amazing, but lesser-known blues harmonica player, **Hammie Nixon** (January 22, 1908 – August 17, 1984) Nixon was orphaned at a young age and spent his youth in foster homes. He entered music in the 1920's excelling on jug, kazoo and guitar. Hammie Nixon played with the great Sleepy John Estes for over a half century. He also recorded with Charlie Pickett, Lee Green and Buddy Doyle. Nixon pioneered the use of the harmonica as an accompaniment instrument. Prior to Nixon's innovations it had been used primarily as a solo instrument. After Estes death, Nixon returned to playing with jug bands from 1979 until his death in 1984.

Named for the 25th president of the United States, William McKinley "Jazz" Gillum (Sept 11, 1904–March 29, 1966) was second only to Sonny Boy Williamson I in popularity and demand for recording sessions in the 30's. Hailing from the same hometown in Mississippi as BB King, **Jazz Gillum** was a self-taught harmonica prodigy. He ran away from home at age seven and lived with relatives in Charleston Mississippi. He worked odd jobs and played on street corners for tips. A trip up north to Chicago impressed the 21-year-old and he



decided to relocate. In Chicago he met Big Bill Broonzy and the two started working club dates as a duo. By 1934 Gillum was recording for ARC Records and Bluebird Records. Gillum's recordings, under his own name and as a sideman, were included on many of the highly popular "Bluebird beat" recordings produced by Lester Melrose in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1940, he was the first to record the blues classic "Key to the Highway" (featuring Broonzy on guitar) utilizing the now-standard melody and eight-bar blues arrangement. The song had first been recorded a few months earlier by Charlie Segar, with a different melody and a 12-bar blues arrangement. Gillum's version of the song was covered by Broonzy a few months later, and his version has become the standard arrangement of this now-classic blues song. After Bluebird Records folded, Jazz Gillum appeared to have been adrift. His career declined save for a recording with Memphis Slim and some Folkways Records side work.

John Lee Curtis "Sonny Boy" Williamson (March 30, 1914 – June 1, 1948) was the transitional force in the development of the modern blues harmonica. He stands at the apex of all that came before and all that came after. He recorded 120 sides in his brief life and recording career. Born in Madison County near Jackson, Tennessee, he and his half-brother spent summers in St. Louis with their uncle Fred Utley.

As a teen he worked with Sleepy John

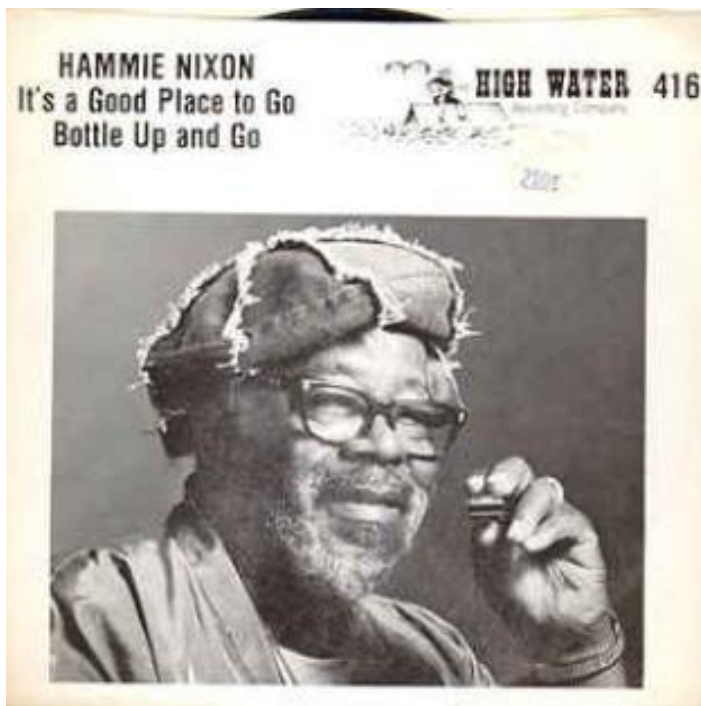


Sonny Terry and Brownie McGee II

Estes and Homesick James in Tennessee and Arkansas. He settled in Chicago in 1934. He is the most important harmonica player to emerge from the mid 30's "Bluebird Blues Sound" that dominated the blues world. His real name was John Lee Curtis Williamson and he was the first to use the name Sonny Boy Williamson. Alex "Rice" Miller, who also used the name after John Lee became famous, "borrowed" the name, but never recorded using it until John Lee died and while the first Sonny Boy was living he

(Rice Miller) seldom ventured far from his Mississippi roots and his King Biscuit radio show, while Sonny Boy I stayed mostly in the Chicago area.

Sonny Boy I started recording with Bluebird Records in 1937 and his first record was "Good Morning School Girl" which became a blues standard. Other songs that have become a part of the blues canon include; "Early in the Morning", "Sloppy Drunk", "Shake the Boogie" and "Hoodoo-Hoodoo" aka "Hoodoo Man



**Some of Muddy's Harmonica men:
Carey Bell, James Cotton,
Junior Wells, Billy Branch.**

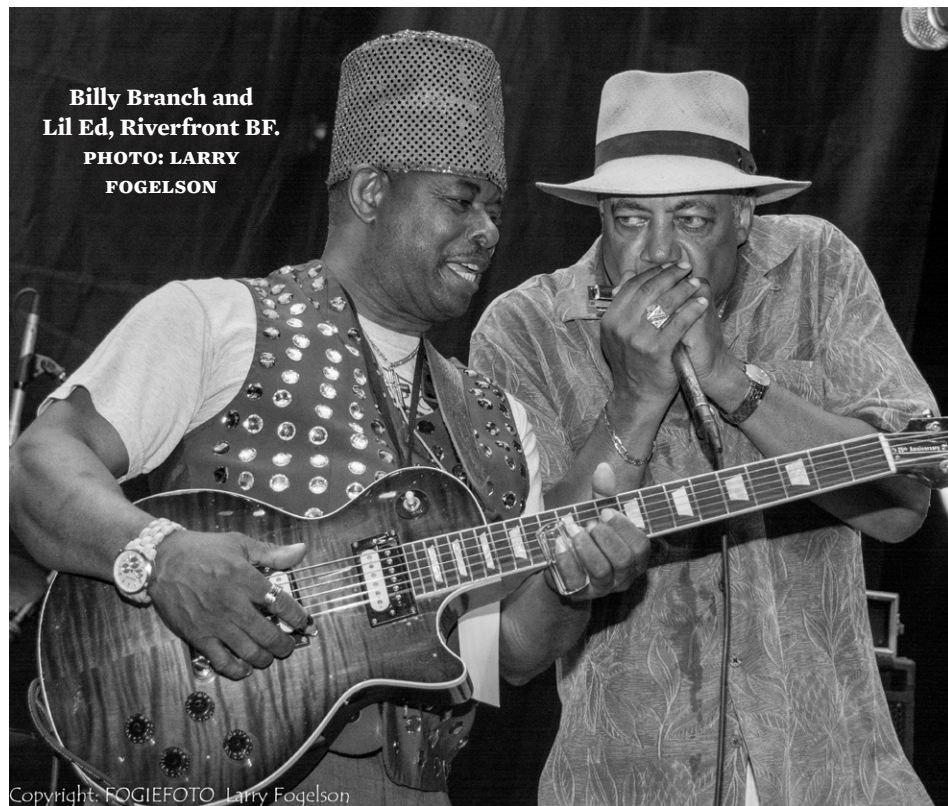


THE BLUES HARMONICA

CONTINUED

Blues". During this time, he also played with a small group fronted by Big Bill Broonzy. In 1947 "Shake the Boogie" reached #4 on the Billboard Race Records Chart. Sonny Boy I have influenced harmonica players like Billy Boy Arnold, Junior Wells, Sonny Terry, Little Walter and Snooky Pryor. He is the link between those modern players and older harp kings like Jazz Gillum, Hammie Nixon, Noah Lewis and before them the rural and Mississippi style. He was the first to take the instrument to a soloist status. He also influenced non-harmonica players like Muddy Waters (who played with him in the mid 40's) Muddy went on to record "Good Morning School Girl" on his 1963 Chess album "Folk Singer" and again when he moved to Johnny Winter's Blue Sky label in 1970. Closer to home here in Baltimore, one of the highlights of John Hammond with the Nighthawks 1979 "Hot Tracks" album on Vanguard Records included Sonny Boy's "Sugar Mama."

While many if not most of the early innovators and practitioner of the blues guitar hailed from the state of Mississippi, the early blues harmonica players favored Tennessee as their place of birth. Starting



TODAY, HARMONICA PLAYERS LIKE MARK HUMMEL, KIM WILSON, BILLY BRANCH, JASON RICCI, JUMPIN' JOHNNY SANSONE, STEVE GUYGER, CHARLIE MUSSELWHITE AND JOHN NEMETH HAVE TAKEN THE BLUES HARMONICA TO NEW HEIGHTS AND PROMINENCE



out as a solo instrument in vaudeville and minstrel shows, the blues harmonica slowly evolved into an accompaniment and then as an ensemble leader. The early harmonica innovators lived hard and sometimes marginal lives and experienced tragic and often horrific deaths. Sonny boy Williamson I was killed during a robbery after a concert just one block from his home. Little Walter Jacobs died from injuries sustained in a street fight after a concert and Jazz Gillum was shot to death. Noah Lewis died of gangrene and in acute poverty and Henry Whitter died of diabetes. Deford Bailey was reduced to shining shoes after he was separated from the Grand Old Opry. Peter Hampton purchased a house in England in 1910 and settled in, but with the outbreak of the

First World War the British government forced all immigrants to leave the country and Hampton returned to America. Never fully recovering from the illness he gained while on the ship returning to the United States, he died three years after arriving in America, in 1916.

Today, harmonica players like Mark Hummel, Kim Wilson, Billy Branch, Jason Ricci, Jumpin' Johnny Sansone, Steve Guyger, Charlie Musselwhite and John Nemeth have taken the blues harmonica to new heights and prominence. They are esteemed by the music industry and enjoy the rewards of their craft. They have built on the hard and long road of their musical ancestors to bring the wonderful sound of the blues harmonica to us all.



BLUESBEAT

PHOTOS BY JIM HAMILTON

"DOWN HOME BLUES PARTY" MARCO HUNTING & FISHING CLUB SHOW ON MARCH 22



DAVID ROSENBERG



RON JAMES



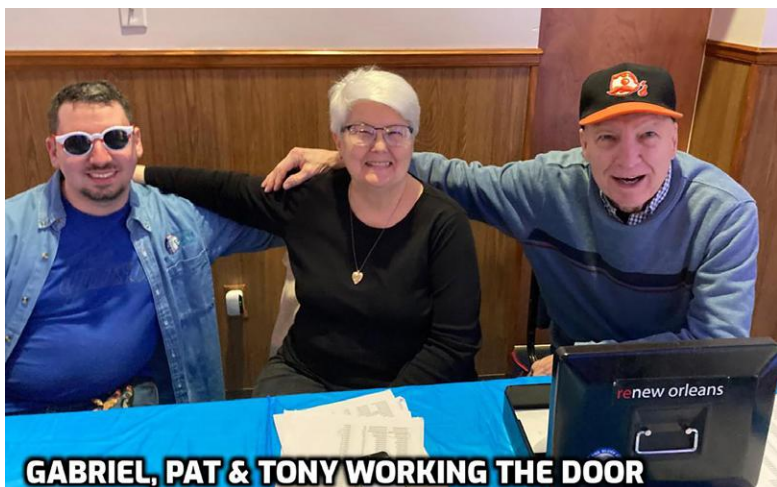
GEOFF MURFITT



TOD GASTON SPORTING VINTAGE MERCH



ROY, DIANE, BETTY AND MIKE



GABRIEL, PAT & TONY WORKING THE DOOR

**DOWN HOME
BLUES PARTY**
CONTINUED



BRANDON SANTINI



GABRIEL, KEVIN, TUDY (MARCO CLUB)



SUE GASTON, MIKE KNOTT



MARRIAN AND MEGHAN MOVING MERCH



KANARAS, MALLARDI, EDSALL, SULLIVAN



EZELL JONES BEHIND THE DRUM KIT



SEAN MCKEE

**DOWN HOME
BLUES PARTY**
CONTINUED





**DOWN HOME
BLUES PARTY
CONTINUED**





**DOWN HOME
BLUES PARTY**
CONTINUED





DOWN HOME BLUES PARTY

CONTINUED





**DOWN HOME
BLUES PARTY**
CONTINUED





NEW MEMBERSHIP/RENEWAL FORM

YES, PLEASE SIGN ME UP TO SUPPORT THE *BALTIMORE BLUES SOCIETY* (BBS)
AND AMERICA'S NATIVE MUSICAL ART FORM – THE BLUES!

THE PREFERRED METHOD TO SIGN UP OR RENEW IS BY CREDIT CARD ON
WWW.MOJOWORKIN.COM

OR PROVIDE THE MAIL-IN INFORMATION REQUESTED BELOW AND INCLUDE A
CHECK PAYABLE TO *BALTIMORE BLUES SOCIETY*:

DATE: _____

NAME: _____

STREET: _____

CITY/STATE/ZIP: _____

PHONE: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

MEMBERSHIP LEVEL: ☐ INDIVIDUAL \$30 ☐ COUPLE* \$40

* IF "COUPLE," OTHER PERSON'S FULL NAME AND EMAIL ADDRESS:

IF THIS IS A RENEWAL, HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN A BBS MEMBER? _____

RETURN TO: THE BALTIMORE BLUES SOCIETY, PO BOX 381, ARNOLD, MD 21012

**DOWN HOME
BLUES PARTY** CONTINUED
PHOTOS BY GABRIEL YUDKEN







BLUES REVIEWS

JIMMY BURNS & SOUL MESSAGE BAND

Full Circle

DELMARK RECORDS

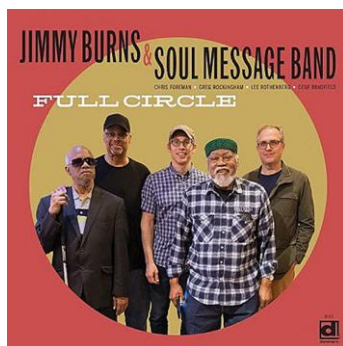
Jimmy Burns is a Chicago bluesman with a secret prior life. Soul Message Band are four of the city's coolest cats, whose burbling 400-pound enforcer is not so secret. Unite them, and their combined mysteries unlock over the course of 50 mentholated minutes.

Burns sits upon a small mountain of blues records, predominantly cut with the hometown Delmark label. That history kicked off in 1996, when the singing guitarist was already in his 50s. *Leaving Here Walking*, his very first long-play debut, was a straight-up blues album that reflected his Mississippi origins on the outskirts of Clarksdale. (Dublin, to be exact; also the birthplace of brother/Detroit bluesman/John Lee Hooker collaborator Eddie Burns as well as harpist Little Willy Foster.) Camouflaged among hard-nosed Delta stuff like "Rollin' and Tumblin'" and "Catfish Blues" were Jimmy's originals, including the entrancing [title track](#). Subsequent albums witnessed his flexibility to break off solo and acoustic ("All About My Woman"), partner with a bank of blastoff horns ("Long As You're Mine"), and hold church ("Wade in the Water"). Not even "[Cold As Ice](#)"—yup, Foreigner's 1977 rock blockbuster—was out of his reach. Burns is a man of many layers.

Plus there is that "secret" twist tied to Jimmy and, in turn, to this new record.

Here, the robust 82-year-old returns to square one, looping back to when he first broke into the business six decades ago. Namely, coming *Full Circle* in the truest sense.

Burns, you see, used to be a soulman. Specifically, his business was Northern soul music—to differentiate from the Southern species classical-



ly associated with the likes of Wilson Pickett, Otis Redding and James Carr. "Through All Your Faults" kicked off his run at fame in 1964. Soon, "You're Gonna Miss Me When I'm Gone" and a real throat-scraper by the name of "[I Tried](#)" piled on, helping to cobble together a name for himself from a string of one-off 45-rpm singles. But that run only lasted for a brief while. By the early 1970s, domestic life came calling, consuming the devoted family man's time at the expense of singing. An extended hiatus set in until that reemergence—and rebirth—in 1996 as a valid bluesman.

Now, not only does *Full Circle* stir personal nostalgia in Burns, which pours out in the liner notes as vivid remembrances: "World of Trouble," for example, is tied to seeing his idol, Big Joe Turner, at Chicago's Regal Theater in 1961; "I Really Love You" affiliates with fellow soulful Chicagoans, The Chi-Lites. The setlist goes one better by rewinding the clock on a handful of those very tracks he cut during the early glory years. A real treat, for sure. But was there a way to elevate such an already special session all the more?

Cue Soul Message Band.

With maestro Chris Foreman's beastly Hammond B3 organ serving as their funky, heavy-weight nucleus, setting fires that burn oh-so-cool comes naturally to the group. Tenor saxophone (Geof Bradfield) and guitar (Lee Rothenberg) bring differing textures and added soloing capacity. Greg Rockingham's



drums motor everything along. An alto saxophone (Greg Jung) and baritone saxophone (Steve Eisen) supplement here and there. Sometimes when the temperament turns soulful, Typhanie Monique's backing vocals play off Jimmy's lead by adding a little butter to his grit. And rest assured that the band is built upon a foundation of seasoned experience: The near-40-year lock between Foreman and Rockingham includes eight years of opening for Steely Dan in their past incarnation as the Deep Blue Organ Trio.

A pair of divergent instrumentals lets the Soul Message Band do their thing on their own. "[Ain't That Funk for You](#)" recalls B3 jazz grooves of the 1960s, such as Shirley Scott's "The Soul Is Willing," Jimmy McGriff's "All About My Girl," or Jimmy Smith's "[Back At the Chicken Shack](#)." Diametrically opposed is "Since I Fell For You," the sax-led torch song.

It doesn't take long, though, for the communal funk to hit the fan. Punctuated by emphatic yeahs and grunted unghs, Burns and company bust out Charles Wright & the Watts 103rd Street

Rhythm Band's "[Express Yourself](#)" from 1970. It's a call to the dance floor that twitched and jiggled its way up both the Pop and R&B charts that year. And then duked it out for 1971's Grammy Award for Best R&B Performance by a Duo or Group with Vocals, which The Delfonics' "Didn't I (Blow Your Mind This Time)" ended coming away with. The perfect gatekeeper for *Full Circle*.

Still, the real déjà vu sets in as Burns freshly reactivates his personal vintage soul discography. "[Give Her to Me](#)" hasn't lost an ounce of friskiness. Still bounding high and low, Jimmy's voice yearns with enough conviction to get the horns blasting and that B3 organ to turn cartwheels in the sunbeams. The misty malaise of "It Use To Be," a Jimmy original, updates to a snazzy, uptown guitar as well as the beefier Hammond organ in place of the Farfisa organ used in 1966. And good news: "I Really Love You" is back surging once again.

In spite of how bouncy those throwbacks are (including "Too Much Lovin'," a finger popper from the "5" Royales), don't get the impression *Full Circle* only swoons. No, the killjoy blues rears its head by stressing out the midnight slink through a laid-back "World of Trouble" as well as making Burns pose the sinking question of "Where Does That Leave Me?" through tear-stained eyes. Pillowy chords billowing from the B3 help soften the blow.

And listen to how "[Rock Me Mama](#)"—the nightlong carnal anthem associated with Muddy and B.B. but likewise pleaded by Jimi to Ike and Tina to Blue Cheer—chills out when swung by hepcats in cahoots with a soulman-turned-bluesman-turned-soulman-with-the-blues.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

FREDDIE KING

Feeling Alright: The Complete 1975 Nancy Pulsations Concert
ELEMENTAL MUSIC

During a temporary lull in an 18-minute public evisceration of "Have You Ever Loved a Woman?," a deep voice booms into the centerstage microphone: "This is the blues ... I'm a bluesman and I've got a blues band." Sounds simple enough. But by that evening on October 10, 1975, such a humble statement of fact seemed like a massive understatement of the legend

BLUES REVIEWS

CONTINUED

standing before everyone. Yet even at that early, early point—only half the way into the set's opening number—he and his dagger-sharp guitar have them. Each and every one of them.

Fifty-some-thousand roaring onlookers packed into the Nancy Jazz Pulsations Festival turn to putty in his supersized hands. For two fiery hours, the highly influential string dazzler put on quite the show from behind a 1960 Gibson ES-345, distinguished by its lovely shade of “watermelon” red. And the vast crowd goes wild at every turn.

But that was nothing new for Freddie King.

The 6-foot-5 colossus—code-name: the Texas Cannonball—had a knack for captivating mass audiences. Yet one-on-one sessions worked just as effectively. Go ask Eric Clapton, [Stevie Ray Vaughan](#), [Jeff Beck](#), and ZZ Top's beardy frontman, Billy F. Gibbons: all devout members of his elite fan club. Because King was a string-bending, treble-stinging epiphany that struck many a guitarist like a bolt from out of the blue. His flashpoint energy and intense fretboard attack flipped the ignition switch for those straddling the blurred line dividing blues from rock.

All that adrenaline and awe was on grand display under the stage lights in Nancy, a music-loving city in France's northeast corner. King, along with his crack five-piece band (zero horns but double the keys, employing both organ and piano), was in town for the huge festival. He made his appearance at the prestigious event count.

For one thing, the Texas-born, Chicago-schooled King knew how to escalate situations with the flick of a wrist or by bearing down on a string just so in order to sail notes up high and away while taking heart rates with them. Right from the get-go, that leadoff slow blues, “Have You Ever Loved a Woman?,” brings you to the edge of your seat with a touch so painfully soft yet piercing,

only to then yank you to your feet seconds later with a moon-shot bend of the strings or a lick flooded with scalding notes. You feel the exhilaration in “Going Down” transfer from King to you, even across all this intervening time and space. “Stormy Monday Blues” smolders with an extended guitar soliloquy. “Sweet Little Angel” doesn't even reach its first wing-spreading lyrics until eight minutes in, not until after multiple crescendos have been breached. And speaking in bright, taut treble tone, the guitar's default inclination is already antsy and anxious. Most times so is his singing.

Such command sends the thousands upon thousands of festivalgoers heaving in unison with him in call-and-response to the chorus of “Got My Mojo Working.” Or he hooks them by teasing and teasing at kick-starting “Hey Baby,” revving the riff until the band's clutch finally engages. Then, off in a whoosh the six of them bolt at a mad tempo that carries them seamlessly into Chicagoan J.B. Lenoir's “Mojo Boogie.” As if not already brisk enough, they upshift into double time for extra kicks right before crash landing after 11 combined minutes.

Want to hear utter fearlessness?

Jump to “Whole Lot of Lovin'.” Specifically the 3:55 minute mark, where one note is struck and then held ... and held ... and held for just shy of 30 seconds, stretched like a tightrope across the stage, wringing out all of its increasingly rising tension until that same note finally gets chopped off, relieving the vice's grip, releasing the band to collapse into an ending—that turns out to be a false one—before they immediately ramp back up again.

Call it fearlessness—or bold-faced audacity or the art of good ol' showmanship. Either way, King was fluent in high drama.

And, yes, tape had been rolling the entire time—but then quietly forgotten until producer Zev Feldman recently picked up the scent. He's the sleuth heralded for tracking down lost

treasure. Among his prior rescues are B.B. King's [In France \(Live At The 1977 Nancy Jazz Pulsations Festival\)](#) and Wes Montgomery's [In Paris: The Definitive ORF Recording](#).

Like those projects, the never-released [Feeling Alright](#) likewise receives first-class treatment. *The Complete 1975 Nancy Pulsations Concert*, transferred from the original tapes and beautifully mastered, sprawls across a limited-edition 3-LP or two-CD set. Twenty-four pages of accompanying essays and reflections provide backstory (Cary Baker), inside story (Wanda King, Freddie's daughter), and fan testimony (the previously mentioned Billy F. Gibbons).

Meanwhile, back on stage, the night's setlist keeps overflowing with hits and road standards: 16 tracks in all. But within that count is a grab-bag medley or two, like the hyperactive one sewing together his own “Sen-Sa-Shun” with Magic Sam's “[Lookin' Good](#)” and John Lee Hooker's “Boogie Chillun.” Nine dizzying minutes of hyperventilation. Plus, unannounced surprises also crop up, such as when “Rock Me, Baby” and “The Sky Is Crying” are found lurking inside “Have You Ever Loved a Woman?”

For as much as Freddie may occasionally borrow material from others, running across others borrowing from him is a cinch. Because, along with his guitarisms, King's repertoire quickly became common currency. “[Have You Ever Loved a Woman?](#)” caught the ears of [Derek and the Dominos](#). “[Going Down](#)” got snapped up by the [Jeff Beck Group](#). And “[Hide Away](#)”? Take your pick: Eric Clapton helped enshrine it as a member of [John Mayall & the Bluesbreakers](#). Stevie Ray Vaughan cut it during the sessions for his sophomore album, [Couldn't Stand the Weather](#). The [Grateful Dead](#) would ease into it on occasion. And [Joe Bonamassa](#) gussied it up with a horn section. All of which is a long-winded way of making the point that Freddie King held major sway across two major, interwoven

genres: blues and rock. Many a disciple are out there. Tonight, though, this is the real deal before you: straight-up, full-force Freddie. No substitutes, no interpreters.

The setlist is jammed solid with blues: Junior Wells' “Messin' With the Kid,” Jimmy Rogers' “That's All Right,” Big Joe Turner's “Wee Baby Blues.” All upgraded for the modern blues guitar. However, the title track makes a point: Freddie didn't always need a song drawn from the ranks of blues. He just needed a *good* song. Something he—and, evidently, his billowing organist, too—could dig into and explore the possibilities. Fitting that bill was the slinky funkiness inherent in “Feeling Alright?,” pinched from Dave Mason-era [Traffic](#) (and then notably covered by [Joe Cocker](#) the year after, in 1969). The audience audibly latches onto King's sheer delight in grooving to the loose vibe.

For sure, he was feeling better than alright.

Yet midway through “Hey Baby,” his 1961 single, Freddie barks out an age-old blues lyric that didn't raise eyebrows at the time but would soon ring chillingly fateful: “I believe my time ain't long.” Little could have anyone fathomed that only one year after this vigorous show, the very vibrant King would be dead, stolen by stomach ulcers and an enraged pancreas in his prime, at the age of 42.

That's why this *Complete 1975 Nancy Pulsations Concert* is so valuable in getting to spend two rare hours with the King at his peak—absolutely live and alive.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

CACTUS

Temple of Blues II
CLEOPATRA RECORDS

Heavy weighs the blues. Robert Johnson's hellhounds, “Honeyboy” Pratt's [bloodstains](#) on the wall, and Son House's [death letter](#) hit like a ton of bricks ... and still do to this day. Plus, John Lee Hooker never got out of [those blues alive](#). Lyrically, rough stuff for



the heart.

But neither do the ears get off scot-free upon entering *Temple of Blues II*. Especially given that the gatekeeper is Cactus, hardened blues-rockers forged out of shocking loudness, brute force and proto-thrash shredding in 1969.

That's why "Moanin' at Midnight," steeped in unresolved terror, could never disturb the neighbors like it does now, in 2026. No, not even when the almighty Howlin' Wolf growled so hard as to overwhelm a poor, unsuspecting microphone in 1951. That prototype roared; this heavyweight descendent crushes bone.

Officially, Cactus was born as a supergroup, welded together out of the psychedelic steamroll of [Vanilla Fudge](#) (drummer Carmine Appice and bassist Tim Bogert; later, both joined guitarist Jeff Beck as the power trio Beck, Bogert & Appice, from 1972-1974) plus the excitable Mitch Ryder's Detroit Wheels (guitarist Jim McCarty) and the mind-journeying Amboy Dukes (vocalist Rusty Day). The resultant beast breathed fire and lashed out with speed, straight from the jump.

So much so that when their self-titled debut LP, [Cactus](#), hit record shops in July 1970, shouts of "America's Led Zeppelin!" rang out.

With the floodgates slammed open, the deluge couldn't stop racing in, with *One Way...Or Another* arriving in February 1971, and then *Restrictions* struck only a few months later, in October. At that point, Cactus had become a wrecking ball in full swing. Yet, by 1972, the band dissolved. Multiple versions sprung up across subse-

quent decades, including this current configuration that leaves Appice as the lone founding member still very much thundering away.

Of course, *Temple of Blues II* sets off seismometers. Its 2024 predecessor in *Temple of Blues* set the precedent by refiring the band's bluesiest early anthems in the blast furnace with assist from influential guests and friends. The same goes for this newest go-round, as a hellraiser army of visiting guitarists, bassists and leather-lunged bawlers—known for leaving a metallic taste in your mouth—rotate in, helping Appice and the band shake the ground. It's a glorious convening of adrenaline and megawatts.

Except, here, this setlist is all the bluer, since the forementioned Wolf looms extra-large: Seven of the 11 tracks trace to his classic Chicago songbook.

Seconds into the album—when an overdriven guitar makes its midnight creep through "[Back Door Man, Pts. 1 & 2](#)"—it becomes obvious that these blues command attention with a new, bold, vicious power that has nothing to do with nostalgia. Cookie-cutter templates are not punching out dime-a-dozen versions, starting with that leadoff track. Never has carnal boasting taken on such sonic tonnage, now cocooned inside a force field of low-slung, squalid crunch. Its initial sludge-trudge pace becomes a sitting duck for the frantically escalating attack of Eric Gales, the singing fretsman who comes by his turbulent surname quite naturally. However, not even zooming to double-time for the finale affords any mercy.

Forty-four more minutes of similarly extra-hard blues-rocking are still to follow.

When Willie Dixon handed over, say, "Tail Dragger" or "Down in the Bottom" to Wolf, never could have anyone imagined the headbanging capacity residing in both. Thought the psychedelized remakes on 1969's notorious *Howlin' Wolf Album* framed them with the most raucous decibels? Unh-uh. Mere pussyfooting. Here, the

two blues thump their studly chests like in the days of old: the former being on the prow; the latter being caught with a hand in the—ahem—cookie jar. But the guitar fury of Alex Skolnick and Richard Fortus rocket past the bounds of fretboard aggression discovered by Hubert Sumlin, Wolf's main man, back at the start of the 1960s, to now blow each song against—and then through—the wall.

What about "Spoonful"? Instead of receiving the ram-rod pounding methodically given by Wolf, and then by Cream, Cactus' take comes pre-ratcheted up to a manic panic. Revving the throttle is none other than Ted Nugent, whose solo career still rocks on to this day after bursting onto the mid-1960s scene as the [Amboy Dukes'](#) founder/lead guitarist. (He's the one with the shapely Gibson Byrdland axe hiked up high on his chest.) To borrow a lyric: "Could be a spoonful of diamonds; could be a spoonful of gold." But just a little earful of the wild man's shredding will electrify your soul.

Also among the harvest are Cactus originals from those first LPs. "Bad Stuff"—off '07 *'n' Sweaty*, the fourth and final album before everything went to pieces in 1972—resumes its banging at the hands of Steve Morse (whose [Dixie Dregs](#), one of his many other projects, get equated to the Allman Brothers Band meets the Mahavishnu Orchestra). Somehow not quite insane enough for you? Then hang on for when the double-barreled leads of KISS' Tommy Thayer and Vixen's Britt Lightning begin carving up "Feel So Good." For added insurance, a trippy freakout now resides where Appice's extended drum solo originally lived in 1970.

Slide guitar runs rampant. Or so it *sounds* during "Token Chokin'," a wiry bottlenecked cut off *Restrictions* that remains very much so now. The magical mystery part comes courtesy of [Bumblefoot's fretless guitar](#) being able to mimic the tell-tale whine of a steel, brass or

glass tube gliding over strings. His sleight of (bare) hand consumes the solo that goes bonkers when coloring way outside of the lines. But that is Ty Tabor's *real* slider skidding up and down the neck as well as against Appice's massive wall of drumming throughout the course of Wolf's uncharacteristically frisky "300 Pounds of Joy." The same goes for "Moanin' at Midnight," whose searing lines come from Pat Travers laying steel to string. The result is something freshly brutal, as flying-shrapnel solos break atop a stomp full of menace.

As for singing, Cactus' own Ed Terry sacrifices his vocal cords for the bulk of the tracks. Occasionally, others with similarly enormous voices kick in to save what's left of his throat by tearing up their own for the common cause. Included are Rob Caudill (Rod Stewart's double), dUg Pinnick (King's X), and Joe Lynn Turner (Rainbow, Deep Purple). Melanie, whose singsong earworm [skated](#) up to the tip-top of the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart in 1971, turns steely in the presence of Jimi Hendrix's "Purple Haze." The [official music video](#) (that's Cactus guitarist Artie Dillon) packs a vintage light show so immersive as to muster a lysergic kick.

That said, "[The Little Red Rooster](#)" stands alone. Appice clears the path with his fighting drums; Rockin' Jake's harmonica circles above. Then the rest of the band rumbles in with Tracii Guns. As a barometer of what is to come, know that L.A. Guns as well as Guns N' Roses are on his resume. And just when you think they've eventually flamed out from exertion, the false ending gives way to a second offensive. Still, the crowning touch comes from Dee Snider, famous for fronting Twisted Sister on all those videos that reigned on televisions through the heyday of [MTV](#) in the 1980s. If anything, his voice has only grown harder core since then. Singing with enough intensity to tear tar from the street, you can practically hear the veins popping out from his 70-year-old neck when

BLUES REVIEWS

CONTINUED

scorching the line about being “upset in every way”—along with anything else in proximity. The music thrusts to a level never gone before and likely never to go again. To think: This is the same metaphoric tale about a barnyard tormentor that has been strutted by everyone from Wolf to José Feliciano.

It’s just that no one had the spine—or the weaponry—to coat blues in modern molten metal. Leave that to Cactus, just as ferocious and prickly as ever.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



DUKE ROBILLARD & HIS ALL-STAR BAND *Blast Off!* NOLA BLUE RECORDS

Prior to *Blast Off!*, here’s a quick pre-flight checklist to run through.

What is the common, shared thread connecting this constellation of stars? The Fabulous Thunderbirds’ *Walk That Walk, Talk That Talk* and Bob Dylan’s *Time Out of Mind*. Chicago guitarist Eddy “The Chief” Clearwater’s *Cool Blues Walk*, New Orleans R&B soulman Johnny Adams’ *Room With a View of the Blues* and foundational Chicago harpist Snooky Pryor’s *Too Cool to Move*. Don’t forget those *Conversations in Swing Guitar* held with jazz fretsman Herb Ellis or the *New Guitar Summit* entered in with Jay Geils (yes, that *J. Geils*).

Answer: Duke Robillard and his get-around *guitar*.

The esteemed duo can be heard on those as well as scads of other records. Within that

grand tally resides an independent mountain of his own solo albums—of which *Blast Off!* now brings that separate total up to an impressive 38. The sprawling discographies of John Lee Hooker and Lightnin’ Hopkins are getting a run for their money.

Given Robillard’s diversified experiences and broad stylistic tastes, *Blast Off!* expectedly widens its setlist. It helps that his All-Star Band—with pianist/organist Bruce Bears, bassist Marty Ballou, and drummer Mark Teixeira as the backbone—can play anything thrown their way: 1960s New Orleans funk (Lee Dorsey’s “Confusion”)? Check. Deep dive into 1950s fun-house obscurity (the Rocking Brothers’ instrumental “Play Boy Hop”)? Piece of cake, right down to the foghorn blasts from Doug James’ baritone saxophone. Or what about jousting with 1930s jive that closes out on a brassy, blowout finale (“I’ll Be Glad When You’re Dead (You Rascal You)”)”? Also, no problem. And also the only chance to hear Duke’s distinctively articulate voice, openly trading menacing barbs in a knife fight disguised as a duet.

Because the nimble-fingered 77-year-old has laid off singing of late, entrusting that responsibility to second guitarist Chris Cote—the one seen belting “*Lowdown*,” the album’s lead-off single and official video, into the mic. The roadhouse brawler of a song holds a sweet spot for Robillard. In 2006, he served as the on-the-road guitarist for its composer: rattrap growler Tom Waits, whose tour included performing on the *Late Show with David Letterman*. (That’s Duke, stage left, lighting up a gorgeously curvaceous hollow-body.)

The musical universe keeps expanding. “Look a There, Look a There” offers a tip of the headstock to Tampa Red, the pre- as well as post-war Chicagoan known for his slide guitar and prolific songwriting. Classic Southern soul seeps out in the aptly titled “Warm and Tender Love,” Percy Sledge’s

Billboard-climbing ballad that fared better than did its 1966 flipside in “Sugar Puddin’.” Then a jarring zag into “Stand By Me.” No, not Ben E. King’s soulfully swaying song by the same name. But the spring-loaded bopper belonging to *Guitar Slim*, whose devout fan club includes not only Robillard but also Buddy Guy and Jimi Hendrix. Sorry—as is often the case with a Slim piece, you can’t sit this lively one out.

Three of the 12 tracks are originals. Two of them are opportune products of spontaneous generation in the studio: the sleek title track and the likewise wordless “Galactic Grease.” “Feel My Cares,” however, has been stewing for a while. A long, long while. In fact, Robillard’s restless guitar has been patiently longing to lash out on this minor-key blues ever since being written—but never recorded—at the age of 17.

That dates to the timeframe when Duke’s tale famously began.

It is 1967. Off in the wilds of Rhode Island, pangs are again stirring in young Mike Robillard, who sets out to do what legions of other red-blooded, guitar-toting teenagers are doing at that time: start a band. But there is a twist. Because rather than craving fuzz boxes, wah-wah pedals or refrigerator-sized Marshall amplifiers, the pre-Duke guitarist would rather indulge in—wait for it—horns. When the saxophones do arrive, so does the capacity to jump and swing the blues, like on those 1940s and ’50s records which Robillard wore out on his turntable. A Room Full of Blues—soon to be shortened to Roomful of Blues—had been born. (The detailed play-by-play of Duke’s musical adventures resides at the *Rhode Island Music Hall of Fame Historical Archive*, including Roomful’s ill-fated pairing with The Blues Brothers, Dan Ackroyd and a beer-spewing John Belushi.)

That yearning to jump and swing hasn’t yet let up after all those years. And horns—ah,

those glorious horns—remain Duke’s essential bling. Case in point: “When I Get Lucky” gusts with tremendous bounce. Its pace hypes all the more from Cote’s excitable voice toying with the idea of driving up envy by cruising a Cadillac. Chalk this one up to another of Robillard’s favorites: Floyd Dixon, the pianist popularly remembered for “Hey, Bartender.”

Yet if swing is really your thing, then why not go big—by going Basie? The luxury unit formed by a clarinet plus a cluster of saxes is just as invaluable for Duke Robillard now as when their lush, concerted thrust first propelled “*The King*” for Count Basie back in 1946. This time, though, Duke’s warm, sparkling jazz chops skim and solo across the melody for all to readily appreciate versus straining to pick out the crucial, minimalist, comping guitar of Mr. Rhythm, *Freddie Green*. Swinging in such grand style, you can hear the smile beaming on Robillard’s face.

At that high point, *Blast Off!* pretty much sums up his frame of mind.

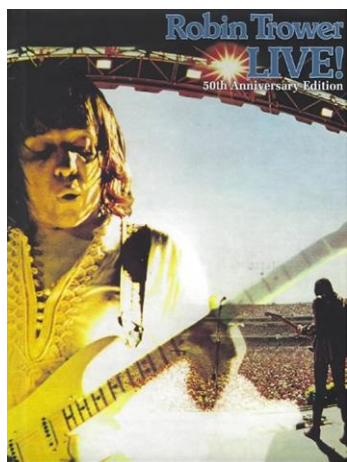
DENNIS ROZANSKI

ROBIN TROWER *Robin Trower Live! [50th Anniversary Edition]* CHRYSALIS RECORDS

Were you there at the traveling guitar event of ’75?

When a caravan of three—bass, drums, and that magisterial Stratocaster—swept its way across the United States, with Asbury Park’s Convention Hall, New York City’s Academy of Music, Dallas’ Memorial Auditorium, and San Francisco’s *Winterland* being among the many cross-country stops. The United Kingdom was also part of the conquest, including a London visit to the BBC’s *Old Grey Whistle Test*. Copenhagen, Denmark bore the brunt of their heavy magnificence, too.

Yet, of all the stadiums, armories, arenas, civic centers, ballrooms, theaters and coliseums that were blues-rocked along the transcontinental tour



route, one particularly special Monday evening stood out. Inside the Stockholm Concert Hall (Konserthuset, in native Swedish tongue), on the 3rd of February, is where and when the Robin Trower Band made enduring history.

This was the performance immortalized in vinyl: *Robin Trower Live!*.

The British power trio—trian-gulated by Robin Trower (guitar), James Dewar (bass/vocals), and Bill Lordan (drums)—was captured in both peak form and sterling fidelity (thanks, in part, to the symphonic hall's stellar acoustics). Ever since being released in March 1976, *Robin Trower Live!* has dropped countless jaws of stunned listeners while launching an ever-growing army enlisting anyone from around the world with six strings and guitar-god aspirations.

At the push of a button, the vicarious thrill of that night unlocks—now, for the first time, in full.

You see, the only way to have heard this entire show is to have scored one of the venue's 1,770 seats and eyewitnessed the spectacle in person. Because, due to time constraints of the single LP format, only 41 minutes were issued. Yet those 41 indelible minutes—which snipped some songs, completely abandoned others, and rejiggered their order—still left secondhand earwitnesses blown away. Even though the performance was in partial form.

Imagine, though, immersing in the complete, uncut 71 min-

utes. Namely, starting properly at a never-heard, high-velocity "Day of the Eagle," which opened the show, and rolling straight through the unedited encore nicked from B.B. King, "Rock Me Baby." And within this span, finally experiencing the dark beauty in "[Bridge of Sighs](#)" being built onstage in majestic slow-burn fashion, its notes doomfully tolling, hanging in the air like pitch-black storm clouds long after being struck on the strings, defying their sonic weight. In commiserate tonnage, Dewar's calm, steady, resolute voice rasps out the bleak scenario:

*The sun don't shine,
The moon don't move the tides,
To wash me clean.
Why so unforgiving and why
so cold?
Been a long time crossing
bridge of sighs.*

That never-released track is only one of the many godsend newly unleashed.

Because Chrysalis Records—also home to fellow '70s blue-rockers [Ten Years After](#), [Rory Gallagher](#), and [Blodwyn Pig](#)—has been giving the white-glove treatment to the classic Trower catalogue by sequentially marching through the albums with special 50th Anniversary Editions. In other words, making the great all the greater. 2023 saw the expansion of 1973's debut, *Twice Removed From Yesterday*. 1974's certified-Gold *Bridge of Sighs* had its day in 2024. Next up was 1975's certified-Gold *For Earth Below*, in 2025. Each and every expanded one is a special treat.

That campaign has now reached *Robin Trower Live!*. Its 50th Anniversary Edition is grand, being newly mixed and restored from the original multi-track tapes. Five previously orphaned tracks reunite with the original seven tracks that now gain back every lost second. Trower's introductions from the stage are intact. The total concert—roaring as it originally did, in order—consumes one disc. For diehard holdouts, the original

1975 mix remains untouched on the second disc.

Given the genuine organic chemistry between Trower, Dewar and Lordan, it was inevitable that a *Live!* record—whose setlist summarized those first three albums—would offer concrete proof that when it came to getting gloriously brutalized by sound, the stage was just as vulnerable—if not more so—as any studio. That came as no surprise to anybody even mildly familiar with the trio.

Keep in mind, though, that when it comes to blues—even rocked and psychedelized blues—neither speed nor shredding substitute for feeling. And Trower accepts that as a personal pledge, supersaturating his work with atmospheric moodiness. It's in what his Strat says as well as how those strings say it with such a signature massive [tone](#): thickened and sustained with Jimi Hendrix-inspired Univibe swirl and cranked Marshall crunch. So, while B.B. King and Albert King rank among Robin's [self-confessed guitar idols](#), the tremendous amp roar and sculpting of feedback for the greater good vouch that Hendrix obviously implanted as well.

Case in point: "Confessin' Midnight," one of the five orphans, screams with wah-wah violence atop blunt-force rhythm. Down inside lurks surreal imagery. The package deal, jacked up to the hilt, rages like a wicked cousin of "Voodoo Child (Slight Return)." Even if not indulged with its due volume, the power is incredible. Turn it up and get pinned to the wall.

But the Robin Trower Band was not the first fame for Robin Leonard Trower, a Londoner born on March 9, 1945.

That came as the guitarist for Procol Harum. Although seen performing "[A Whiter Shade of Pale](#)" at an early televised date, he joined the group in June 1967. That meant missing out by only a few short weeks on the April session when that original debut single was recorded. (Ray Royer holds the guitar credits,

but then promptly quit.) But Robin is the credited fretsman heard on the first five albums as well as the two subsequent 1967 singles, "Homburg" and then "Conquistador." By 1971, he left; by 1973, the Robin Trower Band was up and running.

And the rest has been history, Part II.

History that took many audacious forms on that wintry Nordic night. *Bridge of Sighs*' "Too Rolling Stoned," for instance, scratched and then sloshed under a wah pedal's command during the galloped first half before a hard trot eventually settled in. When the green light flashed midway through "Alethea," Lordan's drum bedlam organizes into a spotlit solo. "I Can't Wait Much Longer," with head hung down, shows why Dewar was the ideal vocalist for delivering the kind of lyric gut punches that Trower tends to write. Two tracks later, "Little Bit of Sympathy" confirms the same, except at turbocharged speed. And at three minutes, "Gonna Be More Suspicious" celebrates its rightful return to the set by making a quick—yet aggressive and deafening—strike.

"Daydream," however, triples in length. The power ballad, cited as a band favorite off *Twice Removed From Yesterday*, is a showpiece dedicated to The Man that evening. "That would be Jimi Hendrix, I'm referring to," Trower recently deciphered in the 24-page booklet of notes for the 50th Anniversary Edition. As with The Man's output, the live forum provides the ideal conditions for Trower and company, too. Bathed in bronze haze lifting off Lordan's restless cymbals and gouged from shrieking big-sky bends, this Stockholm version of "[Daydream](#)" elevates all the more to in excelsis status.

Oh what a landmark night in '75!

And to think that Trower hasn't let up since, still very much out there composing, [recording](#), [touring](#)—and roaring—to this day.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

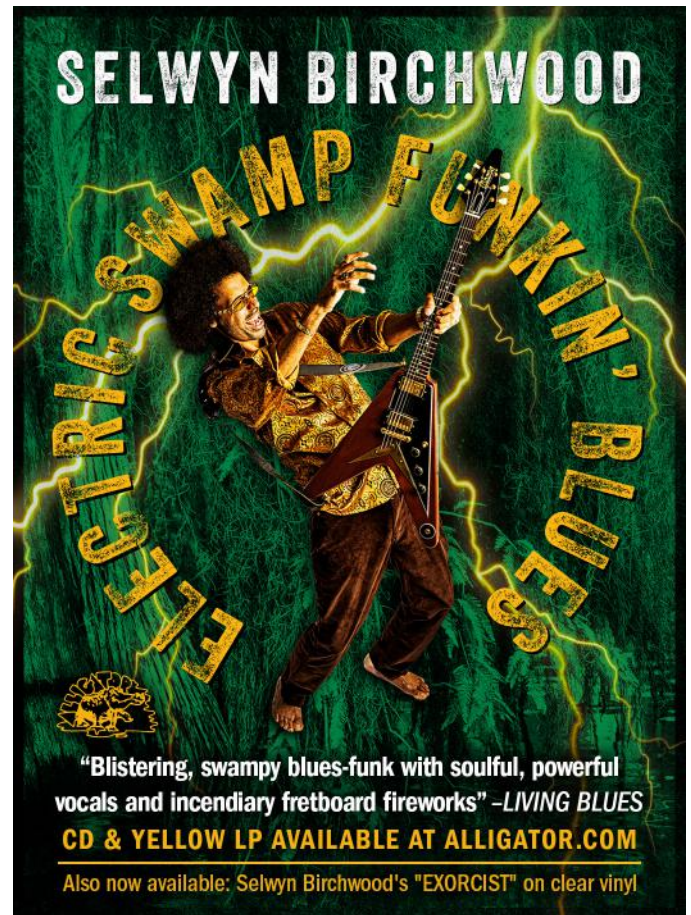
YOUR AD HERE

Contact Jim Hamilton

jim.bbs.prez@gmail.com

or 443-518-0554

See rates on page 2



RADIO BLUES

WTMD 89.7 wtmd.org

THE ROADHOUSE with Bob Sekinger
Saturdays 6pm-9pm.
Featuring Contemporary & Classic Blues

WPFW 89.3 wpfwfm.org
DON'T FORGET THE BLUES
Daily 12-1pm

WPFW 89.3 wpfwfm.org
ROOTS AND FRUITS with Bill Wax,
Saturdays 2-4 pm

WXPN 90.5 xpn.org

THE BLUES SHOW with Jonny Meister
Saturdays 7-11pm

caldoniascrossroad.com

Blues 'round the clock
CALDONIA'S CROSSROAD RADIO:

THE RINGBELL & LOU LOU
HAPPY HOUR SHOW

Sat 4-6pm, rebroadcast Thurs 5-7pm