

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE BALTIMORE BLUES SOCIETY

BRADLEY ALSTON **LILED**
★ TALKS WITH

PAGE 12



Blues Rag



**SHAWN
HOLT
AND THE
TEARDROPS**



**MONSTER
MIKE WELCH
BAND**



**ROGER
GIRKE
AND THE
WANDERING
SOULS**



**NELLA B.
& THE NOISE**



2026

ALONZO'S MEMORIAL PICNIC!

BEST BLUES PICNIC ON THE EAST COAST!

SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 6 ★ SHOW INFO PAGE 3



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**BLUES NEWS NEAR & FAR/2 • BBS ON THE GO!/10
BLUESBEAT/20 • BLUES REVIEWS/38**



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BLUES NEWS NEAR & FAR BY JIM HAMILTON

BBS members, friends and fellow Blues lovers, I hope your summer is progressing along smoothly and that you're beating the heat as we move into the dog days of summer. The BBS' 40th anniversary celebration year continues on the heels of our well-attended May 17th Spring Fever show at the Marco Hunting & Fishing Club headlined by blues great, **James Armstrong** with local favorites, **Fast Eddie and the Slowpokes** getting the groove started. Attendees enjoyed the music, danced to their hearts content, and were treated to a specially prepared anniversary cake on a picture-perfect day.



Left to right: Ronnie Hicks, James Carter, BT Richardson, James Armstrong

It is mid-July as I write this and another Alonzo's Memorial Picnic – the BBS's signature event – looms on the horizon. On Sunday, September 6th a blockbuster lineup of Blues talent awaits you at the VFW Sparrows Point Picnic Grounds. Starting things off will be [Nella B and The Noise](#) 1:00 – 2:30; [Roger Girke & the Wandering Souls](#) 2:50 – 4:20; [Shawn Holt and the Teardrops](#) 4:40 – 6:10; and headliner, the [Monster Mike Welch Band](#) 6:30 – 8:00. You don't want to miss this one! (See opposite page for Alonzo's details.)

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

29TH ALONZO'S MEMORIAL PICNIC



SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 6, 2026



**SHAWN HOLT &
THE TEARDROPS**



**MONSTER MIKE
WELCH BAND**



**ROGER GIRKE & THE
WANDERING SOULS**



NELLA B & THE NOISE

DOORS: 12PM

TICKETS: \$45 / \$50 GATE

MUSIC: 1 – 8PM

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BBS Member Jazs Web
& Tristan Gilbert after
the show at Hub City.

And mark your calendars now for our “Gobble Up the Blues” Thanksgiving show at the Marco Club on Sunday, November 29th featuring **Tad Robinson with Billy Price** and opening act, **Lower Case Blues**. This gang of fine musicians will surely blow ‘da roof off ‘da sucka!

BBS HAPPENINGS

Northeast Blues Society Group formed. In an effort to help one another and share ideas revolving around show planning and other blues society activities, the presidents of 15 blues societies from DC to Maine – including the BBS – have formed the Northeast Blues Society group. We held our first virtual meeting in June and will be meeting monthly. Participants are excited to begin working with one another to improve our respective operations.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6



BOARD SECRETARY POSITION OPEN

The Baltimore Blues Society is seeking a volunteer to serve as Board Secretary.

Duties include 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 recordings, transcripts, and summaries have greatly reduced the workload. Training will be provided.

Interested? Please email a brief resume, in confidence, to:

Jim Hamilton

jim.bbs.prez@gmail.com

YOUR AD HERE!

Contact Jim Hamilton

jim.bbs.prez@gmail.com

or 443-518-0554

See rates on page 2

RAMS HEAD *On Stage* COMING SOON



08.11 MATT SCHOFIELD



08.12 SOUTHERN AVENUE



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09.16 ROBERT CRAY BAND



09.20 CYRIL NEVILLE
PLAYS THE DEAD



10.08 NORTH MISSISSIPPI
ALLSTARS



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10.21 EDDIE 9V

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BBS Blues CD Library.

As we are all aware, CDs have been on the decline for some time now. Many folks no longer have CD players and have no use for CDs. The BBS Board has decided to no longer offer CDs as raffle prizes and limit prizes to BBS merch, tickets to future shows, and the 50/50 to supplement membership dues, general cash donations, and merchandise sales to support the BBS's mission.

BBS Vice President, Matt Kelley has graciously offered to accept anyone's unwanted Blues CDs to start a BBS Blues CD Library within his home. As he pointed out, many things that fall by the wayside often come back years later (case in point – vinyl records), and if and when that happens, people will be happy that he thought about doing this. The BBS has accumulated hundreds (thousands?) of promotional CDs over the decades, and several folks have already responded to Matt's request in an eblast to members I sent on July 11. To reiterate, if you have blues CDs you'd like to contribute to the cause, just bring them to a future BBS show and Matt will take them off your hands.

Blues Jams in Partnership with Stages Music Arts. The third bi-monthly blues jam was held at Stages Music Arts' beautiful facility in Cockeysville, MD on June 28. The next two upcoming jams will be August 16, 2-5 pm and October 18, 2-5 pm. All are welcome. Stages Music Arts is located at 10 Stenersen Lane in Hunt Valley, MD.



BBS Prez Jim Hamilton with Ian & Gary Hoey
after the show at Hub City. Ian's a fine
guitarist just like his dad!

Ticket Giveaway Winners. We congratulate the following BBS members who have recently won ticket giveaways to Blues shows at either The Encore in Columbia or Live at Hub City Vinyl in Hagerstown:

Craig Ey

Mr. & Mrs. Jack Bennett (twice!)

Mike & Betty Knott (2nd time this year!)

Doc Bodine (2nd time this year!)

Phillip Dennis

Steve Murphy

Brian Wagner

John & Lori Mudd

Frank Emma

Rob Tomlin (twice!)

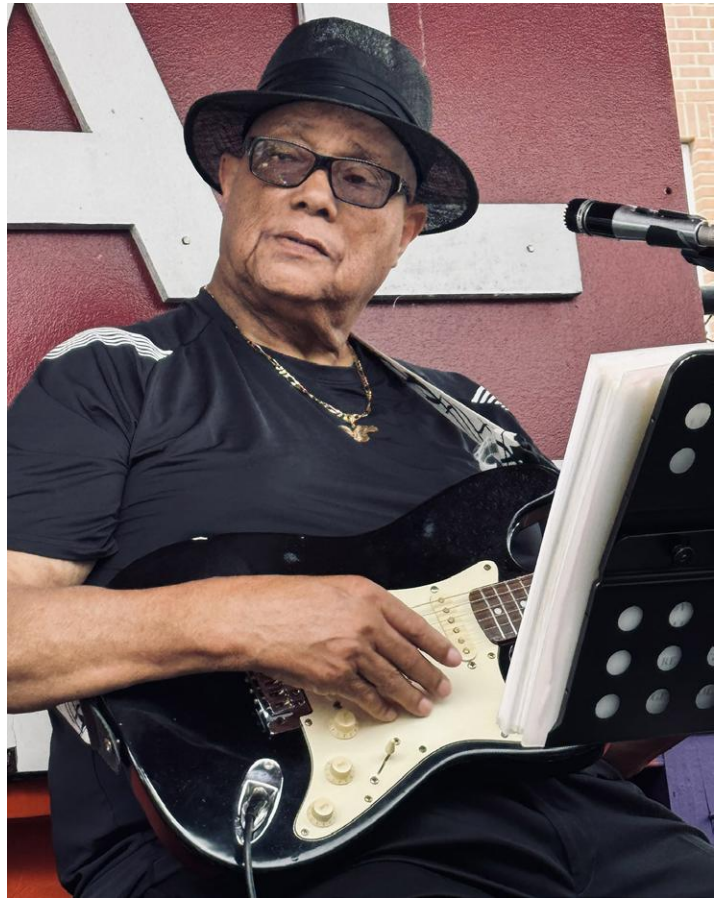
Ron & Ellen Potter

Dan Nolan.

Be sure to watch for future emails regarding show ticket giveaways and enter for your chance to win! You must be a member in good standing (membership dues current) and you can only win twice in a calendar year. The Encore's seat-

ing capacity is around 150, while Live at Hub City Vinyl can seat around 400. Both are excellent venues with great sound systems that offer an intimate musical experience that you just don't get in large theaters and stadiums. Even if you don't win tickets, I'd encourage you to check them out.

Charles “Big Daddy” Stallings. Rosa “Ramblin’ Rose” Pryor, entertainment columnist for *The Baltimore Times*, and Joe Thomas, Charles Stallings’ long-time bandleader, reached out to the BBS with a request to promote a free performance of Charles “Big Daddy” Stallings & The B-Town/Bluez Evolution Band at Avenue Bakery in Baltimore City on June 6. See page 34 for photos. The BBS honored the request and posted the show on the BBS website’s (mojoworkin.org) Blues Calendar and the BBS Facebook page. Charles’s band consists of David Russell, trumpet; Charles Hawkins, bass; Richard Calloway, guitar; and Johnny Mason, drums. Joe Thomas sent me, on behalf of the BBS, a six-DVD set called *Charles “Big Daddy” Stallings & The B-Town/Bluez Evolution Band Live!! The Definitive DVD Anthology (2004-2014)* that showcases his live shows. Stallings is a long-term BBS member and an accomplished guitarist, harp player, and singer/songwriter. The BBS was very instrumental in supporting Stallings’ musical journey through the 2000s, sponsoring him at past Baltimore Artscape events and other venues, as well as having him play at multiple BBS shows when he and his band were active (personal health issues and the death of a band member resulted in the band’s dissolution in 2014). Stallings and his band, as well as Rosa Pryor, were recently inducted into the Maryland Entertainment Hall of Fame. Rosa has promised to write a future article about the BBS in *The Baltimore Times*. Congratulations, Charles and Rosa!



Charles “Big Daddy” Stallings.
PHOTO COURTESY BIG DADDY STALLINGS

Members Afternoon Out. The BBS held a MAO at Racers’ Café on June 21st with Roger Girke and the Wandering Souls providing the musical entertainment. Despite the short notice, the Father’s Day matinee was well attended by both BBS members and the general public. Many thanks to Racers’ Manager, Bernard Lyons for working with us over the past several years to make these events happen.

In Memoriam. The BBS recently lost a long-time member, Sandy Burke, who was married to former BBS Treasurer, Alan Burke. Sandy loved the blues and was also, along with Alan, an active member of the Blues Society of Central PA. She will be missed. Our condolences go out to Sandy’s family and loved ones.

★ALONZO'S 2026 ARTISTS★



Shawn Holt & the Teardrops at Briggs Farm Blues Festival. [BLUESBROAD VIA YOUTUBE](#)

SHAWN HOLT & THE TEARDROPS

An electrifying authentic Chicago blues band, formed in 2013 following the death of Shawn's father, the outfit's former leader and legendary bluesman Magic Slim. Led by Shawn Holt, the band brings high-energy performances, soulful guitar work, and a powerful traditional blues sound that has earned them national acclaim.

Holt commenced his professional career when he was aged 17, touring alongside his father Magic Slim and his uncle Nick Holt, as part of the previous version of the Teardrops. Following that tour, Holt formed his own outfit, Lil' Slim and The Back Alley Blues Band, and continued learning his craft at playing the blues.

Holt became a Teardrop himself in January 2013 and toured with his father that January. During the East coast tour with Johnny Winter, Shawn's father became very ill and ended up in the hospital in Pennsylvania...he told Shawn to carry on. The Teardrops opened for Johnny Winter in Phoenixville, PA. The act was well received and Winter requested that they continue to be his support act for the remainder of his touring commitment.

In 2013, John Primer, a former Teardrop, was the special guest on Shawn Holt & the Teardrops' debut recording, *Daddy Told Me*. It was recorded in Chicago, IL. Primer played and sang on two of the album's tracks, of which five overall were written by Holt. Two songs on the collection were cover versions of Magic Slim's tracks - "Buddy Buddy Friend" and "Please Don't Dog Me". Another song covered on the album was "Before You Accuse Me". *Daddy Told Me* was released on the Blind Pig record label. The album reached number one on the *Living Blues* blues radio chart in October 2013. Pierre Lacocque of Mississippi Heat noted, upon hearing the album, that Holt "only uses a thumb pick for his guitar, with no special effects, and straight into his amplifier. It is indeed a guitar style that is reminiscent of his father's". In May 2014, Shawn Holt & the Teardrops won a Blues Music Award for *Daddy Told Me* in the 'Best New Artist Debut' category.

Shawn has carried on the deep Chicago Blues tradition, appearing at prominent festivals and venues throughout the United States.



Monster Mike at Trandal Blues Fest. [YOUTUBE](#)

MONSTER MIKE WELCH BAND

With more than three decades of touring and recording, Boston-based blues guitarist **Monster Mike Welch** has earned a reputation as one of the most accomplished and respected musicians on the international blues scene. Nicknamed "**Monster Mike**" by actor and blues enthusiast Dan Aykroyd at just 13 years old, Welch quickly lived up to the moniker, developing into one of the premier guitarists of his generation.

Welch has released numerous acclaimed solo albums and, in 2001, joined legendary New England blues band Sugar Ray and the Bluetones. During his 16-year tenure with the group, he recorded five albums and helped earn multiple Blues Music Award nominations.

Throughout his career, Welch has collaborated with an impressive roster of blues greats, including Shemekia Copeland, Ronnie Earl, Danielle Nicole, Duke Robillard, Johnny Winter, Victor Wainwright, Nick Moss, the Mannish Boys, and Sugar Ray Rayford.

In 2017, Welch left the Bluetones to devote himself to the Welch Ledbetter Connection with the late Mike Ledbetter. The partnership quickly gained widespread acclaim, earning seven Blues Music Award nominations in its first year.

Welch has been recognized with three consecutive Blues Music

Award nominations for **Instrumentalist–Guitar**, beginning in 2016, received the **Boston Music Award for Best Blues Act**, and was inducted into the **Rhode Island Music Hall of Fame**.

In 2023, Welch entered a new chapter with the release of the Blues Music Award-nominated *Nothing But Time*. He followed it in 2025 with his most personal and emotionally powerful recording to date, *Keep Living Til I Die*—a searing album that showcases the soulful guitar work, expressive songwriting, and heartfelt performances that continue to define one of today's finest blues artists.

ROGER GIRKE & THE WANDERING SOULS

Roger Girke is a road tested guitarist, singer and writer who has performed over 5,000 career live shows, concerts and festivals in addition to numerous recording sessions and multi-artist releases.

Roger's career began performing in rock bands in the eastern PA/NJ area, eventually joining the legendary Philadelphia area roots rock band Pickins (*Capitol/Ariola*), followed by many years of touring and recording with Sharks (Elektra), Robert Hazard (RCA), and many other notable artists.

Since 2000, Roger has released 5 CDs and has regularly performed at blues festivals, clubs and concerts throughout the Mid-Atlantic.

The Roger Girke Band was a top 10 finalist in the 2009 Memphis, TN International Blues Challenge as well as receiving top tier Independent CD finalist awards in the 2005 and 2009 International Blues Challenge, a part of the Blues Foundation.



Roger Girke and The Wandering Souls at St. George's Country Store. DAN GUTWEIN VIA [YOUTUBE](#)



Nella B. & The Noise at the Silver Spring Blues Festival. [YOUTUBE](#)

NELLA B. & THE NOISE

Step on in and meet **Nella B.**—the Blues firecracker with a laugh that fills the room and a voice that'll stop you midstride. She's got sass for days, grit in all the right places, and enough Southern sparkle to make any stage feel like home. Nella doesn't just sing the Blues—she *lives* them, flips them, and turns them into stories you can taste. The good, the messy, the hilarious, the heartbreaks... she pours it all into her music with a wink that says, "Baby, I've been through it—now let me tell you how I made it out." Onstage, she's pure electricity: warm, witty, and impossible to forget. Offstage, she's the friend who'll hand you a plate, crack a joke, and remind

you that joy is a survival skill. Her sound slides between sweet and smoky, honoring the roots of the Blues while adding her own modern shine. If you're looking for a voice that hits your heart and a vibe that lifts your spirit, you're in the right place.

"Music has always been in my life. Growing up in a house filled with the sounds of Nancy Wilson, Ray Charles, Etta James, James Brown, Aretha Franklin. I found my voice early singing in the glee club, gospel choirs and lots of karaoke. But it wasn't until the Pandemic that I truly stepped into the spotlight. What started as a dare to sing in front of a band, turned into something much deeper. A 'CALLING.'"

Nella B.'s musical journey didn't begin on a stage—it started in her driveway. During the pandemic, when the world felt shut down and musicians everywhere were restless, her husband, bassist, **Anthony Rucker**, gathered local players for what became the neighborhood's beloved *driveway jam*. Nella B. only knew one song—"Meet Me With Your Black Drawers On"—and Anthony dared her to sing it. She took the challenge, stepped up to the mic, and something clicked. Soon after, Anthony joined a Blues band, and they began inviting her to sing. That spark became a flame, and the flame became **Nella B.**

Her influences read like a Blues hall of royalty: **Etta James, Stacy Brooks, Koko Taylor, Irma Thomas, Ma Rainey, Shemekia Copeland, Sugar Pie DeSanto, and Bobby Parker.** Their grit, soul, and storytelling shaped her sound—but Nella's voice is unmistakably her own.

Despite her rising success, she still laughs at the idea of calling this a "career." She's simply having the time of her life—singing, performing, and meeting incredible musicians along the way. "I think I'd be scared if I thought this was a career," she jokes, and that joy is exactly what audiences feel when she steps onstage.



BBS ON THE GO!



**Elliott Gross,
Linda Bronsdon,
Barry Gebler,
Meghan Kieffer,
Jim Hamilton.
New Orleans.
That's St. Louis
Cathedral in the
background**

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!

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



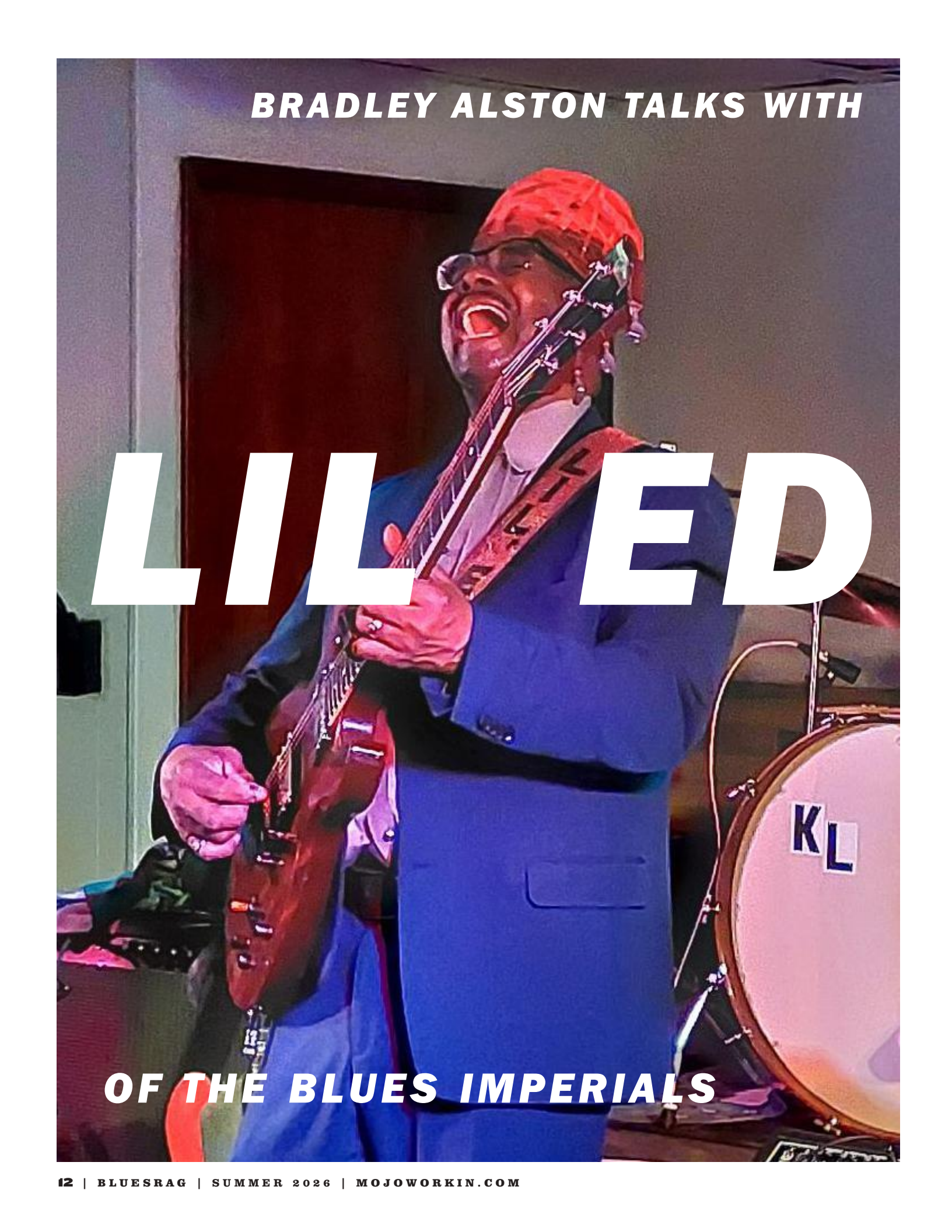
Benitas and Werners with friend at the Tampa Bay Blues Festival



Linda Bronsdon sporting the BBS Alonzo's Lady's V-Neck at Hank Dietle's

BBS Prez Jim Hamilton with the Lower Case Blues Band at Live at Hub City Vinyl



A photograph of a man, Bradley Alston, performing on stage. He is wearing a blue suit, a red beanie, and glasses. He is playing a red electric guitar and singing with his mouth wide open. A large white 'L' is superimposed over his face. In the background, a drum set is visible with a 'KL' logo on the bass drum head.

BRADLEY ALSTON TALKS WITH

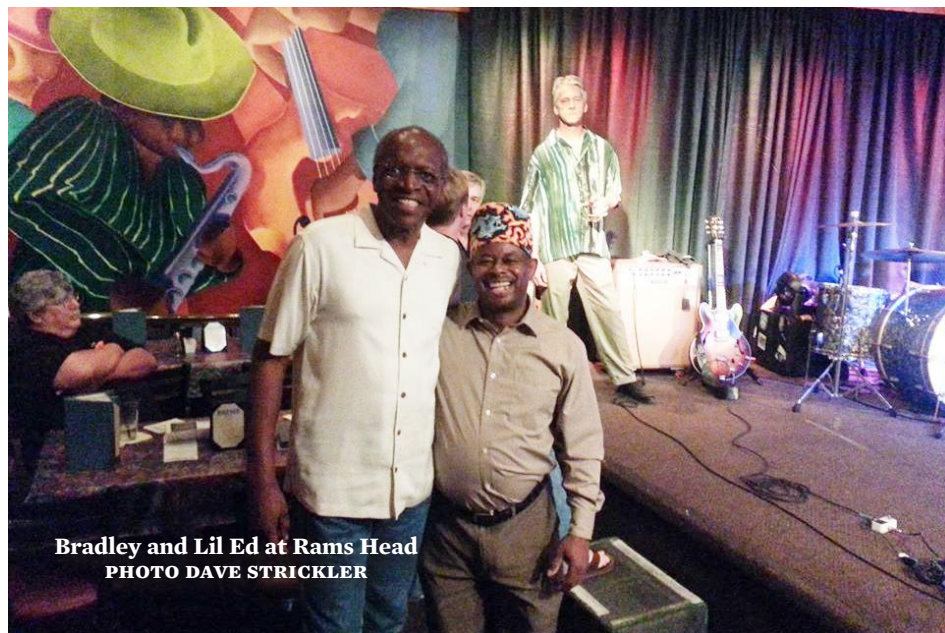
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OF THE BLUES IMPERIALS

THE YEAR 2026 COMMEMORATES 51 YEARS of the musical longevity of the energetic and rockin' Chicago Blues band, Lil Ed and the Blues Imperials. Between 1975 and 1986, Lil Ed and the Blues Imperials built a stellar reputation as one of Chicago's foremost blues ensembles.

Born in Chicago on April 8, 1955, in the heart of Chicago's tough West Side, Ed grew up surrounded by music. He was playing guitar, then drums and bass, by the time he was 12. Ed and his brother Pookie received lessons and support from their famous uncle J.B. Hutto. "J.B. taught me everything I know," says Ed. "I wouldn't be where I am today without him." Ed and Pookie spent their teen years making music together, and in 1975 formed the first incarnation of The Blues Imperials. Lil Ed named his band after the food product "Imperial Margarine," and they built a reputation by working their way up through the gritty clubs on the westside of Chicago and consistently delivering the music that the knowledgeable blues audience appreciated. The band came to the attention of Alligator Records legendary president and producer, Bruce Iglauer who was putting together an anthology of some of the Windy City's "younger" blues artists and he asked Lil Ed if he wanted to contribute. That led to the band's first time in a studio and in addition to cutting one song for the anthology, they recorded thirty in under two hours and the output became their first album, "Roughhousin'" (1986) That initial well received recording enabled Lil Ed Williams to quit his job at the Red Carpet Car Wash and Pookie, who was driving a school bus, and set out on the road. Their second album, "Chicken, Gravy & Biscuits" was released in 1989, and their third, "What You See Is What You Get" in 1992. At that point the group disbanded. Lil Ed issued two solo albums on which he was joined by Dave Weld, a former member of the Blues Imperials and a second with Willie Kent. The group re-formed with Lil Ed's brother James "Pookie" Young on bass, Kelly Littleton on drums and Mike Garrett holding down the rhythm guitar duties. The group took home the Living Blues Award for Best Live Performer in 2011, 2012 and 2013. They won the prestigious Blues Music Award for Band of The Year in both 2007 and 2009. The Associated Press says, "Williams fills Chicago's biggest shoes with more life and heat than anyone on stage today." The Chicago Sun-Times says, "Lil' Ed & The Blues Imperials are the hottest purveyors of bottleneck boogie to come out of Chicago since Hound Dog Taylor."

Lil Ed sat down for a relaxed and laugh-filled chat with the Baltimore Blues Society's *Blues Rag* Magazine. — **BRADLEY ALSTON**



Bradley and Lil Ed at Rams Head
PHOTO DAVE STRICKLER

Hi Ed! Describe your type of blues.

Well, it's like a soup. You have to mix the correct ingredients to get the flavor correct. With my blues you have a little J.B. Hutto, Muddy Waters, Elmore James and a touch of BB (King). The skill is to mix those ingredients just right.

How did you come to like the blues as a youngster?

My uncle, J.B. Hutto used to visit when he was not on the road. My family would spend time in church singing and gathering, but when my uncle J.B. came around, the family would have fun, eating, socializing and playing the blues. As a youngster I would watch the grown-ups and was attracted to the sound of the blues. It was real exciting as a child to see Uncle J.B. play.

Was J.B. Hutto your mother's or father's brother?

He was my mother's brother.

Was your family from Chicago?

No, my family are from the south. Places like Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi.

I was raised in Baltimore and do not recall hearing blues on the radio growing up. Was blues played on Chicago radio when you were growing up?

You know...I can't recall that I heard blues on the radio growing up! Later, during the 60's there was Johnny Taylor and BB on the radio and there was a little blues being played in the neighborhood. In fact, when Uncle J.B. started to come around and teach us a little about playing the blues, there were other young musicians in the neighborhood, but they were into groups like the Temptations and the Chi-Lites and folks like that. So, they didn't know that I was a blues person and when my brother told them I was learning to play the guitar, they would ask me to come over their house. When they asked me to play something, and I started playing Elmore James and they looked surprised at me and said..." Oh No! You like that sad stuff" (laughter) I was learning from Uncle J.B. and would turn around and teach my brother Pookie the bass line.

I interviewed John Primer recently and he moved to Chicago from Mississippi in 1963 and he also did not recall hearing blues on the radio in Chicago..." The Home of the Blues."

Yes. In fact, Uncle J.B. used to sneak us into the clubs, and that was the really the first time I heard the blues being played on a large scale.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

LIL ED

CONTINUED

Ed, you are an exceptional slide player. What was it about the slide guitar that attracted you?

The shimmy! Back when my folks would party when Uncle J.B. came over, we only had 40-watt light bulbs back then. There were no 60- or 100-watt bulbs and the house was usually dim. Anyway, they kept us kids out of the room where they were partying, and I would, of course sneak in. I was fascinated by Uncle J.B.'s shiny slide shimmying up and down the neck of the guitar in the dim light. It was a sight to see for a young child and of course I wanted to investigate and learn. He would see me peeping and call, "come on in boy." My aunt and grandmother would protest, but he would still bring me in. Eventually he would show me a little about the slide...just a little. Mostly he showed me the fundamentals, but I just wanted to play the slide! (laughter). He would teach me the rhythm first and now I know that you have to learn rhythm in order to do the slide. So, he would have me practice the rhythm of the song while he played lead. When he returned from his tour is when he would go to the next lesson/note. It was a weird way of teaching, but I can see the value today.

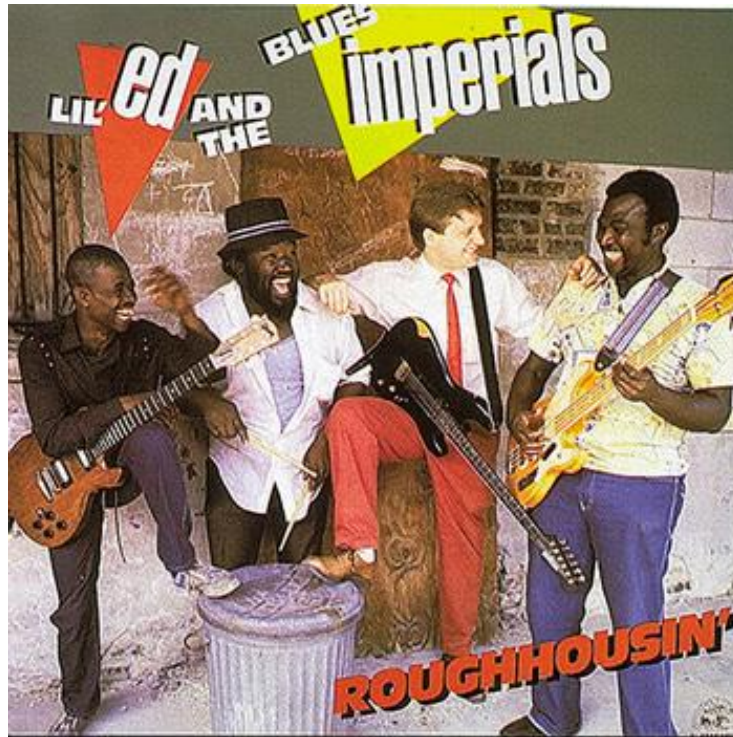
What blues bands do you remember as a teenager in Chicago?

Well, I was about fifteen when Uncle J.B. started taking us to the clubs. He would sneak us in or sometimes paint a mustache on us and dress us in a big overcoat. Which fooled nobody. The doorman would tell Uncle J.B., "why are you trying to sneak these kids in here." He would play being shocked and say, "they are grown men....just don't give them nothing to drink! (laughter). I saw and met Howling

Wolf's hand and his huge one hand covered both of mine!

You worked at the Red-Carpet Car Wash in Chicago and the manager was the one who encouraged you to pursue your musical dreams. Share about that experience and story.

Well, once I learned how to play, I formed a band and was playing around in the westside clubs. Dave Weld was our first rhythm player and he knew Bruce (Iglauer). I was not thinking at that time of making an album. My dream was to go into one of those recording both and for \$100 you could make a 45. Although at the time we were only making \$25 per man at the gigs and you know at that young age, money did not stay in your pockets and my brother and I could never seem to save that \$100. So, one night we were playing at a club (Blues Etc.) up on Halstead Street and Dave whispers to me that Bruce walked in. I had no idea who he was...and frankly did not care much at that time. So, after the set, Bruce came up, shook my hand and said that he was planning to do an anthology and wanted our band to cut a song for the recording. I said sure and we set up the studio time. However, when that time came around I had to work at the car wash. So, I told my boss that I had to leave to make a record. I had never been in a studio before. I did not even know what head phones were (laughter). Bruce



Wolf. Wanted to see Muddy but he died before I was able to do that. Mostly, we had blues men around the neighborhood who covered the main blues stars. Singers like Little Howling Wolf and BB King imitators. I remember shaking Howling

ONE NIGHT WE WERE PLAYING AT A CLUB (BLUES ETC.) UP ON HALSTEAD STREET AND DAVE WHISPERS TO ME THAT BRUCE WALKED IN. I HAD NO IDEA WHO HE WAS... AND FRANKLY DID NOT CARE MUCH AT THAT TIME. SO, AFTER THE SET, BRUCE CAME UP, SHOOK MY HAND AND SAID THAT HE WAS PLANNING TO DO AN ANTHOLOGY AND WANTED OUR BAND TO CUT A SONG FOR THE RECORDING.

like the way I played and the fact that I was young singing all the old songs. After each song they would ask for another and another. At the end Bruce came out from the control booth and said that we had cut so many songs, why not just make an album! We had recorded 30 songs in less than two hours. After that Bruce started getting me gigs out of town and eventually, I was working more gigs then at the car wash. I didn't want to leave the car wash because it was still my main source of income and paying really well. One day my boss came up to me and asked how the music was coming. I shared that it was fine, and we were getting work out of town. He said, yes, I see that you are gone more than being here. Why don't you go out and give it a try full time and if that does not work out...you can always come back here. I was surprised and asked him was he

sure. He said sure and would guarantee my job if I needed to come back. And that how I started going on tour.

What a nice story.

He was a good boss. His name was George Levy. On my "Roughhousing" Album I called him a "mean old Jew." When I would visit the car wash or play there with the band for the annual holiday party, he would ask when I was going to let him hear the new recording. I was little nervous because I had called him that in the song. Finally, I brought the album by and left it for him to hear. The next time I saw him I thought he was going to cuss me out but he came up and gave me a big hug, grabbed my hand and said with a wide grin, "I love the album, great music and I loved that you called me a mean old Jew because that's just what I want people to think! (laughter)

The 1986 "Roughhousing" album was released to wide acclaim and launched your career. How did it change your life?

It was good. With the new album we got a chance to travel for the first time. I had never been outside of Chicago, except one time to Indiana. So, it really opened up that aspect for us all. It was great meeting all the people, and at that time meeting and playing with the ladies (laughter).

I have a picture of you and Ronnie Baker Brooks together. How did you meet?

Ronnie and I go way back, and we were on the same label. I also worked with his father. Our bands would sometimes open for other blues acts or at festivals I would come on before him, but he stopped that because he said when he followed me, I



Lil Ed and Ronnie Baker Brooks

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

LIL ED

CONTINUED

made him work too hard! All the Bakers are good upstanding people.

You are a gifted song writer. Share with us your song writing process.

It varies. Sometimes I can get a fantastic idea from talking to people. Now to them it may not be fantastic, but to me it is because I can make a song out of it. I play my guitar all the time. When I'm at home, I'm always with the guitar. That's the way Uncle J.B. taught me. He said to always keep it with you because you will always get something out of it, and he was right. So, with my guitar I may get a good groove. Other times I'll come up with the lyrics. My wife writes too.

That's great. How long have you been married?

Pamela and I have been married over twenty-seven years. The first time she told me she had a song for me to look over, she produced a notebook and the song was six or seven pages! I said, honey you are going to have to cut this down, it'll take me an hour to sing this! (laughter).

How is the road. What is your touring schedule these days?

Well, when we first started were on the road 300+ days a year. Now, we are out there about 200 days or less.

Do you like that better?

Oh yeah! Because I'm older now. I can't do the road like I used to. Look,



Lil Ed at
St. Georges
Blues Fest

I WEAR [THE FEZ] IN HONOR OF MY UNCLE J.B. I PROMISED HIM THAT I WOULD HELP KEEP THE BLUES ALIVE. THE FEZ ALSO HELPS PEOPLE TO THINK OF HIM AND I WANT TO KEEP HIS MEMORY ALIVE.

I've been overseas, I've been pretty much everywhere. When you are younger its ok to always be on the go. As you get older, the home life becomes more important. Plus, I have grand kids and I want to see them grow up and I want them to remember me.

When you are home in Chicago, how often do you play locally and where do you play?

I play a good deal around Chicago, but mostly in the winter time. You know on the road in the winter you have the snow, the ice and sleet and it makes travel difficult. So, it's good to be home in the winter. If a snow storm happens, you just make it home instead of trying to drive 150 miles to the next gig. You must keep great tires on the tour van because you never know what the weather will be.

When and why did you start wearing the fez head gear?

I started wearing the fez after I got married. My wife and I was sitting around one day, and she suggested that I start wearing it like my uncle J. B. I had been thinking of wearing it for a while at that time. I had tried to make my own, but they were always too big or too small or something wrong. My wife is also a seamstress and she started making them for me and they caught on. I wear it in honor of my Uncle J.B. I promised him that I would help keep the blues alive. The fez also helps people to think of him and I want to keep his memory alive.



Lil Ed, Naomi Girke, and Margie Rostrum at St. Georges Blues Festival June 2019



Lil Ed and Conan O'Brien
PHOTO VAMADE.COM

What do you think about the “Ed Head’ phenomenon? Which now includes TV star Conan O’Brien. How did that fun cult come about?

Well, my wife was responsible. She made the fez and one day she put out a picture of me with the Fez Later she put the picture on a stick and passed that out. Fans had started to wear their own fez, which was a lot of fun. After the Ed picture on a stick came out, eventually fans started to make their own. One day I said you are all my “Ed Heads” and it took off.

Are any of your children or grandchildren interested in music in general and blues in particular?

My children were not. Well, when

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Lil Ed and Mud Morganfield
at North Atlantic BF 2018

LIL ED

CONTINUED

my son was younger, I brought him a brand-new guitar. His mother and I were separated and when I visited him, he had taken the guitar apart! I said, "what are you doing? He said he was fixing. I said "The guitar is already fixed! (laughter) I put it back together for him and when I came back to visit a few weeks later, he had once again taken it apart. So, that was that. Now I have some grandkids who are making noise about wanting to play....so we'll see.

Tell us about your first paying gig at Big Dukes Blue Flame Night Club.

(Laughing) That was a very scary and cool gig. I had just started to play the Westside clubs. The owners were a little nervous because they did not know if I could draw the crowd in to see me. So, they booked other acts to help fill the house. They hired a stripper and singer named Popeye. That was fine with me. I'm standing behind the singer Popeye playing. I could not see what he was doing when suddenly the crowd

started screaming and pointing to the singer. He turned around towards me and his two eye balls were out of the sockets laying on his cheeks. He had popped the eyes out and then put them back in. Man, that about scared me half to death!

What year was that!

1978 or 79. I remember we made \$6 per man on that gig and we were happy.

In a recent interview one of our local radio personalities, shared that if Little Walter was born in the 1990 instead of the 1930 he would aspire to hip hop instead of the blues. What are your thoughts on the future of the blues?

I think the blues is going to be the same. Some young people are trying to change it a little bit, put more rock in it. I heard



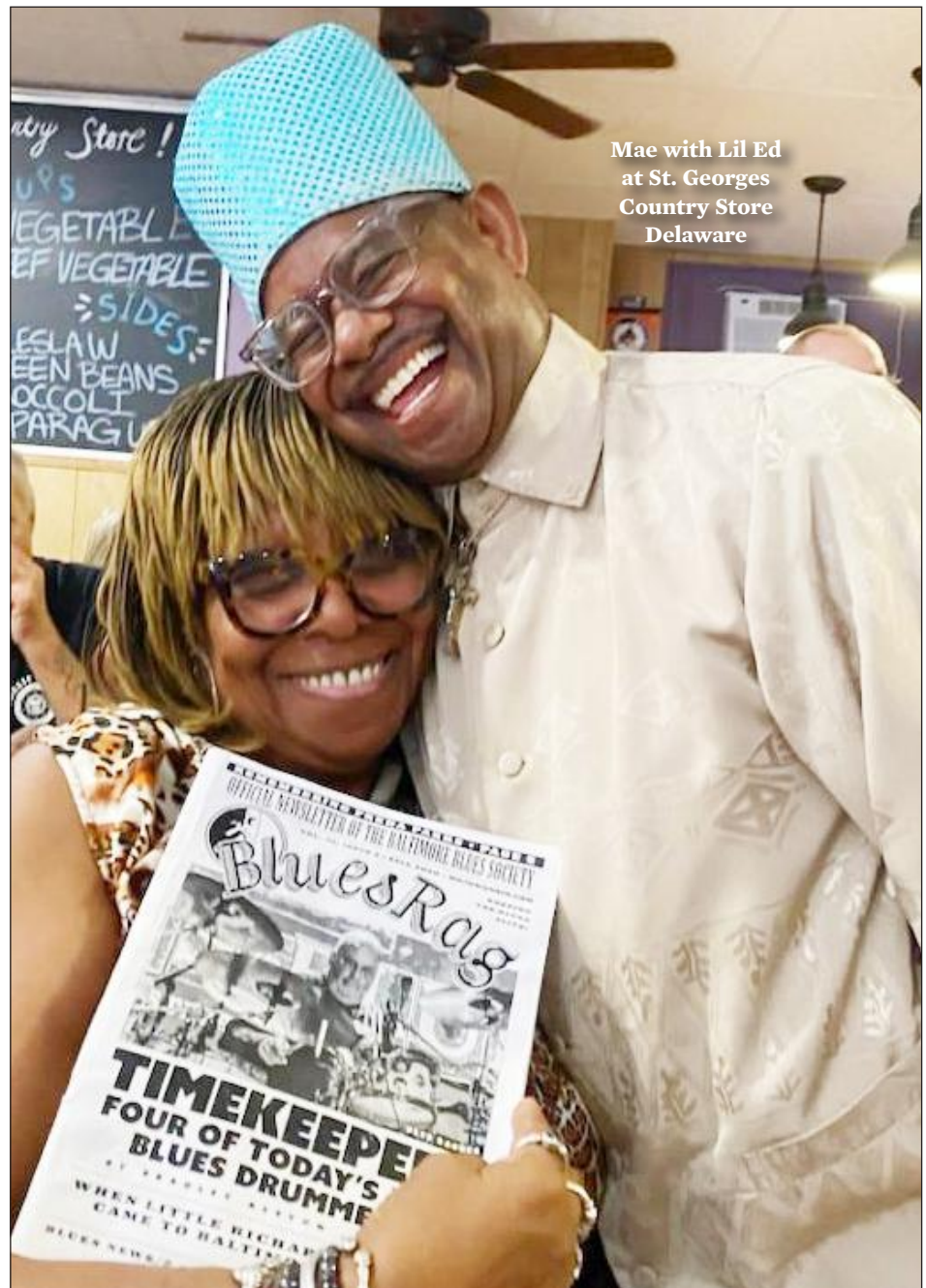
Left, Linda Wagner and Right,
Eleanor Fried with Lil Ed
PHOTO BRADLEY ALSTON

I HAVE YOUNG PEOPLE STARTING TO COME UP TO ME AND SAY THAT THEY LOVE THE MUSIC, AND ASKING HOW LONG HAVE I BEEN DOING IT, WHERE DID I LEARN IT, YOU KNOW, BEING CURIOUS. I'M THINKING ABOUT TEACHING SOME OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD. THERE ARE A COUPLE OF RECORD STORES IN THE COMMUNITY THAT HAVE ASKED ME TO GIVE LESSONS AND I'M SERIOUSLY THINKING ABOUT DOING JUST THAT.

some cats playing some music the other day calling it blues fusion that was the worst thing I have ever heard. Blues, you can uproot it a little bit you know, speed it up or slow it down a bit. Blues is not meant to be changed. You put too much rock in it and it just goes overboard. There are some young people who may try to infuse some hip hop into the blues and it just doesn't work in my opinion. I think that there will always be great blues being produced and appreciated. In fact, I have young people starting to come up to me and say that they love the music, and asking how long have I been doing it, where did I learn it, you know, being curious. I'm thinking about teaching some of the young people in the neighborhood. There are a couple of record stores in the community that have asked me to give lessons and I'm seriously thinking about doing just that.

What is the future for Ed Williams?

I'm in the process of building up my home studio. That is a slow process and I enjoy that a lot. I am thinking and planning to maybe open a car wash here in Chicago. I don't want to travel all my life. I like the road, but the road is not what it used to be. It has become hard. And, gigs are becoming lighter. On top of that I don't like to fly. I have a fear of heights. I prefer not to travel to or through the mountains because that tend to take a lot out of me. I told my booking agent to stop sending me to the mountains. I love the music and the fans who come out to see us and support us. Uncle J.B. taught us that we would not get rich doing the blues, but you'll meet a lot of great people and see a great deal of the country. I'm still having fun and that's the what's important!



Mae with Lil Ed
at St. Georges
Country Store
Delaware



BLUESBEAT

PHOTOS BY LARRY FOGELSON

“SPRING FEVER” MARCO HUNTING & FISHING CLUB





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BLUESBEAT CONTINUED



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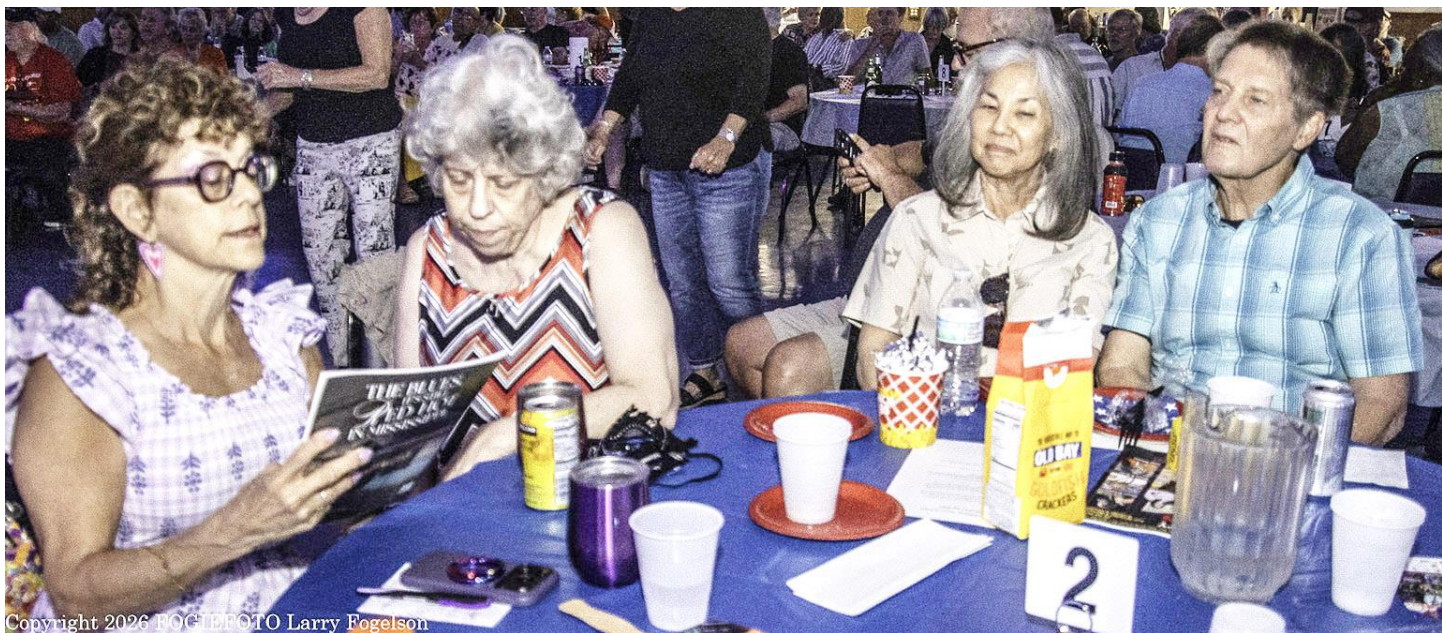
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BLUESBEAT
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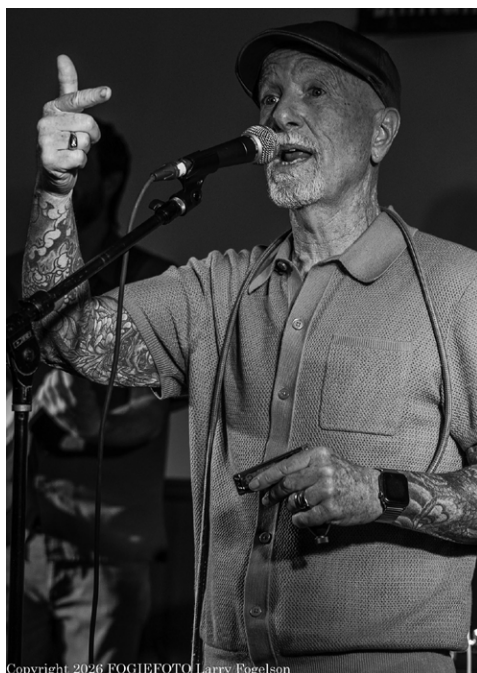
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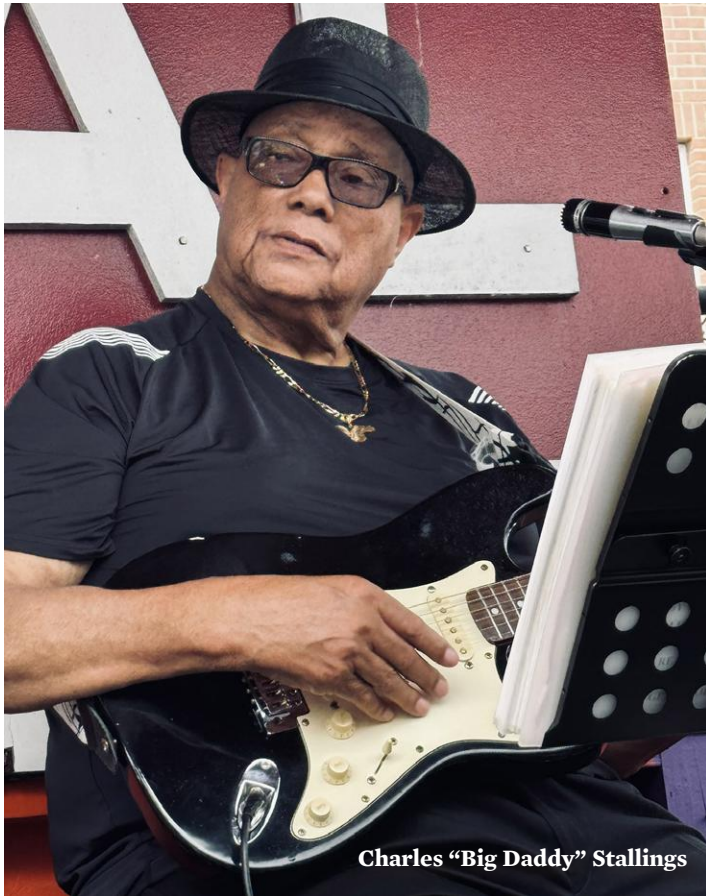
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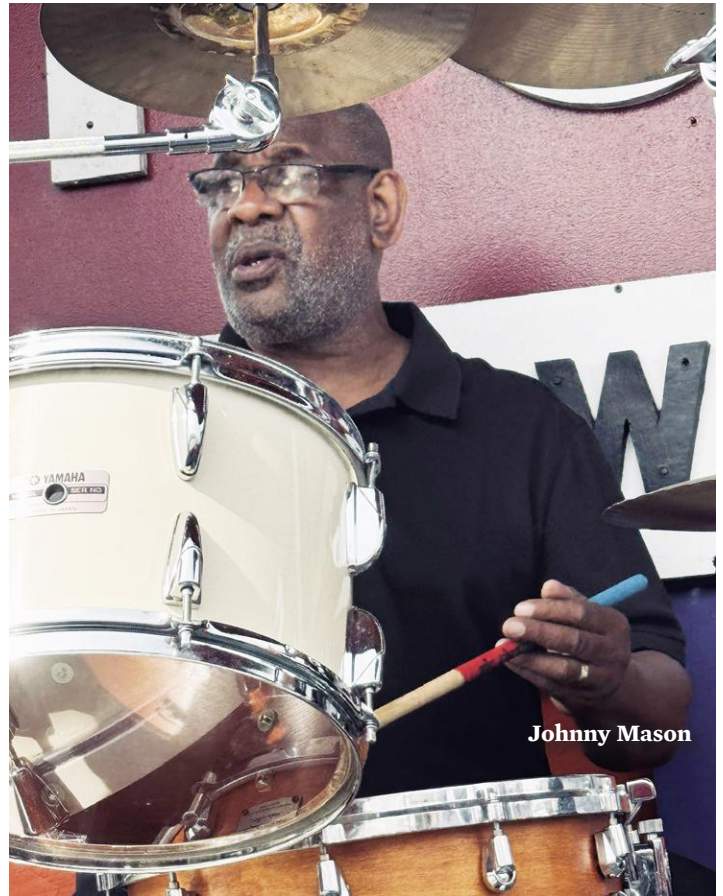
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**CHARLES "BIG DADDY" STALLINGS AND THE
B-TOWN/BLUEZ EVOLUTION BAND PERFORM AT
AVENUE BAKERY IN BALTIMORE, 6/6/26**

PHOTOS COURTESY BIG DADDY STALLINGS



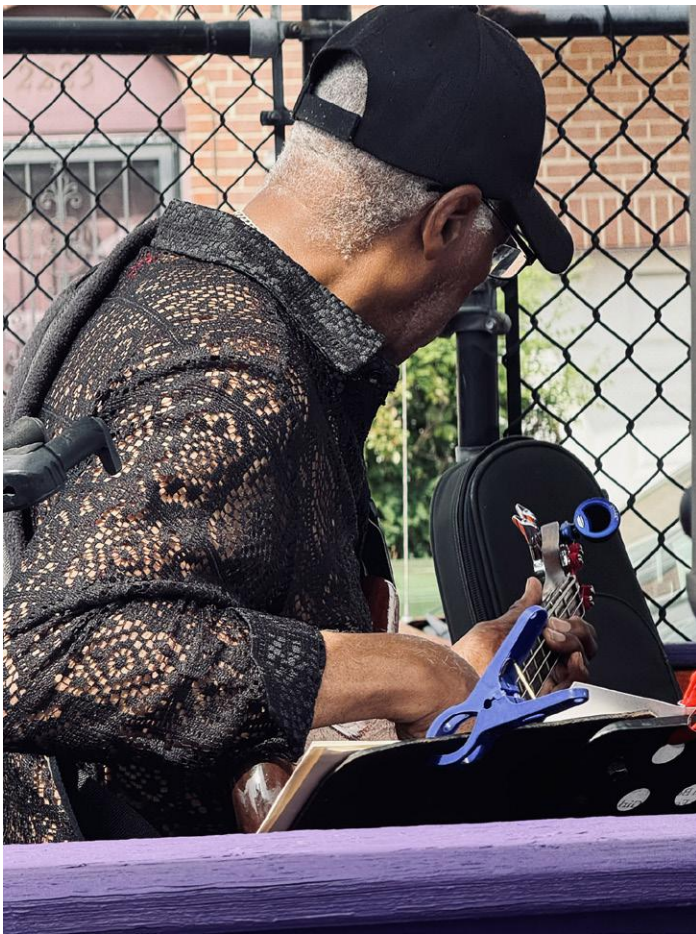
Charles "Big Daddy" Stallings



Johnny Mason



David Russell



Attentive crowd

COMMON GROUND ON THE HILL

COMMON GROUND ON THE HILL is lead by Walt Michael head of the Maryland Folk Live Center at McDaniel College in Westminster. They annually hold two weeks of traditions roots music, instrumental, craft, and dance classes presented by 100 instructors. The two weeks include various performances by faculty and students including a free blues show presented by their top blues instructors. The blues concert took place on July 8. These photos provide a glimpse of the blues concert with Guy Davis, Lea Gilmore, Professor Louis (Louis Hurwitz) of Louis and the Crowmatics, Chris James, Sparky and Rhonda Rucker, Harry Orlove, and many more. It was a wonderful show. BBS members and friends interested in learning more about Common Ground and receiving their notices about events all year and next years Tradition Weeks catalogue, their web site is commongroundonthehill.org. They are well worth checking out.

—LARRY FOGELSON



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Join the Baltimore Blues Society Today!

Not yet a member of the Baltimore Blues Society (BBS)? There's never been a better time to support the BBS and help preserve America's native musical art form—the Blues!

Annual membership is just **\$30 for an Individual** or **\$40 for a Couple**.

Why join?

In addition to supporting our mission of keeping the blues alive, BBS members enjoy a variety of benefits, including:

- The satisfaction of helping ensure that live blues music continues to thrive in our community
- Opportunities to experience outstanding international, national, regional, and local blues artists in an intimate, friendly setting
- Eligibility for ticket giveaways to blues shows at several area venues
- Members only discounts

The Baltimore Blues Society is a **non-profit, all-volunteer organization**. Membership dues, ticket sales, and donations provide the financial support that allows us to present quality blues events, promote local artists, and preserve this uniquely American musical tradition.

Ready to join?

Simply **click [here](#)** to sign up online. Be sure to include your **email address**—it's our primary way of keeping members informed about upcoming shows, giveaways, volunteer opportunities, and the latest BBS news.

Become a member today and help us keep the blues alive!



BLUES REVIEWS

GEORGE THOROGOOD AND THE DESTROYERS

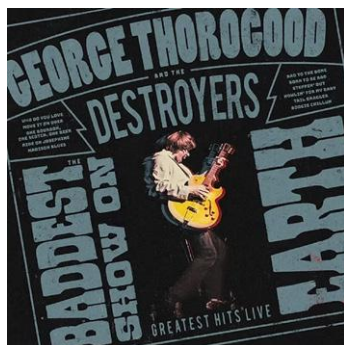
The Baddest Show on Earth: Greatest Hits Live
CRAFT RECORDINGS

Once a boneshaker, always a boneshaker.

On top of that, the man is also unanimously known for being “bad to the bone”—an expression he himself coined and then thrust into the everyday lexicon on the force of his stuttering growl and careening slide guitar. So successfully, in fact, that 1982’s *Bad To the Bone*, named after its evergreen title track, struck gold with 500,000 copies sold by 1985.

Decade after jolting decade confirms that George Thorogood, flanked by The Destroyers, has long been firing up hordes. Earwitness proof to that fact from across the span of 1978 through 2024: *The Baddest Show on Earth: Greatest Hits Live*, a portable powerplant that supplies 70 minutes of sustained blues-rocked energy. Music for your dancing and/or hell-raising pleasure. And since the bandstand has forever been The Destroyers’ proving ground, all that need be done was to just roll tape at every stop along the way. Thorogood and the boys took it from there, providing the sonic heft, kinetic blast, infectious nature and outright raw glory associated with the band. Given its spread of years, cities and venues, this onstage collection stands apart within Thorogood’s deep discography.

“[Ride On Josephine](#)” starts the clock in 1978. That puts the band five years out from their [first gig](#), an unceremonious takeover of a dormitory lounge at the University of Delaware, just a stone’s throw from the suburban basements of nearby Wilmington where teenage plans of stardom were hatched. So, being booked at My Father’s Place—a former bowling alley in Roslyn, New York, that turned into hallowed ground for rockers, from [Ramones](#) and Iggy Pop to Blue Öyster Cult and [Tom Petty](#)



& [The Heartbreakers](#)—was a major upgrade from that modest, inaugural campus engagement. Driven with the unstoppable insistence of a concrete wall on the move, this Destroyers’ performance packs a wallop far greater than Bo Diddley’s blueprint ever did in 1960.

And the crowd goes wild.

Thorogood was going places. That same year, El Mocambo—Toronto’s hallmark nightclub that baited in [Stevie Ray Vaughan & Double Trouble](#) to the [Rolling Stones](#)—got a solid rattling under the stomp from John Lee Hooker’s “Boogie Chillun.” You could fit two of the studio versions off *Bad To the Bone* inside this 12.5-minute marathon jam, and still have spare time to keep on boogieing at a breakneck pace.

Soon enough, The Destroyers’ trajectory landed them on a mega-stage in 1985. To be precise: mega-mega. On that beyond-hot July 13th afternoon, temperatures soared to 90-plus degrees in south Philadelphia. Not to be outdone, the mass audience packed inside John F. Kennedy Stadium soared to 90,000plus. Correct, an ocean of people. It was there—at Live Aid—Thorogood performed “Who Do You Love?,” alongside its maker, [Bo Diddley](#).

Yet five years and five months earlier, on a chilled February day in 1980, that same number, “[Who Do You Love?](#),” was smoked at Atlanta’s Agora Theater. No guest was needed, though, to make the song burst. More than enough firepower was at hand for its concus-

sive beat and Gibson rumble to ecstatically overload every nerve in the building. Pushing things over the top is that little move where George runs his finger along the length of the neck of his guitar, as if shooting a chill right down the spine.

And the crowd goes wild, again.

Sure, George and his guitar actually have been found [alone and acoustic](#). 2017’s *Party of One* was (predominantly) that rare exception. (Other than the pre-Destroyer days, when busking under the spell of [John Hammond](#).)

Not here, though.

Here, he’s in constant conventional form: fully reinforced and extra electrified. His wingmen are faithful, indeed, with hardly any turnover since the band’s inception. Heard here are bassist Bill Blough, second guitarists Ron Smith (Destroyers v1.0) and Jim Suhler (Destroyers v2.0), as well as drummer Jeff Simon, the perpetual source of all the thunderclaps and earthquakes ever since that Delaware debut. When present (which is more often than not), the sax is anything but gratuitous. Take, for instance, “One Bourbon, One Scotch, One Beer.” During the 11-minute story-song groove—stitched together from bits of John Lee Hooker’s “[House Rent Blues](#)” and “[House Rent Boogie](#)” plus his “[One Bourbon, One Scotch, One Beer](#)” (not Amos Milburn’s tame “One Scotch, One Bourbon, One Beer”)—Thorogood’s ferocious fretwork gets pitted against Hank Carter’s muscular saxophone. For performances featured since 2020, Buddy Leach is the one blowing burly attitude, as when Howlin’ Wolf gets both a nod and an ooh-ooh-ooh-wee by way of “Howlin’ For My Baby.”

And, you guessed it, the crowd goes wild.

The famed show that blew out the Bradford Ballroom (captured as *Live in Boston, 1982: The Complete Concert*) gets justi-

fably tapped for a trio of tracks. “[Move It On Over](#)” hits first. [Hank Williams](#) wrote the ode about being banished to the proverbial doghouse after a night out on the town; he performed it as a honky-tonk hop, complete with fiddle and gliding steel guitar. Thorogood instead makes it breathe fire with a phenomenally blistered and bottlenecked attack. Elmore James’ “Madison Blues” strikes next, with another phenomenally blistered and bottlenecked attack. Except this one makes hearts fibrillate twice, thanks to an adrenaline ambush hiding behind a false ending. And, lastly, Thorogood’s own audaciously rousing “Bad To The Bone” arrives. Yes, phenomenally blistered and bottlenecked, too.

And each and every time, the crowd goes wild.

Aside from those three, however, everything else on this 11-track roundup has never seen the light of day.

In other words, you had to have been personally going wild inside Kansas City’s Uptown Theater or the Cape Cod Melody Tent or any of the other featured halls or hotspots to have experienced these moments. So, thanks, George, for digging out a slew of performances from the vaults (four for the LP; eight for the CD and digital editions) that have remained unheard ever since. Until now, that is.

Perfect example: “Steppin’ Out.” The instrumental, distinguished by its downbeats plunging like lead safes falling from the sky, makes its first appearance on a Destroyers album. [Memphis Slim](#) came up with the song in 1959, which then jumped overseas in 1966 and into Eric Clapton’s hands with the [Blues Breakers](#). Two years later, Clapton pinched it again; this time for his newest venture via [Cream](#), who sprawled it out past the 13-minute mark. Fast forward to a Texas night in 2022. There, The Destroyers stripped it back to a quick punch that cuts to the chase in well under

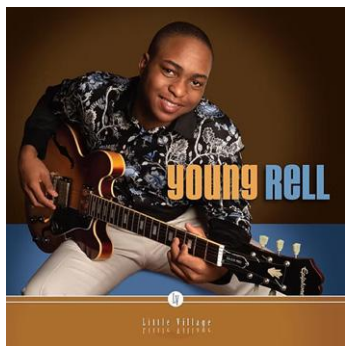
three minutes, while doubling as a soapbox for Suhler's guitar. "[Tail Dragger](#)," with its gnarly riff, nicely spotlights another of Suhler's meltdowns.

Fast forward even more, right up to 2024. That's when "Born To Be Bad" rocked and roared Sarasota, Florida, to its feet. The title cut from 1988's *Born To Be Bad*, like anything else in Thorogood's catalogue, hasn't lost an ounce of its capacity to get audiences shouting along.

If anything fresher than 2024 is needed, you're quite in luck. Because "[The Baddest Show on Earth](#)" can be experienced in the flesh, when Thorogood and the Destroyers rumble into Selbyville, Delaware, on [September 10](#) before conquering Solomons, Maryland, on September 11.

Both options—*The Baddest Show on Earth: Greatest Hits Live* recording and 'The Baddest Show on Earth' tour—save you a spot for when the crowd goes wild.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



HARRELL "YOUNG RELL" DAVENPORT

Young Rell
LITTLE VILLAGE FOUNDATION

Now it is official: Please welcome Young Rell into the blues fold on the strength of his self-titled, long-play debut, *Young Rell*. The singing harpist/guitarist, known to his mother as Harrell Davenport, has just launched his recording career in the bold, gutsy way—by creating rather than copying. New songs instead of old. Fresh, not recycled. Only two outsiders snuck onto the setlist by way of a cover; the 10 other tracks stem directly from Davenport himself.

And as Shemekia Copeland once did (with 1998's *Turn The*

Heat Up), so has Davenport likewise unveiled his grand opening as a leader at the ripe old age of ... 19.

Young Rell, indeed.

But this teenaged 'old soul' hasn't just now burst onto the scene. There have been a few years of [build-up](#). He has already been commanding airspace at festivals (King Biscuit, Calgary, Lucerne), inside Delta juke joints (Red's) and Chicago lounges (Rosa's), as well as atop gorgeous turquoise seas (the Legendary Rhythm & Blues Cruise). Plus, he released a pair of standalone singles in 2025 that paved the way for this, his first full-blown record.

As harbingers go, "[Tomorrow](#)" is quite a good one for Young Rell, both the album as well as the man. It is probably safe to say that beginning blues guitarists often stand at a crossroads nowadays: Either travel in the (more-or-less) classic lane or barrel down the blues-rock one (or really floor it into flat-out rock). Seconds in, the answer is immediately evident. Because a beefy, pulsing shuffle about doing-you-know-what is always a reassuring start to any blues album. And right on cue, "Tomorrow" thumps in. Its guitar writhes, then strikes. A hard-edged harp adds extra insurance as to the chosen path.

Rell is fluent on both, splitting time between the two instruments for the session's entire 47 minutes.

To that, add a warm, flexible voice capable of the sporadic falsetto uptick, which is the vocal equivalent of when he or wingman "Kid" Andersen shoot a guitar note soaring skyward with the bend of a string. Both methods tack on a prominent exclamation point to whatever statement is being made. And all the spontaneous outbursts—assorted grunts and grumbles, oohs and yeahs, and "Play it a long time," when greenlighting Jim Pugh's piano solo to take its needed space—affirm Rell is comfortable under the spotlight.

His writing shows that he has grown up quickly, not shying away from heavy stuff. "Fatherless Child" flips the script from "Motherless Children"

(aka "Mother's Children Have a Hard Time"), the gut-punch first thrown by growly [Blind Willie Johnson](#) in 1927, and then later by everyone from [Eric Clapton](#) to the [Staple Singers](#). Rell's original is a very separate lament unto itself. Loss, confusion and a resentful aftertaste color the words; lyrical harping echoes them.

Right on its heels, "[Spinning](#)" comes to your emotional rescue. It's whole-body catharsis, an antidote delivered in the form of soul music. Rell's own soul music. With saxophone and trumpet blazing away on bright-gold riffs that frame the infectious singalong chorus ("you got me ... spinning"), the love song swoons, majordomo.

"[The World Don't Deserve Your Smile](#)" likewise runs thick with mood. Except mood that slips back to the stylistic default mode of blues, by lining out lyrics in halting clusters that ride up and down on the melody—much in the way [Magic Sam](#) did on the West Side of 1950s Chicago. Soloing space is cramped; yet Rell's Epiphone quickly exerts control with orderly discipline, extending from the steady string-by-string windup and that satisfying, little bend to those kamikaze drops before closing.

Somewhere up on high, [Gatemouth Brown](#) and [Pee Wee Crayton](#) are high-fiving to Davenport's outright giddy "[Richland Swing](#)," its sharp, bright, lightning-fast lines ricocheting around like a hummingbird stuck in a shoebox. Between the Lord-have-mercy horns and the boiling rhythm section, a lot of air gets moved. Not to mention the steady wind coming off Rell's busy strings. The four minutes are an adrenaline rush on Davenport's guitar, as much as "Nite Creepin'" is for his heavy-set harp. It's another wordless, open forum to let him rip, which includes extendedly holding that one hot, fat note—letting it burn, burn, burn—for seconds upon seconds. Tense and release, then back to buzzing at a quick clip.

In contrast to those go-go-go instrumentals is "Hurt People, Hurt People." Not only do lyrics return. But you can feel the

pace slow to a molasses crawl, as the harping loses its urban snarl for a downhome drawl of the kind championed by both Sonny Boys. "I Be Tryin'" keeps the harmonica tone clean—even throughout all the swooping and surging and rat-a-tat bursts prior to sending up a moonshot that settles back to earth in a gentle flutter. On the other hand, Pugh, having swapped over from piano to one of the more funky varieties of organs, sprays out retro grooviness with every squish of the keys.

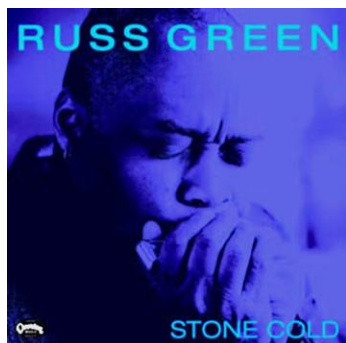
"I Hear Some Blues Downstairs" reveals yet another of Rell's skills beyond singing, harping, fretting, and songwriting: the art of the deep dive to supplement his own songbook whenever need arises. The '70s-era song receives quite the nice revival, having been borrowed from [Fenton Robinson](#), the late, undervalued Chicago bluesman who wrote it as a means of expressing infatuation with the music in general, much as did Z.Z. Hill's "[Down Home Blues](#)."

Last year, Davenport's sleuthing turned up "[Beefsteak Blues](#)," which served as one-half of those independent singles. The source was [James "Son" Thomas](#), a bona fide Mississippi bluesman who served as the [life—and soundtrack](#)—of the Delta party. It was another fine excavation.

But Rell—frequently encountered bouncing between Mississippi (where he was raised) and Chicago (where he first broke big)—needn't rely on recreating since he *creates* a plentiful supply of his own material. Yet another fine example of such is "Giving Me the Blues." This pulsatile airing of grievances sports a nice guitar solo that proves you don't need speed or a flurry of notes to captivate; just the right notes with the right tone. Plus a couple of well-placed groans always help when beating those strings.

So, time has definitely come. *Young Rell* lets the cat out of the bag for the formal start of a long career.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



RUSS GREEN
Stone Cold
OVERTON MUSIC

There is a problem. A major problem.

Before one word of such leaks out, a smoldering-then-eruptive prelude ushers in the kind of uneasy sense that sends eyes to dart back and forth and hearts to involuntarily speed up their pace. Thirty seconds of generalized nervousness spreads among the guitars and tom-toms. The harmonica tugs and tugs at the leash before busting free to climb above a steamrolling funk bassline for another 30 seconds.

One minute in, the picture begins coming into view:

"There's 12 feet of water in her living room. She called 911 and there's nothing they can do ..."

Then the killer line drops, guaranteeing that the bizarre is at hand:

"Cause you know the rest of the house is just bone dry."

Meet (or re-meet) Russ Green, the bringer of bad news. The Chicago native is back in play. Back to staying off the beaten trail by blazing his own. Back to making an album to follow up his 2018 debut, *City Soul*, that lit up *Living Blues* and *Downbeat* magazines as well as the stage at the [Chicago Blues Festival](#). And back to bushwhacking that path with his harp's reed-rattled edge.

Stone Cold rolls out from a muscled band (ensured by having [Giles Corey](#) man the guitar post) afforded lots of blowing room to air out 10 new originals that are not blues in ordinary terms. That makes all the more sense in knowing who Green's two harpist mentors have been:

[James "Sugar Blue" Whiting](#) (who famously rocketed from busking on the streets one day to recording with the [Rolling Stones](#) the next) and Billy Branch (who fathered [Sons of Blues](#), the S.O.B.s, in 1977, and headlined with them at the 2026 Chicago Blues Festival). Both are often considered modernist in terms of approach to the instrument as well as to the music itself. So when Green performs acrobatics in the upper registers for both his solos in "Waitin' On You" or avoids typical lyric couplets to frame the yearn in "Need You So Bad," the message gets sent: The man delivers blues his way.

Not to mention that surreal "[12 Feet of Water](#)."

Writing sticks to the basic tenets of the blues. In other words, life's dread realities: strapped, duped, deserted, crushed, sorely discontented. Kicking off the 50-minute venting session is "Lint Redux," a tale about being busted and broke—to the point of one's pockets even being devoid of ... lint. The "redux" credential is warranted for picking right up where "[Lint In My Pocket](#)," its prequel, left off in 2018. This sequel is markedly different, with its composure instantly transformed by the slide guitar bringing newfound grit to the stomp. Green's harping runs roughshod over everything.

The [title track](#) emerges out from a solitary organ heard shooting plumes high into the air. It's quite the stately introduction. However, in no time the mood darkens and the grandeur vaporizes as the whole band rushes in, and never stops rushing. Caught up in its own momentum, the song sprays shrapnel via lyric lines centered around a blackhearted woman. "She's stone cold," Green keeps reiterating—always adding, "You better believe I sleep with my eyes wide open." The gun-em-down "Hey Man" is no less wrapped tight. For a change of plans, "Nobody Knows" unplugs.

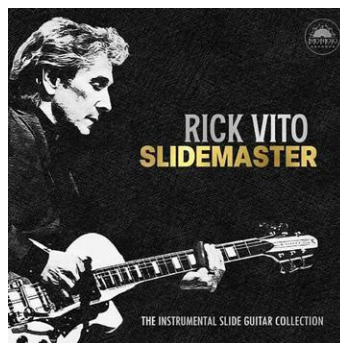
"I Believe" is the slow drag of the bunch. When Green's tarthick voice isn't laying out the case for his crushing heartache,

his harp is continually wringing out a series of burly, brutish fills that lure you in, deeper and deeper, by building anticipation for when the pressure will eventually blow out by way of a solo that cuts against the band's smooth flow. "I Believe" requires a pair of such release valves.

The final two tracks work blues with more standard textbook characteristics: "Troubled World," a bumping shuffle with deep swells, and "[Boogie Joint](#)," a madly boogying racer. Invoked between the two of them are mojo references, roadhouse salutes, plus one of Muddy Waters and Willie Dixon's philosophies from 1957: [Live the life you love](#), love the life you live.

Yet, for as commanding as his voice is—capable of twisting out a cry of sorts from that dense bellow—you can feel Green just itching to raise that harp up to his mouth whenever painting his own songs with his own shade of blue.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



RICK VITO
Slidemaster: The Instrumental Slide Guitar Collection
MOMOJO RECORDS

Many a high-profile project has been seared by Rick Vito's bottlenecking.

Those are his char marks singed across Jackson Browne's "[Tender Is the Night](#)," followed by Bob Seger's "[Like a Rock](#)." That was back during the 1980s, when he was also a member of Bonnie Raitt's troupe. Before that, in the '70s, he signed on as one of the touring "friends" in Delaney & Bonnie & Friends; [Bobby Whitlock](#), John Mayall and John Prine also kept Vito's slide purring back then. Plus,

in between [leading](#) a virtual murderers' row of rockers and rowdies in tribute to personal hero Elmore James—by way of onstage tribute to another personal hero, Fleetwood Mac's [Peter Green](#)—as well as cutting more recent albums with Peter Frampton, [Hank Williams Jr.](#), and Boz Scaggs, Vito somehow found time to [front](#) The Mick Fleetwood [Blues Band](#). The man's Rolodex could choke a horse.

Oh yeah, there is also his tenure as lead guitarist of Fleetwood [Mac](#).

Vito stepped in after Lindsey Buckingham stepped out (momentarily). From 1987–1991, spotlights were on him making the most of those years: [touring](#), recording (1990's *Behind the Mask*), and pulling off some absolutely bewitching sleight of hand that reigned atop the Billboard charts. "[As Long As You Follow](#)," a No. 1 single off 1988's 8X Platinum *Greatest Hits*, distinguishes itself by those guitarisms. Sure, Christine McVie delivers her soft ode to second chances with the usual poised persuasion of someone who has been through that wringer. Vito, nevertheless, ends up stealing the show with cascading church-bell chimes, crying-seagull string bends and a one-of-a-kind liquid solo that pours off the strings.

But as 1991 drew to a close, Vito actualized a Mac lyric when deeming it time to—go his own way. Rick's solo business soon opened and records—with his own name stamped atop each of them—began stacking up.

Of the 11 prior albums, *Slidemaster* uniquely stands apart. Not necessarily for showcasing both new material as well as a couple of remixed, remastered highlights pulled from *Soulshaker* (2019), *Mojo On My Side* (2017), and *Rattlesnake Shake* (2005).

But for what its 40 minutes lack. Namely, singing. Because Vito readily sings, as last verified by 2024's *Cadillac Man*. Not here, though. Not at all. *The Instrumental Slide Guitar Collection* corrals a dozen bite-sized, three-minute morsels that

ignore the mic. Each comes with its own distinct personality—something needed for when a bottleneck does the only talking.

“[Vegas Jump](#)” gets the slide rolling, anxiously. Already nervous at baseline, the tight and tense vibrato keeps urgently pitching higher and higher towards the point of liftoff, like that attained on Sundays by [sacred steel](#). In other words, this is no place for slumber. “Albatross” works quite effectively as the antidote. It’s a spot-on reading of the gentle, dreamlike atmosphere Peter Green created with Santo & Johnny’s “[Sleepwalk](#)” in the back of his mind but with Fleetwood [Mac](#) circled around him. Now, like then, mallets soften the blow on the drums in order to avoid any chance of breaking the spell. “The Big Beat,” in direct contrast, pounds out a Bo Diddley rhythm over which Vito rumbles and skids in a case of 1950s revisionism. “The Danger Zone” is noir in both title and action, made for drama in the risky, wee hours beyond midnight. And deeper we go.

“[Red Hot Baby](#)” finds its magic at the bottom of the bottle, much in the way as did *Blues On the South Side*, a 1963 Chicago guidebook to the art of boozy romps implemented by Homesick James, Elmore’s cousin. This Vito original scoots around the barroom to an easy and loose pulse anchored by a bottom-heavy thump. The combination makes latching onto its pull all the easier for revelers, even if you’re tipsy. More laidback and vocal is “Slide the Blues,” whose deep swoops sing out and then answer themselves in call-and-response.

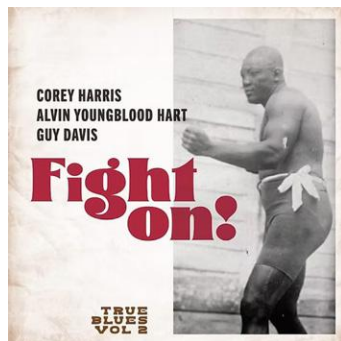
Still deeper.

Wade into “[River of Blues](#).” The piece is intentionally slow in pace, rocking back and forth, setting the trance while maximizing emotional depth. It’s a raga of sorts, where little, intricate curlicues get shaved off from the fretboard with each pass of the bottleneck. Such woozy sounds are vastly more exotic and miles removed from those Vito gleaned from formative days listening to [Robert](#)

[Nighthawk](#) albums. If anything, the technique is closer to that of the great gurus of Indian slide guitar like [V.M. Bhatt](#) or [Debashish Bhattacharya](#). How do you follow that mood piece? Enter “The Supernatural.” First levitated in 1967, Peter Green’s magnum opus with John Mayall & the Bluesbreakers spun on Side 2 of *A Hard Road*. Here, the odyssey breathes again, readily identified by those long, suspended tones ringing out forever until eventually plunging into kamikaze dives.

Ultimately, the showcase opens fully to reveal what a slide can do in expert hands: mimic the human voice in its phrasing and intonation. That is, to sing lyrics by way of glissando and microtones. Both Sam Cooke’s soulful “A Change Is Gonna Come” and “The Lord’s Prayer” are stunningly beautiful when vocalized from Vito speaking with his hands: gliding the bottleneck along the strings with just the exact timing, at just the precise spot, with just the right touch. That’s a job calling for a real *Slidemaster*.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



COREY HARRIS, ALVIN YOUNGBLOOD HART, GUY DAVIS

Fight On! True Blues Vol. 2
YELLOW DOG RECORDS

All that is needed is an acoustic guitar and a heart full of strife. Yet, somehow, in the proper hands, that seemingly simple pairing can best any stethoscope (or band) at listening in on the torment.

Such is *Fight On! True Blues Vol. 2*. No electricity. No accompanists. No doctoring. Nothing of the sort was required. Just an album of straight-up, unplugged,

DIY, run-tape-and-beat-the-strings blues. Country blues, as known in some circles.

For 28 minutes, three hard-line headliners—Corey Harris, Alvin Youngblood Hart, Guy Davis; all of whom were hailed as the young lions of acoustic blues but now assume seniority roles—alternate turns doing what they do best ever since their solo records began piling up in the 1990s: namely, working all by their lonesome. (Harris debuted with *Between Midnight and Day*; Hart lead with *Big Mama’s Door*; Davis went with *Stomp Down Rider*.) In all, *Fight On!* spreads over nine tracks; three apiece; with zero teaming up. To reinforce the degree of isolation, they’re not even in the same proximity, let alone the same studio, when recording: Virginia (Harris), Mississippi (Hart) and New York (Davis).

Given the modest setup and straightforward delivery, these performances could just as well have unfurled right before you. Eye-to-eye. Knee-to-knee. In your kitchen, beneath the moon, on a street corner, inside a backcountry shack.

Despite only having a vintage guitar plus their bare voice, each man’s manner of personal expression pinpoints their identity.

Alvin Youngblood Hart, for starters, is engagingly animated and tends to spontaneously fire off freeform spoken asides to deformalize the setting. Time together becomes looser, more in-the-moment. “Screamin’ and Hollerin’ the Blues” is a prime example. Those three minutes are also textbook Delta. Actually, you couldn’t get any more definitively Delta than having come from [Charley Patton](#), who struck a nerve with Robert Johnson, [Tommy Johnson](#), and Son House, no less. Hart turns that same spark into a [jolting](#) sensation that deliberately bucks and staggers, lurching forward, shoved along all the more by percussive thumps on a makeshift drum: the body of that workhorse 1950s Sears Silvertone flattop guitar. You can practically feel Mississippi’s humid drench.

The beardy, 63-year-old Grammy winner stays in state, more or less, for his two other contributions. Because “Highway 61” has lit up many a pitch Mississippi night. [James “Son” Thomas](#) to the [North Mississippi Allstars](#) can vouch for that. Or when [Fred McDowell](#) was showing off his bottlenecking genius. That was on a front porch in Como, in 1959. Hart, however, picked up his slideless rendition from direct collaborations with [David “Honeyboy” Edwards](#), who, by ’59, had already migrated up to [Chicago](#) from Mississippi. Before that, though, he shared Delta days with [Robert Johnson](#), right up to the night of the legendary murder. Alvin’s arrangement—a guitar moan intermittently pierced by a racked-harmonica’s sharp notes—could just as well have gurgled up from a pool of gloom in Tutwiler or Itta Bena.

As for “[If The Blues Was Money](#),” its inspiration is said to have come from friend [Henry “Mule” Townsend](#), a St. Louis bluesman who cut his first shellac disc in 1929 (for Columbia Records) and kept right on cutting records throughout the 1930s (a very fruitful decade for Townsend) and across (nearly) every subsequent decade, up to his passing in 2006. Yet so deeply brooding is Alvin’s homemade classic—a private hell fraught with two-timing, turpentine and the electric chair—that its drone also would not be out of place in Mississippi.

Corey Harris widens the scope. The beardy 57-year-old has amassed a pile of albums that not only include blues but also [West African-tinted blues](#) and even full-on reggae. Here, he brings a bellowing voice, an explorer’s spirit as well as the title track. Check full of Biblical references, “[We Are Almost Down to the Shore \(Fight On\)](#)” was recorded in 1936, from behind the walls of the Virginia State Prison Farm, by [Jimmie Strother](#). The veteran of Virginia’s medicine-show circuit banged out his version on a [banjo](#); Harris instead plucks out his on a custom-built parlor gui-

BLUES REVIEWS

CONTINUED

tar at a briskly rolling pace indicative of the Piedmont school of immaculate fingerpicking.

“What’s That I Smell,” an original, veers down a different road. Its motion is relaxed, another picked piece but one that fishtails with a jaunty wiggle. Its lyrics are wry, drawn from Harris’ nightly tenure at the Funky Butt, a now shuttered joint that sat adjacent to New Orleans’ Congo Square. Its singing is raspy, sometimes projecting into a holler. Their combination brings to mind 1970s Taj Mahal.

Gruff-throated Guy Davis, 73, is a Renaissance man: songwriter, Broadway actor, off-Broadway actor (portraying Robert Johnson in *Robert Johnson: Trick the Devil*), TV actor (*One Life to Live*). His three tracks are (largely) original.

When Davis’ Harmony Stella 12-string rumbles out “[Everything I Got Is Done in Pawn](#),” a redesign of [Elizabeth Cotten](#)’s “Shake Sugaree,” who needs an amplifier or, for that matter, a band anyhow? The hulking guitar’s naturally resonant boom expands to fill the room with sobering sound. It’s the same method [Blind Willie McTell](#)—King of the Georgia blues—used to embed songs into walls back in the 1920s and ’30s. Here, the driving rhythm offers no slack, mowing down whatever is in its path. “See Me When You Can,” a dirge, drastically downshifts. Its bittersweet battle against the clock is caught every which way: in his singing that delivers weighted lines from the viewpoint of someone going down slow as well as in the empathetic guitar tolling underneath.

For all this glorious misery, they’re not men of *constant* sorrow, though. Corey, for example, beams with divine rapture when redeploying “[I Belong to the Band](#),” one of the more vigorous numbers within [Rev. Gary Davis](#)’ gospel repertoire. His voice bursts like fireworks atop an articulate guitar chugging off a head of steam. Guy

works on the opposite end of the spectrum. His own “Deep Sea Diver” fleshes out carnal exploits of a lover man. Read-between-the-lines innuendo offers some degree of discretion.

Fight On! True Blues Vol. 2 builds upon its precursor, 2013’s *True Blues*, which served as a live memento from when Harris, Hart and Davis joined a larger cavalcade for a series of onstage events spread from New York (Lincoln Center) to Los Angeles (House of Blues) and points in between. This time, distillation reaches the purest minimum: the electrifying power of one-man acoustic blues—raised to the power of three.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



JUNIOR DUGAS & BACK ON DA BAYOU

Gotta Have Da Horns
JIN RECORDS

Welcome, heartache. Here, signposts along the way confirm your location: “[Should Have Told Her the Truth](#),” “Help Me Make It Through the Night,” “[My Heart Won’t Listen](#),” on and on. The underlying messages are right there in the song titles themselves. Not quite ‘Have a nice day’ sentiments.

Yet [Junior Dugas](#)—certainly one of today’s reigning kings of Swamp Pop—specially flavors anguish to meet the tastes found inside south Louisiana dancehalls. Namely, when the crooning keyboardist and his Back On Da Bayou band flip on their warm jets, the emotional blow from any lyric—no matter how sour or crushing—gets softened and diffused. For instance, the hopeless denial in “[She Thinks I Still Care](#)” remains profound, except buffered by a bouncy, melodic line of defense. It’s a

skill Dugas personally learned from Tommy McLain, Johnnie Allan, Don Rich and the genre’s other pioneers with whom he worked.

So, pick your poison: “The Dream,” a lonesome nightmare of sorts? Or, perhaps, “Got To Find a Way”? That’s the one scrambling to hatch a multipoint plan to cope with the struggle of having to turn the page. The gamut running from regret to longing to the outright devastation tied to “[Crying Time](#)” doesn’t stand a snowball’s chance against the comforting, honeyed backdrop wafting from the bandstand. Around these parts, sorrow melts into sorely bittersweet.

Sorely bittersweet—and eminently danceable.

That’s because the prevailing tempo turns these 35 minutes into slow-dance central. Three-minute waves of nostalgia smoothly sweep couples across the dancefloor. For those instead camped out and brooding on a barstool, that same wonderfully unhurried music makes a fine soundtrack for dropping tears into your beer. Comparatively, “Ole Cajun Man” raises a little sand by upshifting into a trot. Thematically, though, it’s still blues spilling out a litany of woes extending all the way down to bayou mosquitoes and alligators. (Despite Acadiana being homebase, at no point do accordions or fiddles figure into Junior’s Swamp mix.)

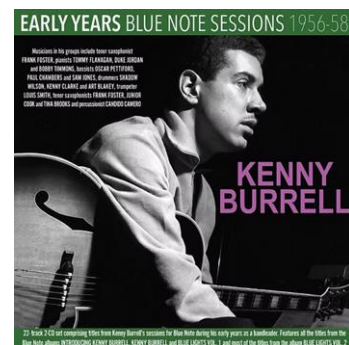
And that’s how Dugas, making the rounds at clubs spread from Opelousas to Church Point to Abbeville and beyond, transforms each evening’s stop into honky-tonk heaven.

Gotta Have Da Horns, which takes its title quite literally, is the portable, on-the-go version of an On Da Bayou Saturday night; handy for whenever and wherever needed. And, yes, its 10 tracks—split evenly between Dugas originals and renditions of classic-country weepers (George Jones to Buck Owens)—gleam with saxophones. As well as the sting of guitar.

The clouds do part, letting the sunshine flood into “Cuz I Love You.” It’s a solid, sway-

ing declaration of devotion to combat the surrounding majestic melancholy. And regardless of its boozy title, “[Tennessee Whiskey](#)” also throws a lifeline to the incredibly indestructible human heart, capable of rising from the ashes to swoon once more—especially at the glowing behest of Junior Dugas’ Swamp Pop.

DENNIS ROZANSKI



KENNY BURRELL

Early Years: Blue Note Sessions (1956-58)

ACROBAT RECORDS

It was a Tuesday. Much like any other Tuesday in Hackensack, New Jersey, in 1956.

Except on this particular one, May 29th, a 24-year-old with a storming, yet eloquent, left hand was in Rudy Van Gelder’s studio with a purpose: to officially toss his hat—no, make that his Gibson axe—into the ring. Up to then, many a side-man role had been held. That’s him, at 19, casting out a springy line in the company of another young giant-in-training, John Coltrane, on a [1951](#) gig belonging to bebop colossus Dizzy Gillespie. This was vastly different, however. Because the guitarist was now cutting what would become his debut LP as a leader. And for the prestigious Blue Note Records, no less. The five-man session ended up bleeding into the following day. But by the close of that Wednesday, the all-hear-this decree was completed.

By September, *Introducing Kenny Burrell* was on the street and turning heads.

And just like that, the so-called Velvet Whip was well on his way to joining fellow jazz fretsmen like [Wes Montgomery](#) to [Grant Green](#) and today’s [Kurt](#)

[Rosenwinkel](#) back to the founding father, [Charlie Christian](#), in the ‘pantheon of cool.’

How cool? Sink into “[Blues for Skeeter](#),” one of three Burrell originals unveiled during that May date. We hear him establishing his uncluttered, calmly burning sound with a high emotional content. But doing so with a radically different demeanor for moaning the blues. Because compare that warm glow to the growl and gnash of other guitars likewise bellyaching at that time, 1956: “[Dimples](#)” (John Lee Hooker), “[I Can’t Quit You Baby](#)” (Otis Rush), “[Wild About You Baby](#)” (Elmore James), “[Three Hours Past Midnight](#)” (Johnny “Guitar” Watson).

Same year. Worlds apart.

Closer would be that of the West Coast’s kingpin himself, T-Bone Walker (“[Mean Old World](#)”), understandably one of Burrell’s early favorites. Still, however, the difference is like night and day. (Another formative idol, [Oscar Moore](#), hits closest to home.)

Early Years: Blue Note Sessions (1956-58) generously chronicles Burrell’s intense opening burst of creativity. In short, *carpe diem* on six strings.

To do so, the two-disc set corrals four of Burrell’s albums from the 1950s into a tidy, one-stop bonanza: *Introducing Kenny Burrell*, along with *Kenny Burrell and Blue Lights Vol. 1 & Vol. 2* (well, just about all of *Vol. 2*). The combined 22 tracks offer a panoramic view across a range of scenarios: solo to septet, with combinations in between. With horns and without. In-studio

and onstage. Blues (the daisy-chained “[Rock Salt](#)”) to ballads (the languid pools of “[But Not for Me](#)”). Hard-bop (a sleek racer in “[Takeela](#)”) to a ride on “Moten Swing.” Plus, the procession of supporting cast is stunning, with drummer Art Blakey, bassist Oscar Pettiford, and pianist Duke Jordan (a member of Charlie Parker’s bebop quintet) among those spotted.

Introducing Kenny Burrell drew in still more key men of the day. Wanting to be a part of the event were Tommy Flanagan (piano), Paul Chambers (bass), Candido Camero (congas), and drummer Kenny Clarke, the ride cymbal’s greatest proponent. “[This Time the Dream’s on Me](#)”—Side 1, Track 1—marks a momentous start. After 30 seconds of laying down the melodic theme, it’s off to the races. Like sparks from a fire, the shower of single notes flying off Kenny’s lightning-quick solo ignites more of the same from Flanagan as well as the two conversing percussionists. “[Delilah](#),” an alluring earworm often associated with the ill-fated trumpeter [Clifford Brown](#), adapts beautifully to gentling guitar strings and a conga beat. “Weaver of Dreams” soothes all the more, underscored by wire brushes swishing around the snare head as if stirring soup. Then, for six minutes, drums and congas alone give a creative beating to “Rhythmorama,” an oasis of manmade thunder. But it’s the blues that baits in a statement from Chambers’ upright, acoustic bass: “Fugue ’n’ Blues” is plucked whereas the aforementioned “Blues for Skeeter” gets bowed.

Kenny Burrell arrived in record shops the year after, in 1957. Technically, this second album was (primarily) recorded first, in March; however, the tapes sat on the shelf. The strategic wait paid off. Rather than raising the curtain for the very first time with the band’s frontline additionally ablaze with Frank Foster’s tenor saxophone, the simpler, hornless *Introducing* kept more of the spotlight on that magnificent guitar establishing its voice. In other words, *Kenny Burrell* better suited the next natural progression of a rising star seeking new challenges. That way when you meet the ripping “Phinupi,” Foster’s bluster brings a fresh texture. Or when you’re seated inside Café Bohemia, a noted Greenwich Village hotspot, on a night when “[Mexico City](#)” is captured live and wiggling, the brassy blend of Kenny Dorham’s trumpet and J.R. Monterose’s tenor sax sounds like the next logical step in ramping up. And again, more blues: “[Now See How You Are](#)” is one of those pieces whose simmering pulse relies on touch and pure feel. Unlike the flying fingers required of “Cheeta,” Foster’s horn layers smoke atop Flanagan’s stylish twinkle and Pettiford’s gentle prodding. In addition to all the fluid, fiery, caramelized fretwork, an added perk was that the LP’s jacket allowed you to own a frameable piece of hand-sketched Andy Warhol artwork.

Blue Lights Vol. 1 & Vol. 2 expanded Burrell’s configurations further yet. By 1958, the ensemble grew even bigger, swelling up to seven men with the fulltime addition of trumpet

as well as dual saxophones. But, in doing so, his role dilutes as collective improvisation works its way down the long line, passing around soloing time in round-robin fashion. What’s gained, though, is hearing the guitar’s gentlemanly attack distinguish itself completely from everything else in the room on a stellar set filled with both group and individual showcases. “The Man I Love” bobs heads. “Chuckin’” taps toes. “[Caravan](#)” heaves whole bodies. Credit Blakey for that. He’s the one actively thrusting the backdrop to the fore by indiscriminately dropping Kenny-Clarke-styled bombs that keep exploding his kit while everyone plays on. The candlelit “Autumn in New York” lets Kenny grab the reigns, unchallenged. The result is a balm for a bad day. But, as is often the case with Burrell, ballads give way to blues. Pensive and wistful, “Yes Baby” harbors a mood, alright. And besides still more blues (“Scotch Blues”), there is also more Warhol.

In time would come *Midnight Blue*, the symphonic *Guitar Forms* as well as a *Blue Bash* with the maestro of the Hammond B3 organ, Jimmy Smith. Stacked one on top of the other, Burrell’s hundreds upon hundreds of credited records (both as leader and accompanist) would easily tower well over five feet tall, if not six or more. The foundational base of that spire rests solidly upon these *Early Years*: 2.5 hours with the cuff-linked guitar whisperer who—even now at the age of 94—can chill out the blues.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

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