



GOLDEN GATE GROOVES

FROM THE EDITOR

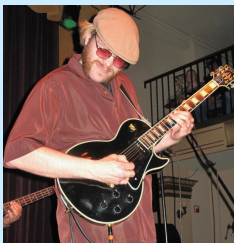
In this issue, photojournalist Dorothy Hill reviews several Golden Gate Blues Society jams, which continue to grow and attract new Blues fans. New contributor Joel Fritz and journalist Joseph Jordan review recently released CDs by local Blues artists. We also remember Koko Taylor; two Bay Area musicians share special memories of Koko, and Dorothy captures a special moment with Koko from the May 7, 2009, Blues Music Awards in Memphis. Joseph Jordan presents his recent interview with saxophonist/vocalist Terry Hanck, who was nominated for a BMA this year, and also shares some news about the GGBS Education Committee, which he chairs, and its plans for Blues in the Schools and Libraries. Joel Fritz also writes a very interesting and informative article on blues woman Memphis Minnie as part of the GGBS mission to provide blues education. And, as promised in our first issue, GGBS member Claudia Lindquist, a Human Resources insider and Blues fan, provides some information we hope will be helpful to the many musicians and fans in the area without adequate health care coverage. The Blues Foundation also recently provided some very new and exciting information on health care for musicians, which is duplicated in this issue. As you can see, we've put together a jam-packed issue on Blues that we hope will interest you. In addition, please check out the upcoming Bay Area Blues events that caught the Editor's eye! *Go out and support live Blues! See you on the Blues trail. -Deb Lubin*

The Golden Gate Blues Society Jam

Article and Photos by Dorothy Hill

Blues lovers are still flocking to the jams every Wednesday at the Little Fox in Redwood City, California. Now renamed The Golden Gate Blues Society Jam (previously known as the Redwood City Blues Jam), the format remains the same with a professional group opening a set at 7 p.m. and closing out with a set and jammers mixing it up in a long set in between.

Society President Vince Caminiti still runs the show with masterful efficiency and usually joins the jam in his other life as a skilled guitarist. Musicians love playing this venue to enthusiastic audiences and the audiences love it because they are getting some of the best national acts at a free jam, and the dance floor is spacious and always filled to capacity. But there is a catch...just be generous when Caminiti comes around with the tip jar!



On May 27, 2009, the jam featured the Terry Hanck aggregation, consisting of Chris "Kid" Andersen on bass, Johnny Cat on guitar, and Butch Cousins on drums. Hanck was nominated for a 2009 Blues Music Award for Best Instrumentalist—Horn and played at the awards show held in Memphis just weeks before. They

opened up with "Have Mercy Baby" and worked their way through an eclectic mix of blues, soul & R&B that filled the dance floor. Hanck's soulful vocals dominated on "Smilin' Through My Tears," while his take on "Junior's Walk" was punctuated with an exuberant explosion of hard-driving saxophone.



The jam session was extraordinarily good this evening with a host of fine Bay Area musicians showing up. Pinkie Rideau, a vocalist from Modesto, showed her stuff and it was awesome—her voice had nuance and supple phrasing on an original "Miracle." Ron Lowes showcased his great vocals and harmonica skills on "Everything's Gonna Be Alright" with Don Yonder and Kid Andersen on guitars.



The shifting scene of jammers included vocalist Jan Fanucchi, drummers June Core and Dennis Dove, Stevie Gurr on guitar sans shoes, Greg Heumann on harmonica, Tom Bowers on bass, Mike Phillips on vocals and bass, and Steve Freund on vocals and guitar—more talent on one stage than one can describe!

Terry Hiatt hosted the jam on June 3rd along with cohorts Randy Hayes on drums, Steve Evans on bass, and Bill Hancock on keyboards. Hiatt is an extraordinary guitarist who created innovative musical patterns throughout the session. His dynamic and confident playing certainly validated the statement that he is one of the Bay Area's best-kept secrets! The band tackled a nice rendition of "Never Make Your Move Too Soon" with Hiatt on vocals.



Things really kicked into gear when Lara Price took over on vocals and guitarist Daniel Castro joined the group. The guitar interplay between Hiatt and Castro was a sound to behold!

The jam showcased Chris Cobb on vocals and guitar

along with Artie Chavez on drums, Greg Heumann on harmonica, and Vince Caminiti on guitar exploring heavy-duty blues.

Mighty Mike Schermer played host on June 24th and was in a celebratory mood as he will soon join the Marcia Ball band. The marvelous Nancy Wright was on saxophone, while the equally talented drummer Paul Revelli and bassist Steve Ehrmann kept a firm foundation, and Sid Morris on keyboards stirred it up with aggressive dexterity.

Schermer's contemporary approach to blues was refreshing and never more than when he and Wright mixed it up, even playing flat on the floor at one point.

Drummer Dennis Dove was celebrating his 50th birthday and joined the stage on several tunes—we knew he could sing, but his artistry as a lead vocalist was amply displayed this evening. Ron Hacker rocked the stage with explosive guitar jamming.

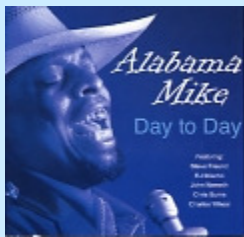
A fantastic array of musicians always show up at the jams—way too many to mention here. Suffice it to say that blues fans have truly found their slice of blues heaven at the Golden Gate Blues Society jams.

CD REVIEW

Alabama Mike, *Day to Day*

by Joel Fritz

Local singer Alabama Mike Benjamin's new album on Jukehouse Records is a fine example of what happens when you combine talent with knowledge of the blues. Backed by some of the finest Bay Area players, Alabama Mike has put together a tasty mix of 11 tunes, consisting of 7 originals seasoned with 4 well-chosen covers.



Mike has a strong soulful tenor voice. He understands that singing is story telling. The result is an album where the songs are the real stars. My favorite is *Sara Brown*, an exuberant love song with an Elmore James flavor.

R. J. Mischo and Jon Lawton take tasteful solos on this one.

Son House's *Death Letter Blues* is another highlight. Mike's

voice takes on a bit of a Son House flavor here. Jon Lawton's slide guitar combines a modern sensibility with a Delta rhythmic pulse. Other highlights include the original *Religion*, a slow blues about hypocrisy with strong instrumental contributions by Charles Wheal on guitar and Jim Monroe on piano, and Elmore James' *Knockin' at Your Door*, which features Steve Freund on guitar and his former musical co-conspirator Scot Brenton on harp.

Producer Scott Silveira plays drums on all 11 tracks. The other musicians include Steve Gannon, guitar; Chris Burns, piano; and Kedar Roy, Willie Riser, and Vance Ehlers on bass.

Overall this album is a fine way to spend just under 50 minutes in the company of the Blues.

On: Jukehouse Records, 2009

Check out: www.myspace.com/scottsilveira

Remembering Koko Taylor

Photos by Dorothy Hill



Lil Ed and Koko Taylor, Blues Music Awards, May 7, 2009

By Steve Freund

The coldest winter I ever spent was with Koko Taylor and her band in Alberta, Canada in 1984. Her lead guitarist was denied entry at the border, so they called me as a quick replacement. I had been called by Koko the year before for a 5-week European tour, and since I worked out well, they called me again.

Koko was a tremendous artist, giving 110% every night, even at these dive gigs in the middle of nowhere. She always made me feel very comfortable, and if there were any problems, she or Pops would usually be able to get them fixed. Except the frozen toilet bowls. But that is a story for another time. Being with her and Pops together was a trip. There was the time when Pops, driving on a suspended license, was pulled over by the Canadian Highway Patrol. While coming to a stop, Koko switched places with Pops and slid behind the wheel. The Mountie never had a clue.

I had also done a European tour with Koko and the band. This was the year that Blues Explosion, on Atlantic Records, was recorded Live at Montreux. That record won a Grammy, and I proudly display my statue at home. Every time I look at it, I remember Koko and that crazy whirlwind period of my life.

Koko and Pops had been together since she was a teenager, and they were always telling tall tales of Tennessee and Chicago in the old days. You had the feeling that Koko was Pops' only love, ever, and that Pops was the only man she ever had in her life. It was true love. It must have been awful when Pops passed away. I was fascinated by the lives they led back then. True links to Modern Chicago Blues. They brought the South with them to Chicago. They both

really epitomized the Chicago Blues----when you were around Koko and Pops, you were IN the blues. They both will be sorely missed.



Koko Taylor, Monterey Bay Blues Festival, June 2004

By Dave Workman

I fell in love with the voice of Koko Taylor in the '60s, when I first heard "Wang Dang Doodle". To my young ears, THIS was how a woman sang the raw, rough, Chicago style blues. She held her own even when compared with Muddy or The Wolf. I tried to find as many of her singles as I could. Eventually, an LP of her Chess sides was released. Around that time, my blues band was getting popular around Ohio State University. I knew two young women who were good singers. One of them (Nancy) wanted to sing with my band. I told her I'd let her sing, and gave her some stuff to check out. I gave her Koko's album and told her to call me if she thought you could do it. Well, needless to say - it was too raw and real for her, and she dropped the idea. Those two women later became backup singers with the legendary Canadian artist Ronnie Hawkins. One of them (whose brother Jeff played in my band sometimes) became a well known movie actress; Beverly D'Angelo is her name.

Some years later, a friend of the band, Cornell Wiley, hooked us up with legendary songwriter and producer Willie Dixon. Wiley was a bass player who had played with Wes Montgomery and Lionel Hampton, and grew up with Dixon. He arranged for us to go to Chicago and audition for Dixon. As we played a set in Willie's rehearsal studio, a woman was sitting quietly in a big old armchair. As we finished, and I was putting my guitar in the case, she



Artwork by Diane Russell
www.dianerussell.net

approached me. She said she really enjoyed listening to us and liked our style. I thanked her, and introduced myself, asking her name. She replied, simply, "Koko". Incredulous, I asked "Koko TAYLOR?" She said "Yes." Over the next few days, we went with Dixon to sit in at some clubs, and Koko came along. In several trips to Chicago, we always went to see her, usually at Bidly Mulligan's. The minute she saw Willie Pooch and me at the door, she was on the mike telling the crowd about us, and that we'd be sitting in soon. Koko played frequently at our home club in Columbus, and if Willie and I didn't open for her, we would be onstage much of the set with her. Right before I split up the band to move to the Bay Area, I received a letter from Alligator Records. Bruce Iglauer said that, due to current economics, he wasn't signing many new acts, but that Koko Taylor had repeatedly urged him to check out my band. He said he would give us a listen, but with no promises. It was too late for us then, but I will always remember the friendship and support of the Queen of the Chicago Blues, Koko Taylor.

Terry Hanck, Singer with a Horn

Interview by Joseph Jordan
 July 10, 2009

Terry Hanck is a consummate musician. For over 30 years, he's been making great recordings and entertaining fans with a potent combination of stirring saxophone and vibrant vocals. With a style harkening back to the golden era of '50s and early '60s R&B recordings, Hanck carries on a long tradition of musicians singing their guts out and blowing like tomorrow wasn't a possibility. His latest CD, "Always," is a brilliant testament to his sound. We caught up with Terry during a mid-summer California tour.



TGGBS: You're 64 now. What music did you listen to when you were a kid?

TH: When I was a kid in the '50s, I listened to old style rhythm and blues, soul and rock and roll on the radio. I

didn't start playing sax until I was 21. When I picked up the horn, I was listening to avant-garde jazz and all kinds of stuff, but I started out playing the blues.

TGGBS: And later, what got you off the most?

TH: I guess where my heart was, was in listening to everything. I listened to modern giants, Coltrane, Rollins, Gordon and be-bop players. But pretty much I listened to all the jazz guys from avant-garde to old swing and everything else. Of course, Jr. Walker was in a category all his own.

TGGBS: Knowing a few of your influences, King Curtis, Maceo Parker, and especially Jr. Walker, where do you feel your sound fits in?

TH: I listen to everything, not necessarily just to horn. I listen to music. Vocals are very important to me too. When I write, I don't hear just horn, I hear a sound and a style when I listen. As far as horns go, I don't listen to just one sound, I change my sound a bit, which most horn players don't do a lot. From honking to Jr. Walker there's a different sound... so I'm not doing an interpretation of his style only. I use a different tone when playing in different styles, like when playing a jump blues opposed to a low-down blues, but most people will still know it's me when I'm doing it.

TGGBS: When you started as a professional musician, what genre of music were you playing?

TH: When I was coming up, I was influenced by (saxophonist) Lee Allen, who was in Fats Domino's band during the Specialty Records period. Those early rock and roll records, in the late '50s early '60s, featured more solos done by horn than lead guitar and they featured great musicians. You can still listen to those records now and hear how the tenor solos were just excellent.

TGGBS: What's your instrument of choice?



TH: I play a Selmer Mark VI, vintage 1968 (tenor saxophone). I've played older horns too that have beautiful tones, but the Selmer Mark VI is the all around best one for me.

TGGBS: When were you first aware of the blues?

TH: The first time I heard Jimmy Reed in the '50s, I said that's what I like, even though I wasn't playing yet, it was just what was coming out of the radio.

TGGBS: Your dad, Henry Brandon (stage name) was a musician. Did you learn music through him?

TH: I kind of learned by osmosis. I kind of rebelled against my dad because I didn't want to be a musician when I was very young. He was a professional at work, so he didn't play stuff around the house. After a while it was a business to him. I liked rockabilly and other kinds of music. Dad did everything from society gigs to contracting music for big names that came into Chicago like Frank Sinatra & Tony Bennett. The next day, he'd be playing a bar mitzvah or conducting a symphony orchestra. He had his hands in everything in Chicago. I got a good start listening to rock and roll. I also liked country later on, but my parents never listened to it, as they were city people. I first wanted to play avant-garde jazz, but didn't know what I was doing. I guess I went back to the music I first loved, and after awhile I knew I was going to play. My dad passed back in the '80s. It would be great to have a conversation with him now.

TGGBS: What was your first solo effort?

TH: Although my first solo album, "Live & Raw" was recorded in '96, I put out a single, "Medicine Man," with Grayson Street, my band in the '70s, with singer & co-leader Ricky Kellogg. I put out a cassette-tape version of "Live and Raw - Part One" and later a CD, "Live & Raw" with different music than that on the tape. It was recorded in '96 and released in '97.

TGGBS: How would you categorize your playing?

TH: I like playing to the style of the song, whatever it requires. Some players only play one way, which might be good, but for me I want to play for the particular style the song needs.

TGGBS: You were born in Chicago. When did you move to California?

TH: I'd been coming out here, back and forth, on and off since '63. I moved to California in '67.

TGGBS: Where do you live now?

TH: Singer Island in Florida, which is part of Palm Beach in the City of Riviera Beach, close to West Palm Beach. I'm just across the inlet from Donald Trump (laughs). Vera (Hanck's wife of 10 years) and I moved there in 2003. We both like warm water and we're close to the warm Gulf Stream coming near shore, with the nice blue Caribbean water, and pretty much that was it. Also, we could afford a house there.

TGGBS: What do you like to do in your spare time?

TH: I love the ocean and it's a big part of my life. I'm in the water when I can get my butt out there. I wouldn't call myself a big time surfer, but I still do it. I love to scuba dive too, and would like to get back into it. I also like to free dive. I enjoy cooking and both Vera and I like eating. And as a homeowner, you're always doing a lot of things around the house. But, it's the ocean.

TGGBS: Elvin Bishop has stated you're his favorite saxophone player. Tell me about your 10-year stretch playing in his band.

TH: Elvin helped me get confidence in myself. It was a learning experience to watch somebody on stage that knew what he was doing. I went from playing in small clubs to playing the Oakland Coliseum. I did leave once in '83 and spent all my money making a 45, but afterwards, didn't really have any money or support. So after staying away for a year, Elvin invited me back and I played horn in his band

for another 5 years. After awhile, it was just time to do my own thing.



TGGBS: Do you still keep in touch with Elvin?

TH: I was just over at his house recording the other day. We're still good friends and still in touch. He'll always bring me in

on his recording projects for one or two things, and we work together on and off.

TGGBS: Musically, what is important to you and how do you keep your music fresh when you play similar sets night after night?

TH: We do introduce new things, but playing every day, you get into a comfort zone with your sets. But by branching out with everything you play, you can discover new stuff about a song. You try and bring something to a song every time you play it. Every time I play, there is an experience, some sort of getting in touch with myself. It has to be some sort of reaching into the soul. The main thing with music is to reach people's soul, whatever that is.

TGGBS: What's the state of the blues today?

TH: The blues is a tough sell. You don't hear it on the radio, whereas before, you could hear it all the time. The way media works is a funny thing. The media will use blues imagery in TV ads, and they'll use it in theme songs. But if you're driving and you're not to the left hand of the FM dial, you're not going to hear it on the radio. However, with digital and satellite radio stations, such as Music Choice and XM, who play my music a lot, there is a lot of support for the blues.

TGGBS: Who do you record for now?

TH: I'm with the VizzTone Label Group, partnered by Chip Eagle, Bob Margolin, and Richard Rosenblatt.



TGGBS: Regarding your latest CD, "Always," tell me about working with producer Kid Andersen:

TH: He's really a brilliant musician and he's got a keen ear. He can pick stuff up right away and if he hears something once, he can play it. He's

learning a lot of things and he's learning fast.

TGGBS: How many albums do you think you've played on?

TH: I don't know, probably 30.

TGGBS: You have two bands, one on each coast:

TH: I'm fortunate after all these years to work and be able to play with great musicians.

TGGBS: Are you technologically savvy?

TH: I'm a dinosaur and just learning to use the computer. I bug my wife and other people into doing my sites for me. Hopefully, by the end of summer, I'll be proactive.

TGGBS: Are you planning your next album yet?

TH: I'm definitely working on stuff. It's in my head and I'm doing a couple of new tunes in my current set. I'm also looking forward to moving in a bunch of different directions at once. I always want to move around a lot stylistically. I've got no plans for retirement. As a musician, there's no retirement. I wouldn't know what to do. Anyway, human beings weren't meant to retire.

TGGBS: What do you see as the main importance of a blues society?

TH: To promote and preserve the music, and that would include teaching the blues.

TGGBS: What do you think about the state of things?

TH: The whole world seems to be going to hell in a hand basket. It's not a job one man can do... one man can't handle all this. It's going to take us all taking responsibility for ourselves and thinking we're all part of one thing.

Terry Hanck's latest CD, *Always*, is on the VizzTone Label Group.

Check out:
www.terryhanck.net and
www.myspace.com/terryhanck

Photo on page 4 by Jon R. Didier, Blues Music Awards, May 7, 2009.

Photos on page 5 by Deb Lubin (Monterey Bay Blues Festival, June 27, 2009).





Medical Insurance for the Underinsured: You Have Options

by Claudia Lindquist

When I'm not out listening to the Blues, I have a day job in Human Resources and Benefits. Before this gig, I was self-employed, a single mom, and had to sort out health care on my own, so I was in your shoes. Recently, I attended a benefit for an uninsured musician recovering from a serious illness, and I was urged by a friend to write an article about medical and dental options when you're not covered by an employer.

Obviously, it's best to find a low cost plan that covers catastrophic illnesses, but that's not in everyone's budget. Let's start with plans that cost money and work our way "down" to free clinics.

Medical insurance became more manageable in 2003 when a bill passed allowing people to open Health Savings Accounts (HSAs) in conjunction with high-deductible insurance plans. These plans allow you to save for future medical expenses on a tax-free basis and essentially enable you to become your own health plan administrator. I signed up for one in 2003, and it beats an IRA any day. Last December, I introduced the plan to our staff, and 50% of them signed up. Here's how it works for me.

I have an Anthem Blue Cross High Deductible Health Savings Account plan that offers the same coverage and doctor groups as any other Blue Cross plan. I have a \$3,500 deductible and the monthly premium is \$244.

Included in the plan is a free annual physical, but I pay for everything else until I reach the deductible. Now here's the part where you become your own health care administrator. I have made deposits faithfully, and am currently earning 5.1% interest at Patelco with my HSA. Where else can you get that kind of rate? You are allowed to use your HSA dollars for chiropractic care, dental work, orthodontics, contact lenses, vitamins, transportation costs related to medical care, COBRA premiums - just about anything short of cosmetic surgery or funerals.

Another way to look at my costs/savings versus an Anthem HMO plan is shown in the table above, to the right.

Now here's the good part. If I take care of my health, make those HSA deposits religiously and don't incur medical expenses up to the deductible, that money grows. My costs annually could be just \$2,928. Everything in the HSA is mine. I can put in as little or as much as I want each year. I see this insurance as being the most useful if I get hit by a truck. If you want antibiotics every time you have the sniffles, you may as well pay the high premiums and let the insurance companies get fat off you.

	HSA (High Deductible)	Anthem Blue Cross HMO
Annual premium	\$2,928	\$5,376
Deductible	\$3,500	\$500
HSA deposit or HMO office visit	+ \$3,000 (elective)	\$30/office visit or \$90 (3/year)
Interest	~ \$500	--
Out-of-pocket	\$5,928 (worst case)	\$5,966

Take the time to find walk-in clinics in areas where the cost of living is low. I found the Farmacia Remedios on Mission Street in San Francisco. It's a sparkling clean pharmacy with the clinic in the rear. They do a mini-checkup, treat your ills, and give you a printout of the visit for \$59. The doctors are excellent and my longest wait has been 14 minutes. This pharmacy is part of Burlingame-based QuickHealth. They're in Fremont, Oakland, Rohnert Park, Sacramento, San Jose, and San Mateo. <http://www.quickhealth.com/>.

LA Clinica in Oakland has small satellite clinics in Contra Costa, Alameda, and Solano counties. Services include medical, dental, optical, women's health, prenatal and postnatal care, and preventive medicine. <http://www.laclinica.org/services.shtml>

Tiburcio Vasquez Health Center (Hayward, Fremont, Union City) provides medical and dental care. <http://www.tvhc.org/index.htm>

Glide Memorial Church <http://www.glide.org>
(415) 674-6140 | Email: health@glide.org

A doctor friend told me that the Glide physicians are first rate and the waiting time is quite short. Make a donation.

There is another non-profit agency that supports community clinics in Contra Costa and Solano Counties. www.clinicconsortium.org, shows all of the clinics in our area.

There is a similar non-profit in Alameda County and its website, <http://www.alamedahealthconsortium.org/>, lists every clinic in Alameda County.

For all community clinics in California, see <http://www.cPCA.org>.

Several community health centers in the Bay Area provide health care to everyone, regardless of their ability to pay. In Oakland, you can try Clinica de la Raza or San Antonio

Medical Insurance (continued)

Neighborhood Health Center. You can also try Asian Health Services or LifeLong Medical Care (which tends to cater to older patients). All of these clinics offer a sliding-scale payment structure, and your cost could be as low as \$0 or, more likely, around \$20.

Women can get free medical screenings at:

Women's Community Clinic
2166 Hayes St. #104
(between Cole St. and Shrader St.)
San Francisco, CA 94117
(415) 379-7800
www.womenscommunityclinic.org

Editor's note: In the next issue of the newsletter, Claudia comments on dental insurance and what she calls "medical tourism." If you'd like to contact Claudia directly, please email her at OffToRio@yahoo.com.

This information provides a different way of thinking about seeking out and paying for health care. If you have comments or suggestions for additional information or topics of interest, your feedback is welcome. Please send an email to: newsletter@tggbs.org.

The following information was taken from the latest Blues Foundation newsletter:

The Blues Foundation has partnered with **Sound Healthcare**, a Nashville entity that offers an approach to the humanization of America's health care system, creating access to health insurance and advocacy for the greater good. Its goal is to provide access to specific insurance and discount products custom-designed to meet the needs of Blues music industry professionals.

Sound Healthcare strives to customize programs of protection designed to balance your budget with your needs. They offer a line-up of products, information, and resources, and the assurance that they will strive to exceed the expectations of those they serve. Sound Healthcare also partners with these associations: Country Music Association, Gospel Music Association, International Bluegrass Music Association, Audio Engineering Society, Songwriters Guild of America, The Recording Musicians Association, Americana Music Association and Nashville Association of Musicians, Local 257, A. F. of M.

For more information, visit [The Blues Foundation](http://TheBluesFoundation.org). A Sound Healthcare representative will call and ask questions specific to your needs and locale, as not all plans are available in all states.

Bay Area CD Blues Reviews

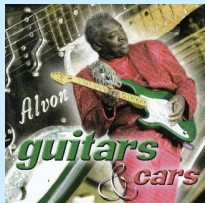
by Joseph Jordan

Welcome to a review of some recent Bay Area releases. We hope these reviews will encourage you to check out and support our local artists.

Ratings: 1 to 5 stars, with 5 meaning it's still in the player a month later.

Alvon, Guitars & Cars

Alvon Johnson has been making great music in the greater Bay Area for over 17 years, and he's just released his fourth CD, "Guitars & Cars."



Produced by Albert Parks and recorded at Whip Studios in Berkeley, "Guitars & Cars" features 10 tracks with a total time just under an hour.

His guitar playing is alternately sweet, soulful, fierce, biting, and mellow as the fellow himself. He's also blessed with a great voice, and whether he interprets his song through a charmingly sly talk-singing, is cutting loose on a up-tempo number, or easily delivering a ballad, he's got a great one-two-three punch.

Alvon wrote three tracks, and the remaining were penned by artists such as Chuck Berry, the Isley Brothers, Curtis Mayfield, War, and others, including two by producer Parks.

Alvon has always been a sensational entertainer and although his showcase stage performances won't be present for the CD's listeners, the music more than makes up for it. His guitar playing is somewhat unique in that he eschews picks and yet plays with the dexterity of a fearsome flatpicker. His thumb ought to be patented, or at least insured by the busted State treasury.

In a reprise from an earlier recording, "Tater" is one of the strongest tracks on the album. Mayfield's "People Get Ready" is given a loving instrumental take, most soulful and deep... respectful to the almost-gospel feel of the original.

He takes a very bluesy tack on Berry's "No Particular Place to Go" but it never really takes off; however, his relaxed, jazzy interpretation of Bobby Troupe's classic "Route 66," while not adding anything to the archives of the number of times this tune's been covered, still is mighty pretty. Nice keyboard playing on the cut by Jimi McKinney too.

The album could be a good late night play for lovers, and the last track, one of the CDs' best, a slow 12-bar blues, "So Sorry," is heartbreaking in its lyrics and intensity.

The same band plays throughout the CD, with the aforementioned McKinney, Rustee Allen on bass, Taz Roberson on drums, and Little Albert (Parks) on harmonica. Inexplicably, the CD's cover reverses the image of Alvon and portrays him as a lefty... 'taint no such thang.

On: Pig Heaven Records, 2009

Check out: www.pigheavenrecords.com

The California Honeydrops, Soul Tub



"I bet you never knew what a bucket can do."

That's a phrase the new quartet, The California Honeydrops, brings to its listeners, and the answer to that initially cryptic comment may surprise you.

Remarkably, with regard to the ensemble's phenomenal musical affinity with one another, The California Honeydrops were formed less than 2 years ago. They got their start busking in the Oakland Bay Area Rapid Transit alcoves and hallways and decided to make a go of it as recording and touring artists. Boy, have they ever. There isn't anyone like them in Northern California that I know of and they've made a CD they can be doggone, sure 'nuff proud of.

"Soul Tub," their first CD, and featuring all original tunes, clocks in at 45 minutes and includes 12 cuts, with one of those being a "reprise." Recorded at Blues Cave studios in Oakland and self-produced by pianist Chris Burns and the group, "Soul Tub" was engineered by Burns and group co-percussionist Ben Malament and mastered at Berkeley's famed Fantasy Studios.

The Honeydrops are multi-instrumentalists, with frontman, primary vocalist, and principal songwriter Lech Wierzynski showing great versatility on guitar and displaying outstanding musicality as a trumpeter. (He was taught by Ray Charles' trumpeter, Marcus Belgrave, which makes sense when you listen to the R&B influence of his playing.) He's also one terrific singer.

The collective chops of the band members have been forefront in the bands of Dan Hicks, Jackie Payne/Steve Edmonson, Albert Collins, Freddie Hughes, Maria Muldaur, and the Marvelettes, just to name several of the more prominent artists with whom they've been associated.

The Honeydrops' instrumentation, which is "rooted in the African-American musical tradition," includes tub-bass, jug, washboard, percussion, trumpet, drums, guitar, harmonica, and a whole lotta fun. They present accomplished and delightful harmonies and it's clear by listening to just a track or two that here are stellar musicians blessed with an unusual sound by any contemporary standards.

The group's lone female, Nansamba Ssensalo, provides a bluesy vocal and a very early Aretha Franklin-feel with "All You Got To Do." In the next cut, "Bye-Bye Baby, I'm Gone," there's a Fats Domino-influenced shuffle throughout, with a couple of marvelous solos by Oakland pianist Burns and guitarist Wierzynski.

The upbeat pace of "Miss Louise" sounds straight out of New Orleans, and tells the tale of driving off an arduous older woman... lyrics sung with straight street corner jive and bravado. Wierzynski's "Rain" pleads through the tears and the weather for a woman long gone.

The song "Soul Tub" is performed twice, with the reprise version, the CD's last cut, being fairly superfluous after the first time around. Tracking in at almost 4.5 minutes, I would have just as soon heard another original song.

There's a bright trumpet opening and close to "Honeydrops Theme," whose lyrics explain the California Honeydrops' real-life backgrounds and musical philosophy. The autobiographical song also features one of the best three-part harmonies on the recording.

"In My Dreams" is the bluesiest of the tunes and features a slow 12-bar lament that dreams are the only place in which the sadsack protagonist can meet up with a woman who's flown the coop. A nice acoustic guitar solo by Polish-born Wierzynski bucks up the overall feel of the cut.

The short and sweet "Squezy Breezy," another Nawlin's-groove, features both Wierzynski's tasty trumpet and Burns' solo piano turns, while "Help Me Now" brings forth a '50s R&B feel with a backing chorus that echoes shades of the "The Night Time Is the Right Time." Here, the vocals are appropriately pleading, with a nice delivery by lead singer Wierzynski. If this one were to have been sung by James Brown, it would bring down the crystals in a shaking chandelier.

You'll hear second-line, polyrhythmic percussion in "Cry for Me" plus wailin' trumpet and backing sax punctuation, party track vocals, and a great lyric.

"Soul Tub" is not a blues album, although you'll hear plenty of blues influences in it. What it is, is a wonderful concoction of R&B, soul, New Orleans, and good-time jug-band funk and roll. (That's a mouthful, but trust me on this.)

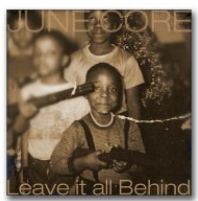
All in all, "Soul Tub" is a unique and heartfelt musical homage to American roots music, delivered with startling originality and a captivating joyous noise.

*** ½

On: TubTone Records, 2008

Check out: www.cahoneydrops.com and www.myspace.com/thecaliforniahoneydrops

June Core, Leave It All Behind



For his first "solo" recording, master drummer June Core has put together a marvelous compilation CD of his favorite cuts from bands he's played with over the last several years. None of the cuts was exclusive to this CD, but all of them were handpicked to show off Core's more than

formidable chops, and few of them disappoint. Core, a non-vocalist, leaves the singing to individual bandleaders, giving the recording a best-of feel.

Now if you'll indulge me... Angela Strehli, R.J. Mischo, Andy Santana, Charlie Musselwhite, Mike Schermer, Junior Watson, Terry Hanck, Bob Welsh, Kid Andersen, Franck Goldwasser, Sid Morris, Ronnie James Weber, Randy Bermudes, Steve Lucky, Austin deLone, Michael Peloquin, Steve Ehrmann, Dale Ockerman, Brenda Boykin, Mark Hummel, and a ton of others make up a Bay Area Blues Hall-of-Fame in their own right. All of them contribute, some mightily, to this crackerjack effort by drummer Core.

This is a 15-years-in-the-making, well-programmed compilation of 14 tunes off eight albums by seven artists, clocking in at just over an hour.

An uptown rhythm, a 12-bar beat, a shuffle here, a slow blues there are all played with rhythmic aplomb by Core, at the apex of West Coast drummers.

Andy Santana checks in with two unusual offerings for a blues album, Dylan's "Ballad of a Thin Man" played with a little big-band jazz sound (about which Core said was his "most challenging tune to play on") and "Soul Shadow" by Bill Withers/Joe Sample in a soft pop styling. Hummel checks in with a funky blues, "Ooh La La" and later with "Taint What You Say," an album standout.

Marin County's veteran blues woman, the lovely Angela Strehli, contributes an uptown track, the rollicking "Boogie

Like You Wana" and the thoughtful "Stand by Your Woman." Core plays "Stand" solidly with an almost Latin beat and just slightly behind the count, which absolutely makes this cut shine.

June shows his consummate prowess on a ripping little solo on the live Musselwhite number, "Drop Down Baby," and delights with his playful musicianship on Andersen's "In the Stot."

The CD's production is, at times, uneven, as here and there, the guitar, or drums, or rhythm section is not as present as the listener might have them; however, short of remastering finished cuts off several other peoples' albums, this is to be expected.

Core learned his chops through capable mentors, Robert Lockwood, Jr. and the great Johnny Shines, whose bands he drummed with starting in his teen years. He is currently Charlie Musselwhite's drummer.

The CD cover features a disturbing sepia-toned photo of a cherubic 4-year old Core with a toy rifle pointed at his head during a family Christmas gathering... ouch! However, you won't be picking this up for the images, just the standout music performed by seasoned professionals, held together by A-list percussionist, June Core.

*** ½

Self released: DM 001 – 2009

Check out: www.cdbaby.com/cd/junecore

Rick Estrin and the Nightcats, Twisted



Close to 40 years ago, the great Muddy Waters complimented Rick Estrin, saying, "You got that sound, boy." Having been blowing his world-class harp for 45 years now, he's still got it.

The four-piece Nightcats just released their 10th album in 30 years of existence; however, it is Estrin's first as sole leader of the band.

This is the 1st Nightcats recording without blues guitar icon, Little Charlie Baty; however, the incredible Norwegian guitarist ("a resident alien of extraordinary ability"), Chris "Kid" Andersen, more than fills the guitar slot with his often blistering, well-paced, always melodic & feisty playing.

"Twisted" has 14 tracks spread over 52 minutes of pure fun and blues oats. All of the songs are originals, and Estrin served as composer or co-composer on 11 of the 14 tracks.

The CD was recorded and mixed in San Jose, and mastered by Dan Stout and Alligator Records boss Bruce Iglauer in Chicago.

Along with Andersen's production chops (he co-produced the CD with Estrin), this album might stand alone as a showcase for the Kid. Listen to him bust out with the fat-toned "Earthquake," where surf guitar meets a mighty twang.

However, make no mistake, this CD is Estrin's. As usual, he thrills, cajoles, and mesmerizes his harmonica into a plethora of sounds; traditional ("Take it Slow"), rocking ("Big Time"), and down home ("Someone, Somewhere"). His playing sounds as fresh and vital as ever, which is remarkable. He's always played his heart out, but on this, his first "solo" effort with the Nightcats, he's blowing something special for us.

Drummer J. Hansen takes the lead vocal on his own hilarious 12-bar, upbeat composition "I'm Takin' It Out On My In-Laws." The Kid also plays an outstanding solo on this track as well.

I must say something about the steady bass of Lorenzo Farrell, and the top-notch drumming of J. Hansen. Both of them play oh so right on every track. The contributions of these two Nightcats cannot be overstated and they make up one of the better rhythm sections on the Left Coast. Bay Area piano and organ stalwart Bob Welsh sits in on several tracks as well.

The wonder of Estrin's playing on the instrumental, "Cool Breeze" (the only track on which all four share composition credits), is just old style lovely... and haunting at the same time. On this tune, the Kid also shows his considerable jazz progression chops, while both Farrell and Hansen get to stretch a bit.

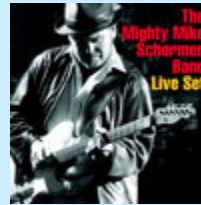
Always impeccably dressed on stage and in images, Estrin, who turns 60 this year, is now a fully mature statesman of the blues. However, he can still rock it to the floor, stick it to the ceiling, and mix it up like a hellion in between.

Estrin is a world-class harmonicist and is among the very best songwriters in popular music... his tunes and lyrics are just outstanding. And if there is a more distinctive vocalist in the world of the blues, I'd like to know who it is. Rick's voice has fine, deep conviction and purpose and serves each song on the CD with a resonance made his own.

I would think this disc might rate a few nominations around the time of the next Blues Music Awards. Well done, Nightcats!

On: Alligator Records, ALCD 4930 - 2009
Check out: www.myspace.com/rickestrin

The Mighty Mike Schermer Band, Live Set



Two clubs, 10 songwriters, nine musicians, 57 minutes, and nine tracks later, guitar player/vocalist Mighty Mike Schermer has come up with another sparkling effort among his growing catalog of excellent recordings.

Self-produced with a brilliant mix and master by the peripatetic Steve Savage, Mike and his handpicked Bay Area band-members (Steve Ehrmann, Paul Revelli, Nancy Wright, Dale Ockerman, et al.) have fashioned a loving tribute to Mike's fiery playing and some great tunes of T-Bone Walker, Freddie King, Little Milton, Earl King, King Floyd, and more.

Recorded both at Moe's Alley in Santa Cruz and the Torch Club in Sacramento, Mike states it's the most fun he's ever had making a CD, and that's saying something in regard to all the discs he's played on.

It's obvious the crowd is digging the proceedings too. With guest slots filled by singer Lara Price, drummer June Core, and keyboardist Austin deLone, this CD comprises a who's who of stellar Bay Area players. Mike just rips through "T-Bone Boogie," has a lot of fun with "Hey Baby, Que Paso?" and just shreds the oft-played blues instrumental "Hideaway."

Mike's vocals won't threaten the pantheons, but he can reach a drawling, growling sensitivity with a smirk and a wink and is always full of confidence. Best of all, his voice is in complete service to the songs he does sing.

Now, the guitar playing... oh what a thrill. It's what blues fans crave and critics clamor for... fat-toned, stinging, upsetting, impeccably paced, forlorn and sassy, all proving Mike's ability to be atop of the West Coast blues scene.

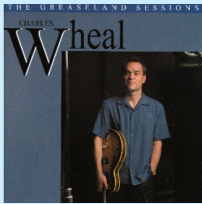
All in all, a terrific dance in your living room, bring it to a party, buy one for your friends disc of resounding delight. As Mike says, "It's a big ol' party in a little plastic box, and it wouldn't be no ball at all without y'all."

*** ½

Self released: FD 61038 - 2009

Check out: www.mighty-mike.com/

Charles Wheal, The Greaseland Sessions



Charles Wheal's 1st album is a good one. There are 12 tracks, with the album hovering around the 46-minute mark, which although short by some CD standards, will provide enough music to please most any listener.

The recording features all cover tunes, but they are particular favorites of Wheal's, are well-chosen, and make for an eclectic mix of songs by the likes of B.B. King, Big Maceo, Magic Sam, Jimmy Rushing, Eddie Taylor, and more. All of the songs have been played by Wheal's band "on the road," so there is a familiarity and comfort with the material that translates to good listening.

Bay Area all-stars such as pianist Bob Welsh (who sounds superb as usual), drummer J. Hansen, bassist Steve Wolf, sax-man Scott Peterson, and the great harmonica master, Gary Smith, are all present. I must say something particularly about Smith, one of the finest harp players in the country. Every note he blows, whether as a rhythm accompanist or during one of his perfect solos, is a revelation and completely within the tender mercies of the song.

The English born, now living in America Wheal held down the lead-guitar chair in Mark Hummel's band for 10 years and has backed up blues stars such as Snooky Pryor, Sam Myers, Billy Boy Arnold, James Cotton, Charlie Musselwhite, Kim Wilson, and many more.

He's played all around the world and thought it high time to concentrate on his own chops as a band leader and guitarist/vocalist par excellence.

Wheal plays a mean blues shuffle and provides an inspired vocal in "Letter to My Girlfriend." "Watch Your Mouth," composed by late Bay Area musician Troyce Key (once co-owner of Eli's Mile High Club), is a track worthy of Chuck Berry at his rocking best. A particular stand out on this cut is the tenor sax of Scott Peterson who blows up a '50s ruckus. Top that off with Wheal's letting loose on a pitch-a-ball solo that will have you tapping your toes.

"Ace High" features a tag-team tandem where Wheal and Peterson play note perfect with each other. B.B.'s "Baby You Done Lost Your Good Thing Now" is one of the best tracks on the album—a slow blues that encompasses a raw burn of a beat behind mournful guitar fills and a truly evil solo.

"Me and Piney Brown" is a wonderful shuffle where, once again, Smith, Welsh, and Wheal just have the most fun together, and listeners can't help but move a musical muscle.

Maceo Merriweather's "County Jail" is a complete delight and the most old school of the songs here. Wheal's vocals compliment the sad lyrics to the proverbial chain-gang T.

Huge kudos to drummer Hansen throughout for being so good you hardly notice how integral he is to the music. Hansen is a most musical drummer and the album is far better for it.

Charles Wheal's vocals throughout are strong and sincere, and his emotion and ability to carry the songs are solid; he sings with full commitment. His guitar playing throughout is excellent and will provide more than an indication of what an outstanding musician and player he is.

Kid Andersen engineered and, along with Wheal, co-produced the disc, which was recorded in May 2008 at Greaseland Studios in San Jose.

The production has many of the songs sounding as if they were laid down in the glorious '50s... and that's a very good thing. If you don't yet know Wheal as a frontman or of his excellent playing, do yourself a blues favor and hurry up and check this one out.

Self released: CWR-001 – 2009

Check out: www.myspace.com/charleswheal

In Future Issues

If you'd like your CD reviewed, please contact the Editor via newsletter@tggbs.org.

Upcoming SF Bay Area Blues Events that Caught the Editor's Eye

July 29 The California Honeydrops, Yoshi's, Oakland

August 1 Dave Workman and Cathy Lemons, Bobby G's, Berkeley

August 7-9 San Jose Jazz Festival, San Jose (large Blues component)

August 8 Alabama Mike, Rasselas, San Francisco (**free admission**)

August 26 **Benefit** for the Arkansas Blues & Heritage Festival (formerly, King Biscuit), with the Jackie Payne/Steve Edmonson Band, Kenny Neal, and more, Little Fox (jam night), Redwood City

September 5 Rick Estrin and the Nightcats, Biscuits & Blues, San Francisco

September 5 Marcia Ball, Little Fox

September 17 Terry Hanck, Biscuits & Blues

Memphis Minnie

by Joel Fritz



Bukka White called Memphis Minnie “about the best thing goin’ in the woman line.” In the 1930s and '40s she was one of the top blues recording artists. A powerful singer and skilled songwriter who played guitar better than most of her male contemporaries, she recorded

over 180 songs, most of which she wrote, between 1929 and 1959. Musicians who appeared on her records included Big Bill Broonzy and Little Walter. Her songs were covered by a wide variety of musicians including Bob Wills, Led Zeppelin, and the Jefferson Airplane.

Memphis Minnie was born Lizzie Douglas in Algiers, Louisiana on June 3, 1897. Her family called her “Kid.” She received the name Memphis Minnie in 1930 from a record company A & R man. In 1904 her family moved to Walls, Mississippi, a few miles south of Memphis. Her first guitar was a Christmas present when she was 8. She attended school long enough to pick up the rudiments of reading, writing and arithmetic. In her teens she ran away to Memphis numerous times, coming home when she ran out of money. During WWI she joined a Ringling Brothers show that toured the south. From that point she was on her own as an entertainer.

In the early 1920s she worked with Mississippi blues artist Willie Brown, who also played regularly with Charley Patton and Son House. She and Brown played together for five or six years. Willie Moore, who often worked with her and Brown said “Wasn’t nothing he could teach her...” Everything Willie Brown could play, she could play and then she could play some things he couldn’t play.”



After leaving Brown she moved to Memphis and started working with Joe McCoy. In 1929, they were signed by a Columbia Records scout who heard them playing for tips in a barbershop. They recorded eight songs in New York including “When the Levee Breaks” and “Bumble Bee,” a song she was to record five times. The record company

released the records under the names Kansas Joe and Memphis Minnie. The records did well. She dropped Kid Douglas in favor of Memphis Minnie. It was the beginning of 20 years of blues stardom for her.

She and McCoy settled in Chicago shortly after their records came out. They recorded frequently and played clubs in Chicago as well as the South and Midwest. Their sound was based on intricate guitar duets that combined a rural feel with sophisticated interplay. She played lead while McCoy played a bass line. Minnie’s vocals were simple and straight forward with an air of power and self assurance. Many of their songs had rural themes like *Plymouth Rock Blues*, a song about chickens, and *Frankie Jean*, a song that showed how to call a horse. *What’s the Matter with the Mill* combines sexual innuendo with a farmer’s regular trips to the grist mill. They recorded many double entendre songs with titles like *My Butcher Man*. Daily life was the theme for songs like *North Memphis Blues*, a commercial for a restaurant called the North Memphis Cafe and *Memphis Minnie-jitis Blues*, a song about a bout with meningitis that’s notable for its stark, elegant language.

Minnie’s biggest hit from this part of her career was *Bumble Bee*. It celebrated lust in a way that transcended the double entendre material she recorded so often. “I got a bumble bee, don’t sting nobody but me...” she sang. In the second version she recorded, she sang “He had me to the place once that I wish to God that I could die.” The lyrics to each version of the song are markedly different.



Minnie and Joe McCoy split in 1935. Their last recording was a two sided duet called *You’ve Got to Move* on side one and *You Ain’t Got to Move* on side two. Joe had to move after all. In the mid '30s Minnie’s style took on a more urban flavor. For the next four years or so she usually recorded with a piano player, often Big Bill Broonzy’s frequent accompanist, Black Bob, to complement her guitar.

Around 1939 she connected with Ernest (Little Son Joe) Lawlars, the love of her life. They lived together until he died in 1961. She and Lawlars did guitar duets that were similar to her earlier work with Joe McCoy but stripped

down to deliver the rhythmic pulse that drove the blues of the late 1930s and '40s. With Lawlars she recorded some of her best songs. *In My Girlish Days*, a deep blues about coming of age, ends with, "All of my playmates is not surprised. I had to travel 'fore I got wise. I found out better but I've still got my girlish ways." *Lonesome Shack* is about relationship insurance. She sings about a "lonesome shack" "out cross the hills" where she can go if her current relationship falls apart. *Me and My Chauffeur Blues* combines double entendre with fact. Although she owned a car, Memphis Minnie never learned to drive. *Nothing in Rambling* is another deep blues that contrasts security and life on the road. It begins with "I was born in Louisiana, raised in Algiers. Every place I go it's the peoples all say 'Ain't nothing in rambling, either running around.'" Lawlars did the vocal on *Black Rat Swing*, a comic tune that features the refrain "gonna find my shoe somewhere near his shirt tail." The song was released with the vocal credit "Mr. Memphis Minnie."

During this period, she began playing the electric guitar. Other blues players in Chicago, like Big Bill Broonzy and Tampa Red, started using amplification too. It was not a revolutionary development. At the time, people used the electric guitar because it helped them be heard in noisy clubs. Record company publicity pictures from around 1940 show her with an electrified National arch top guitar.



She and Lawlars continued to record into the early fifties. Their last release came in 1953. In a 1952 session for Chess they were assisted by Little Walter on a remake of *Me and My Chauffeur*. While

they recorded less frequently than in the previous two decades, they were a popular live act in Chicago in the early '50s, working at well known spots like the Club de Lisa, Sylvio's, Gatewood's Tavern, and others. By the middle of the decade club work their fell off as the electric music she pioneered with Big Bill and a few others in the early '40s matured and supplanted the music of the older artists. In 1958 she moved back to Memphis with Lawlars.

In Memphis they played music as long as their health allowed. They appeared on local radio with Sonny Boy Williamson and Robert Nighthawk and worked in local clubs. In 1959 they recorded an unreleased three song test for a local label. In 1960 Minnie had a stroke that put her in a wheelchair for the rest of her life. Lawlars died in 1961.

Minnie had a second stroke soon after. She spent the remainder of her life in a nursing home. She died in 1973 and was buried in Walls, Mississippi.

Suggested Listening

The best bang for the buck is the two 4-disc box sets on JSP, *Queen of Country Blues 1929-1937* and *Queen of the Delta Blues, Vol. 2*. Both are available at all of the usual on line sources for around \$25. Her entire recorded output is available on mp3.

Photos from blog by Lorna Dee Cervantes, 2006

Blues in the Schools/Libraries

by Joseph Jordan

Education Committee Chair

There can be no greater way to show love for the blues than our willingness and ability to pass that love on to future generations. The Golden Gate Blues Society is in a unique position to do just that. TGGBS has prepared and produced a series of programs geared to “Blues in the Schools and Libraries.” We’ve secured Bay Area venues where the decision-makers have been appreciative and willing to allow these programs to be produced for their students and patrons.

TGGBS has lined up presentation dates at branch libraries in Contra Costa County as well as the San Francisco Public Library system. These programs will be ongoing and developing, as TGGBS continues to produce a myriad of classes and lectures displaying the rich and vital history of the blues in its many forms.

Initially, prominent Bay Area musician and educator Henry Oden will be the instructor for these 1-to-2-hour sessions and, in the future, TGGBS plans to produce seminars, workshops, and music appreciation classes for adults with the enthusiastic assistance of a huge group of greater Bay Area blues musicians and music insiders. The support that our society members provide to these programs is immense and will allow The Golden Gate Blues Society to help keep the blues alive. What greater gift to the music can there be?



Photo courtesy of Henry Oden



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The Golden Gate Blues Society is a nonprofit affiliate of The Blues Foundation, based in Memphis, Tennessee. The purpose of the Golden Gate Blues Society is to enhance the appreciation and understanding of the Blues in the Greater San Francisco Bay Area through:

- sponsorship and promotion of Blues performances;
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