



GOLDEN GATE GROOVES

FROM THE EDITOR

Deb Lubin

As I was reviewing the articles that appear in this issue of the newsletter, I was struck by how interwoven we are as Blues lovers, musicians, writers, photographers, etc. The author of one article unwittingly mentions the author of another. The product has become organic, taking on a life of its own. I hope you feel it too as you read through this issue.



Life and death are focused on herein. The Bay Area Blues community lost another of our own when **Michael "Fly" Brooks**, bassman extraordinaire with Elvin Bishop, Terry Hanck, and others, died at the beginning of September. With short notice, **Johnny Ace**, a good friend of Fly's and an extraordinary bassman himself, agreed to write some memories of Fly for this publication. Johnny also elicited comments about Fly from other musicians who knew him well and loved him. Their memories are sure to move you. 🎵

In a similar vein, we celebrate the life of **Francis Clay**, quintessential drummer with Muddy Waters and a founding member of the James Cotton Blues Band, on the "eve" of what would have been his 87th birthday (November 16). Two people who knew and loved him share their memories and some photographs. Thanks are due to **Mark Hedin**, who has written for several local area newspapers, and **Rosa Schuth**, one of Francis's closest friends. We all miss Francis greatly.

🎵 Meanwhile, the GGBS continues to roll. We're getting ready for the Finals of our **International Blues Challenge** on November 7th, where four bands will compete to go to Memphis in February 2011. Check out the article and photos from our preliminary rounds, and best of luck to the four remaining bands! Shortly before we went to press, it was announced that the winner of our local challenge will be opening for the Robert Cray Band on November 12, at the newly reopened Fox Theatre in Redwood City! How cool is that? The benefits begin immediately! The local Blues community is blessed to have **Dorothy L. Hill** as TGGBS President! The woman knows how to get things done, and we all owe her a debt of gratitude! 🎵

🎵 Also in this issue, of particular importance, is information about two upcoming benefits for two long-time Bay Area Blues guitarists—**Steve Edmonson** and **Steve Gannon**. Please come out to these events and help support these fine musicians in their time of need. Both of them have been strong supporters of others in need and deserve our support now! 🎵

🎵 Please see the contents list below for the remainder of topics covered and information provided in this, the seventh edition, of *Golden Gate Grooves*. We are always looking for, and welcome, contributors to the newsletter. If you're interested in participating, and/or you have a topic of interest, please contact me at deblubin@sbcglobal.net. 🎵

I encourage all of you who haven't yet joined The Golden Gate Blues Society to please do so by going to www.tggbs.org and clicking on the appropriate link. We can only be as strong as our membership! Hope to see you at one or more of the many events discussed in this issue of the newsletter! 🎵

🎵 **Go out and support live Blues! See you on the Blues trail.** 🎵

IN THIS ISSUE

1. Review of the Preliminary TGGBS International Blues Challenge (IBC) Events and Information on the Finals
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5. Review of the Redwood City Blues Festival and Video Links to IBC Events and the RCBF
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9. Remembering Francis Clay



The Golden Gate Blues Society Preliminary Rounds International Blues Challenge 2010

Article by Dorothy L. Hill; photos as credited



One of my major goals when I became President of The Golden Gate Blues Society was to send one of our member bands to the International Blues Challenge in Memphis in February 2011. We are well on our way to accomplishing this goal and it has been an eye opener for all of us.

Not only have we proven that we have some of the best blues talent in the world in our midst, but we have also opened the door for our member bands to gain exposure on the national scene—maybe next year!

The camaraderie shown by all the bands throughout has been heartwarming and is indeed a mark of their excellence in every way. We are proud to say that any one of the bands in this whole process would well represent TGGBS in Memphis. Three bands competed in each of our four preliminary rounds, with the winner of each going on to the Finals. We now have four finalists and, on November 7, 2010, one of them will be selected to compete in The Blues Foundation's IBC. Our Finals will be a major event to be held at **Club Illusions** in Palo Alto. The exciting news is that the winner of the Finals will open for the Robert Cray Band at the newly reopened Fox Theatre in Redwood City on November 12 – definitely also a “must be there” event.

TGGBS used The Blues Foundation's established scoring criteria for the preliminaries with members and fans voting. We will use the same criteria at the Finals, with the addition of three distinguished Judges who will help select the winner along with our members and fans. Categories include Talent, Vocals, Blues Content, Stage Presence, and Originality.

We cut our teeth at our first preliminary round on July 18 at **Angelica's Bistro** in Redwood City. The participating bands were J.C. Smith Band, Tia Carroll and Hard Work, and Isis and the Cold Truth. The day went amazingly smoothly and the place was full of appreciative members and fans. When it was time to vote, we all came to the realization that each of the bands was so good that it was a hard choice; the **J.C. Smith Band** walked off with the win in this first round.

The second round was held on August 1 at **JJ's Blues** in San Jose, with Pinkie Rideau and Blind Resistance, Twice as Good, and the Redhouse Blues Band. **Twice as Good** won this second round.

On August 8, the **Mojo Lounge** in Fremont was filled with members and fans for performances by the Lara Price Band, Wendy DeWitt and Kirk Harwood, and Crosscut. **Wendy DeWitt and Kirk Harwood** were the winners this day and are the only duo act in the Finals.

The Standby Club in South San Francisco hosted the fourth and last preliminary round on August 22. The participating bands were Alabama Mike and 3rd Degree, BrotherCat, and Tip of the Top. With the closest vote count of all the challenges, **Tip of the Top** was declared the winner of the fourth and final preliminary round.

The Blues Foundation's IBC also includes a competition for the **Best Self-Produced CD** of the year from affiliated blues societies, with the rules allowing one entry from each society. This award will be made during the events in Memphis in February. The Golden Gate Blues Society's officers selected **Alabama Mike's** brand new CD “**Tailor Made Blues**” as our entry. It is a first-rate product and should be a strong contender in this category.

I want to personally acknowledge the efforts of our IBC Coordinators, **Susan and Marty Preece**. They have been invaluable in making these events all work smoothly.

We now have the task of raising funds to pay the winning band's travel and lodging in Memphis...we need our members' help; the funds raised at the Finals on November 7 will go toward this cause. Please come out and show your support for the bands and I promise it will be a gala event.

**Look out Memphis –
The Golden Gate Blues Society is on its way!**

[Ed. note: Please see the band photos from the preliminary rounds in order of appearance, the flyer for the Finals, and other related information on the following pages.]

Photos from the Preliminary TGGBS IBC Rounds

Angelica's Bistro

photos by Deb Lubin



JC Smith Band



Tia Carroll and Hard Work



Isis and the Cold Truth

JJs Blues

photos by Deb Lubin



Twice As Good



Pinkie Rideau and Blind Resistance



Redhouse Blues Band

The Mojo Lounge

photos by Deb Lubin, except as noted



Lara Price Band



Wendy DeWitt and Kirk Harwood



Crosscut by Bobbi Goodman

The Standby Club

photos by Dorothy L. Hill



Brothercat



Alabama Mike and 3rd Degree



Tip of the Top

[Ed. note: See later page for links to videos from these events]



The winning San Francisco Bay Area band at this event will be sent to Memphis for The Blues Foundation's International Blues Challenge February 2-5, 2011.



www.tggbs.org

*The Golden Gate
Blues Society
presents*

TGGBS Members—\$15
Nonmembers—\$20
Nonmembers may join TGGBS at the door and be admitted for \$15
Everyone gets to vote for their favorite band!



The International Blues Challenge

*JC Smith Band
Twice as Good
Wendy DeWitt
Tip of the Top*

November 7th
**Club
Illusions**
4pm-8pm
260 California Ave.
Palo Alto, CA
(650) 321-6464

NEWS FLASH!

The winner of The Golden Gate Blues Society final IBC round will open for Robert Cray at the Fox Theatre in Redwood City on November 12th.



This will be a fundraiser to help pay travel and lodging expenses to send the winning band to Memphis.

We have a distinguished panel of Judges who will participate in selecting the winning band along with TGGBS members and nonmembers. They are **Barbara Hammerman**, veteran Judge of past International Blues Challenges in Memphis and 2009 recipient of The Blues Foundation's Keeping the Blues Alive award; **Kathleen Lawton**, KCSM Blues DJ; and **Lee Hildebrand**, Journalist for *Living Blues* and other notable publications. The MC for the event will be KPOO Blues DJ, **Noel Hayes**.

Club Illusions is a beautiful venue with a parking garage in back conveniently located right off El Camino Real. Dancers are welcome! Save this date – we are going all out with this event – raffle, silent auction and the chance to send the band of your choice to Memphis. This could be the career boost of a lifetime for one of our bands. **We are very pleased to announce that the winner of the Finals will be the opening act for the Robert Cray Band at the newly reopened Fox Theatre in Redwood City on November 12, 2010.** www.foxrwc.com
Dorothy L. Hill, President



Benefits for Two Bay Area Musicians

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a benefit for

STEVE EDMONSON



HOST/ MC: JOHNNY ACE

Kid Andersen, Randy Chortkoff, Ron Hacker, Mark Hummel
Lisa Kindred, Cathy Lemons, John Nemeth, Anthony Paule
John Petersen, Kenny Blue Ray, Paul Revelli, Andy Santana
Ron Thompson, Roy Tyler, Bobbi Webb, Nancy Wright, Rusty Zinn & ...

San Francisco native, internationally known blues guitarist, Delta Groove recording artist and mainstay of the SF Bay Area Blues scene for over 30 years, Steve Edmonson has been fighting for his life due to a severe infection following emergency surgery on June 30, 2010. He is eventually expected to make a full recovery, and is hoping to be back making music by November. The Blues community has come together to put on this benefit to help with Steve's medical and living expenses until he can return to work. **Organizers Cathy Lemons and Johnny Ace, along with Judy Edmonson, have assembled an allstar lineup of talent! This event is expected to sell out; advance reservations are strongly recommended!**

BENEFIT FOR STEVE GANNON

Another Bay Area musician needs our help defraying medical expenses. Steve Gannon has been a favorite on the local Blues scene for many years, holding the guitar chair with Craig Horton, Lady Bianca, and many others. Steve is undergoing expensive medical treatments and needs our help. **Scott Silveira** is organizing a benefit for Steve at **George's Nightclub, 842 Fourth Street, San Rafael, California, on November 14 from 4pm to 9pm.**

Performers include (see raffle prizes below):

Reverend Rabia and Spencer Jarrett (acoustic duo)
Johnny Nitro with Don Basse, Scott Silveira, and Kathy Tejcka

Dave Workman with John "Broadway" Tucker,
Henry Oden, Paul Revelli, and Steve Willis

Ron Hacker with Don Basse and Paul Revelli
Kickin' the Mule featuring Freddie Hughes
Wendy DeWitt and Kirk Harwood

Lisa Kindred with Tim Wagar, Marvin Greene, and Scott Silveira

Jimmy McCracklin with Steve Gannon and Co.

Tip of the Top

Alabama Mike, Craig Horton, and Junior Morrow
with 3rd Degree (Scot Brenton, Anthony Paule, Sid Morris, Mike McCurdy, Scott Silveira)

Mark Hummel and Steve Freund with Randy Bermudes and Robi Bean

Mike Rinta, Mike Rose, Michael Peloquin

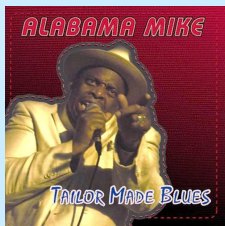
Autographed guitar from Tommy Castro and two autographed CDs and a DVD from Rick Estrin

CD Reviews

by Joseph Jordan

Alabama Mike, *Tailor Made Blues*

Produced by Jon Lawton, Scott Silveira, Scot Brenton
(9Below Productions), 11 cuts / 49 minutes



In Alabama Mike's sophomore effort, listeners will hear a full range of the singer's prowess as a vocalist/band-leader, and marvel at everything else from song choices, musical mood shifts, and inventive horn arrangements.

Mike's voice is an impressive and expressive instrument, and with this CD, shows itself in a variety of styles from old-style R&B ("Stop Putting Me On") and playfulness (his title track) to tragic ("Ghetto Life") and Latin shuffles ("Look Here Baby"). His deep Southern chops are immediately evident and the ease with which he seamlessly transitions from song-to-song tends to surprise and delight throughout this terrific effort.

All through the CD, there's marvelous side work by an excellent cast of Bay Area musicians, many prominent in their own right (Scot Brenton, Jon Lawton, Anthony Paule, Sid Morris, Michael Peloquin, and several others.)

Traditional blues fans will enjoy this stellar effort, one of the best of Bay Area indies this year, and might just wonder if Alabama Mike will break out on the national scene or be entrenched within the tragically under-rated status of being a local treasure.

[Ed. note: It should be noted that all but two of the songs on this CD are original compositions by several members of the band.]

JukeHouse Records, 2010

Check out: <http://alabamamikeblues.net/>

Tip of the Top, *Rock Tonight*

Produced by Frank De Rose, 13 cuts / 48 minutes



Tip of the Top isn't your average bar-rockin' blues band.

This mostly self-penned CD will surely gain some new fans for the South Bay Area band, a quartet of gifted players out to deliver quality blues within a relaxed atmosphere

and with a satisfying groove. The bands dual-lead vocals are complementary and handled with ease by guitarist Jon Lawton and harmonica Aki Kumar [with rhythm section Frank De Rose on bass and Carlos Velasco on drums]. Both singers are talented musicians as well, immediately evident from the CD's first cut, the heartfelt "She Told Me" to the final track on the album, the mysterious Latin-groove of "What Have I Done."

Although the CD's title might suggest otherwise, rollickin', raucous intensity is not what to expect out of this, the band's second effort, but the soulful approach that each cut brings, especially standout tracks like "Hate To See You Go," will satisfy most anyone who slaps this CD in their player.

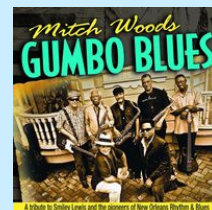
Their delightful live sets drive the band's uniform purpose of compelling their listeners to have a good time and, as a result, have gained them an ever-expanding and appreciative audience. This album continues in that promise by delivering heartfelt music combined with excellent musicianship, lovingly presented and reveling within Tip of the Top's stellar musical chops.

Delta King Records, 2010

Check out: <http://www.tipofthetopmusic.com>

Mitch Woods, *Gumbo Blues*

Produced by Mitch Woods, 12 cuts / 33 minutes



Marin County's Allstar pianist/vocalist Mitch Woods continues to mine musical treasure and then deliver the goods to his wide public audience. A nationally known musician due to his constant touring and sheer volume of musical inventiveness, Woods has fashioned yet another payload of delight.

Although the "Gumbo Blues" CD comes in at a very spare half-hour and change, the audience ought not feel at all unsatisfied. The disc will likely stay on their top-10 Bay Area radar for some time, at least until Woods' next set of toe-tapping, head-bobbing music comes out.

"Gumbo Blues" is a tribute to the late singer/songwriter Smiley Lewis, and "the pioneers of New Orleans Rhythm and Blues." Joined by key members of prominent bands most often associated with music from the Big Easy (such



as groups led by Fats Domino, Dr. John, Allen Toussaint, Jon Cleary), the album just shines with horn- and keyboard-oriented groove roots.

Woods is surely among the most talented keyboard players on the national scene and his deep-voiced renditions of songs most associated with those played over 50-years ago are always full of good-time Crescent City flavor and fun.

Woods continues a musical tradition that thankfully refuses to die, especially with cuts like "Shame, Shame, Shame" and "Big Mamou." His efforts should be lauded and his discs like "Gumbo Blues" listened to. It won't be hard to do, just slap it on and smile.

Club 88 Music, 2010

Check out: <http://www.mitchwoods.com>

www.bigcatentertainment.com

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PAL/Redwood City Blues Festival 2010

by Dorothy L. Hill

On July 23 and 24, 2010, the Police Activities League and festival producers Gino Gasparini and George Schoenstein kicked off the 5th annual Redwood City Blues Festival. The event was held at Courthouse Square in downtown Redwood City, where the redeveloped district has become a hotbed of restaurants and venues featuring blues acts, not the least of which is the former Little Fox, now renamed Club Fox, which reopened that Friday evening for a one-night special after-party featuring the Madison Blues Band.



Although I was unable to attend the Friday night show with Café R&B, this Southern California band always puts on a dynamite show and Roach is a bundle of energy, a sure bet to delight audiences.



Saturday's show opened up with a United by Music showcase. United by Music is a nonprofit organization that creates opportunities for performances by talented people with intellectual and physical disabilities. Blues superstar Candye Kane is an active supporter of this venture and she and blues award winner Janiva Magness,



were on board at this showcase along with three performers from the Netherlands. The show, featuring the Candye Kane Band (Laura Chavez on guitar, Kennan Shaw on bass, and Evan Caleb on drums) and Janiva Magness, was a highlight of the day. The contingent of Lady Angel, Arthur Shorty, and Leon from the Netherlands had the audience enthralled with their polished performances. TGGBS supports United by Music: www.unitedbymusic.org.

Dave Crimmen, billed as a Rockabilly Hall of Famer, was hardly blues-oriented and his rock 'n' roll experiment was so loud and rockish that I took refuge in one of the restaurants across the street.



But Amy Lou's Blues Band got things back on track with a raucous blues-based show, with Amy Lou throwing colorful boas into the crowd and keeping the groove hot and heavy with powerfully belted lyrics.



The Dave Hydie Band served up a righteously good blues set, with June Core on drums, Kedar Roy on bass, and a three-piece horn section. Hydie's proficiency on slide guitar with accompanying harmonica rack was solid.

BrotherCat was a revelation with a bombshell of a show—Levi Lloyd on guitar and vocals, J.B. Davis on bass and vocals, Scott "Charterman" Charter on drums, and Ron Lacey on vocals and keyboards were outstanding with their groovy soul interpretations and upbeat blues.



The tribute to the East Bay Blues Masters took many of us back to the days when the clubs in Oakland were thriving and we could catch Frankie Lee, Freddie Hughes, or Johnny Talbot performing on a regular basis. Those clubs are gone, but the legends are still around and



having them all in one day was a treat. Frankie Lee is suffering from prostate cancer and his plea to the audience to get tested was heartwarming. He sounded good and his voice was strong this day with an uptown soulful delivery of the "West Coast Sound," which he helped form.



Freddie Hughes and Kickin' the Mule were memorable, and the band included the wonderful Nancy Wright on saxophone. Hughes still has that gospel fervor that drips with soul and his delivery on

"Don't Let the Green Grass Fool You" had many in the audience singing along.



During the break, The Golden Gate Blues Society presented blues promoter and DJ Tom Mazzolini with a Lifetime Achievement Award for his contributions to the Bay Area blues community. The presentation was made by two of our eminent blues DJs, Byrd

Hale of KZSU and Noel Hayes of KPOO.

Johnny Talbot closed out the festivities with a Texas to Oakland styled guitar exhibition. The highlight of his performance was a poignant tune about the history of Russell City that featured some tasty guitar work.



It was a beautiful day in Redwood City with great music and many vendors displaying their wares. The Golden Gate Blues Society

was one of the major sponsors of this event and we thank the producers and staff for a job well done. I also have to say that one could not find a more congenial and respectful audience at a blues festival!



Photo credits: The first 2 photos on page 1 and the first 3 photos on this page, courtesy of George Schoenstein. All other photos by Dorothy L. Hill.

Links to YouTube Videos of IBC Events and the Redwood City Blues Festival by Bobbi Goodman

IBC Videos

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ek6rk3d8NYY> – JC Smith Band
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NByt2VtJh8U> – Tia Carroll and Hard Work
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=njaMcpGDXUE> – Isis and the Cold Truth
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwzMLIAYps4> – Lara Price Band
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2qTwpyIM7k> – Wendy DeWitt and Kirk Harwood
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BnBpDn2N_Fs – Crosscut
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BraoeRdHzBk> – BrotherCat
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XoGexV1LsO4> – Alabama Mike and 3rd Degree
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zO2SS65Lp8s> – Tip of the Top

[Ed. note: Unfortunately, Bobbi was unable to attend Round 2 of the IBC events.]

Redwood City Blues Festival Videos

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jDc1BLTeSow> – United by Music, Lady Angel
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ugak4TAXaTQ> – United by Music – Arthur Shorty
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUohIBtDX2w> – United by Music – Leon
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f_qHyfEPE4M – United by Music Finale
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7T9bOzVAM2g> – Dave Crimmen Band
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBQZmyyKvns> – Amy Lou's Blues
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VjR9Dp2bl0> – Dave Hydie Band
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Svukbmf_ZE – BrotherCat
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=80ZhxdSPIWo> – Freddie Hughes and Kickin' the Mule
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1pcO5grGgpY> – Johnny Talbot and De Thangs



TGGBS member band The Delta Wires celebrates 40 years in the Blues with a show at Biscuits and Blues on Friday, October 15. Please join the band in celebration!

Ernie Pinata & The DELTA WIRES

The "Rocky Balboa" of the Bay Area Blues scene

The DELTA WIRES

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MICHAEL "FLY" BROOKS: Another Soldier's Gone

September 1, 1950- September 20, 2010

by Johnny Ace (photo credits at end of article)

Hello to all you readers of The Golden Gate Blues Society newsletter. In 1982, I was doing a gig with my friend, the late Crusher Green, drummer of 35 years with the wicked Wilson Pickett. Crusher and I were in New York City talking about a mutual musician friend who had just died, and Crusher said to me "Johnny—another soldier's gone." I asked Crusher where he got that saying, and he told me that Pickett would always say that when one of his musicians passed on. Fly Brooks was a true soldier in this unsteady profession—not like those putzes who saw the movie "The Blues Brothers" or Stevie Ray Vaughan and think they "know."



Monday morning at 7:00 a.m. on September 20, 2010, in Crockett, California, we lost one of our most cherished musicians — bassist Michael "Fly" Brooks. As I write this, I'm still very sad and hurting so much inside that my thoughts aren't really clear. But I'll do my best for Fly.

To get to the real root of this story, we'll have to go back to the winter of 1969 when I first met singer/ harp player Perry Welsh, who was then working as a roadie along with Bill Elias for Elvin Bishop's band—that would be Elvin's first band after he left Paul Butterfield a year before. I was standing outside New York City's Café Au Go Go one night trying to get in, and this stocky guy with long blonde hair and beady eyes called me over and asked me what I was doing. Well, we hit it off immediately, Perry and me, and midway through our conversation, he told me that this was Elvin's third and final night at the Au Go Go, and that the band was leaving the next day. Perry then said, "If you ever want to leave New York, come out to San Francisco! I won't guarantee you a lot of money, but you'll have a lot of fun!" So on July 5, 1972, I finally got it together to make the pilgrimage west to San Francisco. I left in a van with my friends from Brooklyn, and they left me off in Denver, where I hitched a ride to San Francisco. My life was forever changed.

Perry, myself, and guitarist Johnny Vernazza ("Johnny V") put the band Perry and the Pumpers together once I got to San Francisco and Elvin Bishop put me up in his apartment on Fulton Street. Perry was definitely right about having fun—but we never worked. We were having too *much* fun. After 5 months of this and no money, I got a good offer to go out to Ann Arbor, Michigan, to join up with my old pals The Brooklyn Blues Busters. I took the gig. I left San Francisco in November of '72 and Perry was almost crying. I remember him saying to Johnny V and Terry Hanck: "We'll probably never see the fucker again!"

Well, I came back to visit everyone in the spring of '74. Fly was the guy that Perry had hired to replace me on bass. I first met Fly at Elvin Bishop's Fulton Street pad. Then, Elvin got Fly and Johnny V from the Pumpers to play in his band. Yeah, Perry was hurt, but it was just business. Fly and me immediately hit it off for the same reason I hit it off with Perry; we were all from the same cloth. And we all had the same brains, or lack of brains! We all were brothers. It was that simple.

Fly's favorite bassist was Donald "Duck" Dunn from Booker T. and the MG's, who were on all the great Stax Volt records from the late '60s: Otis Reading, Sam and Dave, etc. Fly always told me how much he loved Duck Dunn. He even resembled him on stage—no fancy steps or moves—just totally into the music. He also really dug Rocco Prestia from Tower of Power with that more modern funk sound. Fly loved, played, and listened to blues, but his real musical love was soul and funk from the '60s and early '70s. He never over-played. His bass sound was big, fat, and deep—with a big bottom. Fly had the heart and the soul—he had "the gift." His groove would just drive a band. He was a complete bass player/team player—the tops!

Fly's sense of humor was strong and biting, and yes, he would always let his opinion be known. He didn't like bullshit and phonies. And like me, he was honest and it always got him into trouble. He was also for the underdog. In those early days in the '70s, I met Fly's mom and, like Fly, she had a great sense of humor. And when I met his dad, I could see where he got his boldness from. Fly, I'd say, was a pretty complex person. He had a soft side that he wouldn't let many people see—unless he really dug them. And he liked to play the tough guy.

In September 1975, Elvin hired me to be a secret weapon singer in his band while they were recording the LP that had the hit “Fooled Around and Fell in Love,” which was recorded in Miami at Criterion Studios. When I got to



the studio, Fly gave me a great greeting and I asked him how the session was going. He said “Johnny, I’m all done—I played everything I knew.” Elvin was working out the kinks in “Fooled Around”—a whole year before they recorded it. I knew it would be a hit, even with Elvin singing it! And when Mickey Thomas sang it, well, the rest is history! For 30 days straight, we had fun in Florida, and our last gig in Atlanta with the Allman Brothers was the best. I’d scream in a high nasal voice at 12,000 Allman Brothers fans, mimicking Hans, the midget from the movie “Freaks:” “Champagne for me lady! You make me the most happiest man in all the woorld!” I might as well have been speaking Russian! No one in the crowd of 12,000 knew what I was saying except Fly. Do you know what that feels like—to get no response from 12,000 Allman Brothers fans? **I NEVER cared! I did it for me and FLY and I’d do it AGAIN! RIDE!!!!**

When “Fooled Around” hit number one in the summer of ‘76, things really took off. Fly told me that people from grade school that he hadn’t seen in years were calling



him up asking for money. That sucked! I guess that was one of the negatives about hitting the big time. When the band came to New York and played The Bottom Line, we had a ball. I showed Fly New York like he never had seen it and he never forgot it. I showed him stuff in the city close to my father’s junk shop, and we stayed at my mom’s

apartment in Queens. He had this big chip on his shoulder about being from Richmond, California—what

he called “East Bay Grease.” He used to tell me how tough it was where he grew up and I never argued with him. He also told me that he didn’t believe in The Mafia—that it was just an “ego boost for New Yorkers.” I showed him some stuff that changed his mind. He was very taken by all of that.

A year or so later Fly married a great lady named Karen. I flew in from New York for the wedding and it was great—although I don’t remember everything. Fly later told me I smashed the wedding cake. I don’t remember that! The ride continued into ‘78. Fly was still with Elvin and just riding the wave, doing stadium concerts and touring the world first-class. I was now living in San Francisco with my pal Walter Shufflesworth and his wife Debby, plus a



Hammond B3 player named Tommy Giblin from Cedar Rapids, Iowa. We were all having the hardest time putting a band together. I was just being too critical and choosy. Our dream band never came to be. About 2 years later, Walter

put the Dynatones together for a good 25 years.

In 1978, just for fun, Fly and me, along with Terry Hanck, the tenor player/singer who joined Elvin’s band back in ‘75 in Miami, and guitarist Rick McCracken, Tommy Giblin, a midget photographer named Randy Bachman, and different drummers put together a party band called “The West Coast Sheiks.” I was the lead singer and we opened up a whole new can of worms! Fly’s bass amp had bananas stuck in it for years from Bachman’s schtick on stage; I’d carry him on my shoulders through the



crowds of screaming people, me and the little man smashing bananas all over the stage while doin’ our “Mickey’s Monkey” routine. Again, some got it, and some, NO WAY! But Fly ALWAYS got it.

The Sheiks lasted about one year. Maybe we were ahead of the times—or just too crazy. I don’t really know... I do



know, Fly and I, along with the guys, continued to have a ball. Fly was always so generous—always letting me stay over at his pad, feeding me, even when Karen wanted some private “love time” ALL ALONE! I felt bad and I’d stay with Bachman after gigs if I couldn’t get lucky. Now with that said, staying with Bachman was a STORY in itself. Well, maybe we should let that alone! MERCY!! Fly and Terry even sent me money for a while when they were on the road with Elvin! Now that’s FRIENDS!

I started to see a lady named Annie. She had a great 2-year old kid, and a year later we had a kid. I thought I could do better in New York, so we left SF for fame and fortune in NYC. Four kids later, the fame never happened and my marriage was falling apart. On a cold winter’s night in 1983, the devil was in me. I was gonna do something SO horrible, kill someone. Annie. I look back on it now and see how wrong I was and how crazy I was feeling; but back then, I was very serious. And I wasn’t watching too many Alfred Hitchcock movies. It was madness, from passion, or lack of it. The jails are filled from scenarios like the one I am describing. And I had it all planned out.

In my deepest moment of darkness, late one night, I called Fly and told him my plan to kill Annie. After 30 minutes, Fly finally talked me out of it. I never forgot that. Annie, me, and the kids moved back to San Francisco in 1986. After 2 months in San Francisco, we split up. I was very heart-broken and did a lot of drinkin,’ druggin,’ and wild sex. Not really. Well...really. RRRRIIIIDDEEEE!!!!

Sometime in the late 1980s or early ‘90s, Fly split with Elvin and with his wife Karen. I never asked him why. They have a great daughter, Erin. She sings. About 2 years ago, they made a CD together, “Turn Me Loose” on Greaseland Records [Kid Andersen's label]. Fly then worked with Charlie Musselwhite, Norton Buffalo, Ron Hacker, and Terry Hanck for 9 years or more. I never lost track of him and we were still very tight. Fly remained Fly. His humor, kindness, and saying what he wanted to say never left him. He was still an A-1 GEM!

It wasn’t easy, but in 1995, I got straight. I guess the times were changing. I was getting very out of control. I had to grow up. I went to see Fly play with Terry Hanck at Biscuits and Blues in San Francisco. After the gig, I walked Fly and his bass amp to his car. When we were done schlepping his amp and bass into the trunk, we sat down in the car. I told Fly “I’m straight.” He looked me dead in the eye and immediately snatched out of his coat pocket a half empty quart bottle of vodka. Still looking me dead in the eye, he unscrewed the cap and said “I’m not, you want some?” I said “naw,” and he commenced

to take a huge swig of that juice. I wasn’t mad. I worried a bit—for Fly’s well being—but that was my man Fly. No problem for me.

Well, several years later, Fly was in a bar in Crockett giving some young guy in an Ivy League sweater a real hard time. The guy cold-cocked Fly. Fly didn’t see it coming. The punch landed Fly’s head against a pool table real hard. Fly had a bad concussion. He started to get horrible dizzy spells and they wouldn’t go away. I heard about what happened and I called Fly right away. He told me about his condition. There was a big benefit for Fly at Biscuits and Blues about 4 months after that. Everyone was there. Fly jammed with Elvin. That was real nice.

In November 2009, I did a lot a talking with Fly—a lot. He was pretty sick—diabetes—and a lot of dizzy spells and headaches. But he was still hilarious and tough. Perry Welsh, bassist Steve Ehrmann, Charlie Owens, and me went to see Fly in Crockett. We were all in the Club Tac. Fly said he was buying, so I said, “I’ll take a soda.” Fly said to everyone, “I don’t buy no one sodas! You gotta drink!” I laughed—still the same Fly. Three days later on a Saturday afternoon, there was a big get-together at Ehrmann’s place in Crockett. More dear old friends were there. Fly wasn’t there. I had Perry drive me to Fly’s apartment to get him. The front door was unlocked. I walked up the stairs to the second floor and that door was unlocked too. I guess everyone knew Fly and he was safe. The pad was pretty clean. I noticed hanging on the wall in the main room the photo of Fly playing with Chuck Berry with his ‘62 P-Bass, which he kept immaculate—all original parts. Fly was always very proud of that gig with Chuck Berry in the mid ‘70s. As my mind was flashing back in time, admiring Fly’s bass and digging on the Chuck Berry shot, I thought of all the great people Fly played with and what he accomplished. Then I looked around the pad. It was covered in a sea of empty beer cans—hundreds.

About 3 months later, Fly was in the hospital. He was in for 3 weeks straight. I was on the road with Cathy and the band. I left word with Charlie Owens to call me immediately if anything happened. I got home the day Fly passed. I spoke with his ex-wife Karen. I didn’t ask for any details on Fly’s passing. I asked her how she and her daughter Erin and Sonny, Fly’s brother, were doing. She said they were O.K.—that they were gonna have a memorial in Crockett to celebrate Fly’s life and that she was gonna videotape everyone who wanted to tell stories about Fly so Erin could have it. I told her to call me when she had the details.

I just always knew that Fly would always be there in Crockett. It was just a fact. I could always count on Fly if



I wanted to rap with a real friend, and LAUGH. Fly would always be there. Like the sun coming up and going down. Now he's gone from the planet.

Back when I first met Fly, he used to tell me this little story that blues man LC "Good Rockin" Robinson used to tell him at gigs when LC was feeling philosophical. He'd tell Fly, and Fly would do LC's voice and tell me:

Life is like when you're at a lake and you throw a stone in. It makes all these ripples in the water—big ones, then little ones 'till they all disappear. That lake is like life—so many ripples, big 'n small, 'till all's quiet, and then they're gone.

Fly, we ALL love you. RIP

Some comments follow from musicians who worked with and loved Fly (in the order of how long they knew him).

Rick McCracken

I saw Fly playing at a "Music in the Park" type gig around 1970 or '71 in the East Bay when I was about 16 or 17 years old. A year or two later I met and played in a band with him that he had named "Wally Boom Boom." I played my first real gig (meaning I got paid) with Fly at the Long Branch in Berkeley in 1972. We became very close friends and years later toured with The Elvin Bishop Band; we toured and recorded with Mickey Thomas, the West Coast Sheiks, Jo Baker and the Boys, Terry Hanck and the Soul Rockers, and countless pickup gigs. As a bass player, he was rock bottom solid, fat and round, with precise chops, a great sense of tempo and excellent on stage and in the studio. He was a great teacher, generous with his knowledge, and always ready to share his love of life and music, which he gave to so many of us—musicians and fans alike. He Will Be Missed—Rest In Peace My Brother.

Terry Hanck

On bass, he had a big fat tone and knew how to lay it in the groove and push at the right time. Just listen to his work on Elvin Bishop's hits from the '70s. He also possessed a quick wit; he was a master of the one-liner and would, in this manner, dispense of many an unwary foe. I've known and worked on and off with Fly for almost 40 years. I don't think I've spent more time laughing with or more time being pissed off at anyone else I know. I miss him already.

Perry Welsh

Fly Brooks—what I can I say— one-of-a-kind and there will never be another. Fly and I go back 40 years to Perry and the Pumpers in 1973. He was in my first working band in San Francisco—we had more fun than the law could ever allow. In a recent conversation with Fly I felt a great deal of pride and love when he told me that the best times of his life were spent with me (JA: He said that to me too!) Me and the Pumpers. He lived fast and loose and I loved him a lot. I will miss him greatly, but I know he is in "The Good Place"—play on Fly!

Johnny Vernazza

Michael "Fly" Brooks was and will always be a one-of-a-kind cat. He always had your back. And even when you were victim to his comic attacks, as I many times was, he still had you laughing out of control. Life on the road with him was like one long high school skit. His bass playing was beyond compare as far as his use of "hook lines" that a lot of bass players aren't into. Just listen to any of the recordings of Elvin Bishop from the Capricorn Record days and you'll understand, very unique. He had a knack at finding a part that more than complimented the song, it helped create the whole body of the tune.

Elvin Bishop

Fly Brooks was one of the best musicians I've known—his style was simple, solid, and very original, and stands the test of time—I was lucky to have spent so much time with him, on and off the stage, and I really have a lot of great memories of him. Fly was also a helluva natural comedian and a real good friend—we're gonna miss him.

Charlie Musselwhite

I don't know of another person I laughed so much with than Fly Brooks. Since we seemed to see things in similar ways, we would howl over shared observations. Fly was a unique man with great perception that always could detect the twisted side of things to great amusement or disgust—usually both. He was a fine musician and good friend to many, but, if you're like me, what we'll miss most is his caustic wit.

Ron Hacker

I knew Fly for a lot of years, he was on the A side of my first record, a 45 rpm, in 1980. He was in my band in the 1990s for 8 years, but I knew about Fly long before that. The first time Fly went to Europe was with the Hacksaws, I took a festival gig in Denmark that flew us over and gave us a few hundred dollars apiece for one show. Gary, my drummer at the time, and I liked to smoke us some reefer, so I flew us to Amsterdam for a couple days to get right from the flight and to get right with our smoke. Fly



didn't smoke, but he didn't give a shit what other people did. We rented a car to drive to Denmark, which took us through Germany on the Autobahn. Anyone that knew Fly will testify that Fly did not suffer fools, but Gary was 6'3" 230 pounds and didn't like to be told what to do, and I was the boss of the band, so Fly didn't say anything to us about driving down the Autobahn at 100 miles an hour passing the hash pipe back and forth until I forgot to light the pipe when I handed it back to Gary and he was holding the steering wheel with his knees lighting the pipe. Fly roared from the back seat, "Will you fuckers pull over and get high, you're going to fucking get us killed!!!" I'd love to hear him tell that story.

Steve Freund

Sometimes you meet people that make you feel as if you grew up with them—a kindred spirit. That's the way I feel about Fly Brooks. From the moment we met in 1994, it was nonstop laughter. He was one of the funniest guys I ever met. He and Terry Hanck together were almost too much fun. Nothing was sacred, and the stuff we pulled out off the top of our heads made time fly by. Michael was also a wonderful musician, equally adept at soul, gospel, and blues. A big plus was that he and I were also friends with another great bassist and singer, Roger "Jellyroll" Troy. That sealed our pact, and we remained friends from the time we met. To sum it up, Fly "got it."

Kid Andersen

To say that Fly was a great friend to me is a ridiculous understatement. That man enriched my life in a profound way that few people could even understand, and I consider myself truly blessed for having known him in the last 9 years of his life. The old cliché "I could write a book" instantly comes to mind, and if anyone had the guts to publish said book, it would make the reader's jaw drop to the floor and inevitably make him soil his pants from laughing. Fly knew how to tell a story, he'd lived 'em, and continued making 'em. I played in Terry Hanck's band with Fly from 2001 'til 2004, and we remained close

after that and I produced his one and only solo CD "Turn You Loose." If you didn't know Fly, you missed out. I felt that the vibe of our whole world had changed forever the day I heard he was gone, and I'm not just imagining it. He was really THAT special, and I can proudly say that I got to have him for a bassist, roommate, friend, surrogate father, drinking partner, and all-around walking source of entertainment. Fly was one of the first people I became close with after arriving in America, and I could not have lucked out more! RIP my friend, we'll meet again.

Photo credits:

Page 11, Fly at the Monterey Bay Blues Festival 2009, courtesy of Karla Bean Facebook page.

Page 12, column 1, top, 1977 at the Waldorf; Elvin Bishop, Mickey Thomas, Rick McCracken, Fly Brooks, Reni Slais, Don Baldwin, Bill Slais, Johnny Vernazza; from the Obert Sonsten archives.

Page 12, column 1, bottom, Fly, mid-'80s, courtesy of Karla Bean Facebook page.

Page 12, column 2 top, June 1978; from the Ace Archives. Al Pinz, Johnny Ace, Walter Shufflesworth, Fly Brooks, Perry Welsh, Applejack Walroth, Rick Kellogg.

Page 12, column 2 bottom, June 7 1978, from the Ace Archives. Top Left: Fly Brooks, Johnny Ace holding daughter Ari, Walter Shufflesworth, Perry Welsh, Applejack, Al Pinz's wife, Brigit Welsh, Papa Joe Adamo, Randy Bachman (middle); Lower front left to right Al Pinz, Rick Kellogg.

[Ed. note: A celebration of life is being planned for Fly. No details are available yet.]



"On the Air" with Noel Hayes *Interview by Joseph Jordan*



Continuing our insider's journey among blues radio personalities, we present you with the "voice" of another prominent and influential blues broadcaster, Noel Hayes of KPOO-FM, 89.5 San Francisco. We are indeed lucky to be within hearing range of this dedicated artist.

TGGBS: What time is your show, "Wednesday Blues

with Noel" and do you stream over the 'net'?

NH: My show is Wednesday mornings from 9 to noon [and yes, KPOO does stream over the net - JJ].

TGGBS: When did you start your program?

NH: I've been [broadcasting] on Wednesday mornings for 10 years.

TGGBS: What do you feel is unique about your show?

NH: I play mostly urban blues.

TGGBS: In doing your program, what are some of your greatest joys?

NH: Playing some of the friends and artists I've met throughout my 35 years of going to see blues bands.

TGGBS: What do you feel is the impact of your show?

NH: Well, I'm sure I have a very positive response by email or the internet and by phone calls that tell me I have the best show out there, but I'm sure that other blues shows hear that same thing. I think I play a lot of good music.

TGGBS: What do you do for a living?

NH: I'm a general contractor.

TGGBS: What are some of your other interests?

NH: Just the blues.

TGGBS: Do you attend live blues shows regularly?

NH: Oh, all the time. I've traveled 'cross the country and up and down the Mississippi and every Black city in the U.S. to see blues bands.

TGGBS: What are the names of a few musicians, old or new, that you feel need more recognition?

NH: Well, new is very limited because I'm one of the guys that think the blues is dying off quality-wise. From New Orleans, there's a guy named Brother Tyrone, who's a very good soul singer; in Philadelphia, Mr. Frank Bey, who sang with the Otis Redding Revue; let's see, there's several others I can't think of off the top of my head right now. Across the country, I think there's a lot of Black artists, I'm into the Black artists, (and) when some of them get the opportunity to be exposed to mainstream recognition, that's a real pleasure.

TGGBS: Who are some of your favorite old-timers?

NH: It would depend on my mood, but a lot of the Chicago guys, like Son Seals was definitely one of my favorites. I love Mighty Joe Young, Mighty Sam McClain, Johnny Copeland, Albert Collins, Albert King, those are all favorites that I've seen many, many times.

TGGBS: Any Northern California bands you especially want to mention?

NH: Well you know when Jackie Payne lived here, he was one of my favorites, but he's in Vancouver now. Otherwise, Ms. E.C. Scott. For singers, it's pretty limited. I think Alabama Mike has some possibilities. Another one of my recommendations for a great group is Earl Thomas.

TGGBS: Want to get anything off your mind and into print?

NH: I don't think there's anything really negative about the blues that I'd like to say because I like to keep everything positive, with the exception of me saying I don't think there's enough quality bands out there playing that kind of music [blues] and Black American music has seemed to have gone to rock and hip hop and R&B and other stuff and have avoided the blues. [Performer] Candye Kane sent me an email lately where she said that she thinks the blues is in trouble too. She felt that even though it's the wrong thing to say, you should burn a CD of your favorite blues artist and hand it to somebody young. That's a huge comment from an artist, but I do that all the time. When I do my show every week, I burn a couple of discs of music and every time I see somebody young, I give them a CD to listen to [so they'll] get hooked on the music. I just think it's the original American art form and it's just not out there enough. If people hear that or got the opportunity to see somebody, [the music] would really give them a new perspective; I just think that that needs to happen.

TGGBS: Anything else you'd like folks to know about yourself or your program?

NH: I like to accommodate and promote more touring bands [on the program] rather than local bands, because I feel that a band that tours may become more of a quality band. They're actually going from state-to-state playing gigs and they need all the help they can get to get people to come check them out. When they tour,



they're actually playing these clubs for very little money, they're doing it just to get their name out there, which is pretty much what the old blues guys did in the beginning. They're out there playing for enough money to get around and eat and get people to listen to them.

TGGBS: How can a blues society like The Golden Gate Blues Society assist you and/or help the public to gain a better appreciation and awareness of the blues?

NH: I think The Golden Gate Blues Society has definitely taken a step in the right direction by the quality of the people that are on their panel. I think the first thing is that they have to be knowledgeable about the blues, which people like [TGGBS President] Dorothy [Hill] have a great knowledge about the blues and I think you need that first off to even get the ball rolling. And then you need the time to put the stuff out there in the public and try and reach an audience that hasn't been reached. I really think TGGBS is doing that by attending, and attending to, a lot of things. Just the flyers [they put out] at places such as [South San Francisco bar and club] The Standby Club. Every once in a while, somebody will pick that up and be like, "Wow, I didn't know anything about something like this" [the TGGBS]. I think that works at the ground level. Try and get somebody younger [to listen to the music] as there's all kinds of people going to check out the blues right now.

TGGBS: Tell me a little about The Standby Club.

NH: The Standby is a new spot. It was an older bar in South San Francisco that was shut down by the City and a young couple bought the bar and spent their life savings trying to fix it up. They wanted to change the whole clientele, so they promoted heavily to the industrial side of South City, like Genentech and the biotech industry. But what they found is that, on the weekends, there was nobody in the club. I said, "Why don't you [let me] bring the blues to you on the weekend?" They said, "I don't know anything about the blues." I said, "the blues is a great thing and I'm sure you could fill up the place and

have some people here spending some money as well as getting some new people to find out about the blues." That's been the case. There's quite a few people that have become blues fans who were never really listening to it before it was here. My involvement here is, like I said, the young couple who own the place have done a good job to try and make this a nice place for the neighborhood and citizens of South San Francisco. I told them I have great love for this music form and I'd be happy to see it over here and I think they'd enjoy it too. Let's give it a try, and I think it'll catch on with the neighborhood, being it's a very culturally diverse neighborhood. It's become a great success. I help out Joe, the owner, with recommendations of people.

TGGBS: How can people find out about who's coming to The Standby?

NH: Through Facebook, Yelp, and Twitter and soon on The Standby's website [which was not up at press-time.]

TGGBS: Tell us anything you want to tell us.

NH: I fell in love with the blues in the '70s and pretty much [have] seen, from '75 on, any kind of blues band that was out there. I've seen almost all the legendary blues performers. That's what made me fall in love with the blues. I hope that some younger people, especially Black, pick up this music that is the original American art form and carry on the tradition and not change it to a total rock and roll scene the way I see it going. To me supporting the Black artists is what it's all about.

TGGBS: Any last words?

NH: Make sure that people know my show's about the music, and not about me.

[AUTHOR DISCLAIMER: Noel Hayes is an advisor to The Golden Gate Blues Society.]



Photo Retrospective of the Hayward/Russell City Blues Festival July 10 and 11, 2010



Tomcat Courtney by Henry Provost



Frankie Lee by Henry Provost



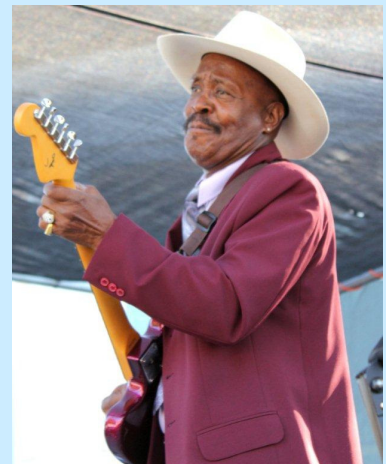
Sonny Rhodes by Dorothy L. Hill



Big Time Sarah by Dorothy L. Hill



Terry "Big T" Williams by Henry Provost



Chick Willis by Dorothy L. Hill



Guitar Mac by Deb Lubin



Little Jimmy Reed by Dorothy L. Hill



Benny Arroyo by Henry Provost



Velma Landers by Deb Lubin



Fillmore Slim by Henry Provost



Wingnut Adams by Henry Provost



Zakiya Hooker by Dorothy L. Hill



Curtis Lawson by Dorothy L. Hill



Bobby Rush and Ronnie Stewart by Dorothy L. Hill



Little Junior Crudup by Dorothy L. Hill



Ron Thompson by Dorothy L. Hill



Tumbleweed by Henry Provost



Julie Paisant, Ronnie Stewart, Paula Stewart, and Avotcja (accepting Monterey Bay Blues Festival award) by Dorothy L. Hill



Remembering Francis Clay

by Mark Hedin, photo by Rosa Schuth



I first met Francis Clay one evening in the late '90s. On hand to take in a show by James Cotton at the Biscuits and Blues nightclub near Union Square in San Francisco, I noticed him

sitting front and center, with his little ponytail tied back, and figured he must be somebody. I was soon amazed to learn just who!

It took a while, but I eventually sold some local newspapers on the idea of doing feature stories on him, and visited him at his home in the Mendelssohn Apartments on Folsom Street, downtown. I heard later that Alvin Youngblood Hart and local harmonica player Big Bones had moved him in there.

I came to learn that Francis was generous with his time. He welcomed me into his home, and regaled me with tales of Muddy Waters paying him off to stay away from certain women; of him convincing Muddy that playing at the Newport Jazz Festival or touring Europe might be good for their careers; how Howlin' Wolf bad-mouthed him to Muddy, and then hired him away; how, in New York's Greenwich Village, he thought, from first-hand experience, that Jimi Hendrix played his own material just fine, but didn't have it together so well on other stuff; how he told the others in the band backing John Lee Hooker to just watch the man's feet if they were having trouble following him.

He also told me how, truth be told, he single-handedly had done more than anyone else to ignite rock 'n' roll. If you accept that Muddy's band was a key inspiration, for example, to the Rolling Stones, well, according to Francis, Muddy's band wasn't all that popular when he joined it in the late '50s, but soon after, "they were lining up around the block."

Francis passed away in early 2008. Were he still with us, we'd be back at Biscuits and Blues next month, celebrating his 87th birthday, which would be Nov. 16. One of his friends suggested I collaborate with Francis on a biography. I wish I could've. By that time, Francis could be hard to understand at times, and was a bit preoccupied with what he felt was "a conspiracy" to keep him from telling the truth of what he'd seen and experienced, and to continue to deny him proper credit for his accomplishments.

I found it difficult to track down anyone else who might address his claims of having composed much of such songs as "Walking through the Park," "She's into Something," "Tiger in Your Tank," "She's 19 Years Old," and others that Waters recorded. Certainly, it's my opinion that almost everyone who ventures into the music business gets robbed at some point. For me, though, a turning point came when I found Francis telling me stories that, in fact, came from reporting I'd done previously, trying to verify, for instance, his statement that Bonnie Raitt had told him she believed his claims, that those songs had something different about them. When I couldn't get her to comment, Francis attributed it to just another tentacle of the conspiracy.

But Francis didn't let much slow him down. I saw him laid up at St. Francis Hospital one year during holiday season, a couple of years before he died. He was one full-of-life character, sassing the nurses and brightening everyone's day. He would tell you that he came back from the dead four times, I think it was that his heart had stopped, but he'd recovered.

I brought him once to Cupertino radio station KKUP, where he sat in on drums during the fund-raising performances. It was a wonder to watch. The image that came to my mind was of an aging lion on the prowl, bringing all that wisdom and experience to bear on those cymbals, toms, and the rest of the kit.

He'd run you ragged though! I found that once you agreed to drive him somewhere, he could usually be counted on to pull a few more stops out of his hat to add to the itinerary. He seemed to know everybody; I was constantly being surprised by new stories of people he'd known, played with, or who we were about to visit with here in the Bay Area.

One night we wound up at Yoshi's in Oakland, where Cotton was appearing. We got there late after hitting a few other spots, and Francis wasn't interested in walking into the auditorium, so we sat in the lounge and waited for the show to conclude. Eventually it did, and Francis asked me to go see if I could find someone working the stage there – apologies, if you're reading this, for forgetting your name! Eventually, we emerged back into the now-quiet lounge area, and there they were, Clay and Cotton. Francis was standing there leaning on his walker, deep in conversation with Cotton, who was leaning in toward him, supporting himself by holding



onto the other side of the same walker. If only we'd had a camera!

It was no surprise to me to see the headline "Gentleman of the Blues" on a Johnny Ace (John Acerno) feature story about Francis in an issue of *Big City Rhythm and Blues* magazine a few years back that focused on drummers. It certainly conforms to my experiences of him.

Francis recorded with so many people. You can look it up for more details. He told me about playing with Bird and Diz in Jay McShann's band and of backing Gypsy Rose Lee, perhaps in that circus he played for early in his career.

After leaving Muddy to help Cotton start his band, and then moving on from there, he recorded with Big Mama Thornton, Lightnin' Hopkins, Hookers John Lee and Earl, and so many more. You can still find these recordings. Pictures of him from those days show a dapper-dressed man with a pencil mustache.

I'd like to know more of his demeanor in those days. He always emphasized to me his belief in the value of discipline and education, and told of how those attributes had served him well throughout his career – especially when his colleagues were often lacking in some of those respects – he said Muddy, for one, could barely sign his own name when they first met.

Francis could be cranky that his circumstances weren't more comfortable and he felt he'd been repeatedly taken advantage of or overlooked – not only, for instance, over his compositions, but also for his innovations in drum hardware, or, in another example, over *S.F. Chronicle* writer Joel Selvin's misidentifying the Muddy drummer that the Stones' Charlie Watts cited as a key influence. "I could sue!" he'd complain. But he didn't utter a peep about it when I introduced him to Selvin some time later at the San Francisco Blues Festival, where, as he liked to say, he was "the ambassador."

Ace writes that Francis turned down Louis Jordan once. Francis told me his one regret was not getting to play with Duke Ellington – but that he'd come close!

Later in life, besides recording with Roy Rogers, Pete Sears, and Johnny Dyer, Francis took an interest in poetry, and would read his tributes to his forebears, to Martin Luther King, Jr., and his thoughts on current affairs, at events at the Yerba Buena Gardens that he'd host, or in a poetry and writing seminar he attended near his SoMa [South of Market in SF] home. You can find some examples of these on the Web too.

We won't see his like again. All of us who did were lucky to have known Francis Potter Clay.

Francis Clay, Friend

Article and photos by Rosa Schuth

Francis and I first met around 1968 when I was barely a teenager in high school who was crazy for Chicago blues. He was playing with the James Cotton Band at the



Golden Bear in Huntington Beach, California, where I went regularly to see incredible bands. My family had recently moved to Southern California from the Bay Area, where I had been in heaven surrounded by the best music. When I discovered the "Bear," I was thrilled to find really great music in Orange County and that I could survive there because of it. Francis liked to say that we first met at that show because he swore that he

remembered me sitting at a little table in the front. We were officially introduced in Los Angeles in the mid-'80s during the ceremony where he received his Blues Hall of Fame award.

But it was when we reconnected in NoCal in 1994 that Francis and I became true fast friends. Mark and Ellen Naftalin, with whom I had recently become good friends, were producing their annual Marin County Blues Festival, along with setting up a foundation for Francis. The Naftalins had also done the same for many great blues musicians, such as Percy Mayfield and Lowell Fulson, and now they were helping Francis with a big boost.

Francis and I talked for hours on the phone and that made it easy to keep in touch with him when I moved north from the East Bay to Sonoma County. I loved his many stories and great sense of humor and our chats would always brighten both of our days.



Even when Francis, like all of us, started to repeat and retell stories over and over, I could always steer the conversation to another untold fantastic tale of his countless

great adventures playing with so many great musicians.

He loved to talk about music, art, and politics; we had a lot of that in common. I never imagined a day that I would not be getting my Francis call for the day.

He was a super, one of a kind, true blue friend with a heart of gold. I am so privileged to have had the opportunity to know and love him as a best friend for life; I miss him tremendously.



Mitch Woods, Big Bones, Tommy Castro, Francis Clay, Will Scarlett, unknown, and Johnny Ace at Tribute to Francis at Yoshi's in Oakland on October 28, 1995. Above, Pinetop Perkins and Francis Clay. On previous page, Rosa Schuth with Francis.

Editor's Recommendation: Ron Hacker at the Saloon in SF on October 30--live recording! Be there!

The Golden Gate Blues Society

www.tggbs.org

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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;
- Education programs and publications on the performance, interpretation, preservation and growth of the Blues as an American art form; and
- The financial as well as moral support of the San Francisco Bay Area Blues community