



GOLDEN GATE GROOVES

INTERNATIONAL BLUES CHALLENGE—WHAT I LEARNED

by Paula Harris

3rd Place Winner at the 2012 IBC in Memphis



If entry into the IBC is something you're considering, let me share some things. Let me qualify right off the bat: I am, by no means, the final "that's-the-way-it-is" voice on this matter. You'd have to speak to one of the bands that actually **WON** to get that. But we did come darn close and these are the things I learned, the things

I WISH I had known or learned BEFORE competing, and things I would do differently if I had a "do over." One person commented: "You only got third; are you going to do it again?" The answer is "NO! I'm pretty darn happy with third." You can't imagine the doors that open for you just from being a part of the IBC at any level, much less if you actually get to Memphis. Anything that happens in Memphis is "icing" on a cake. I am proud of my band and, even though we didn't "WIN," we did our BEST and that is all anyone can ask or expect from a band. (In fact, I think the semifinal round might have been one of the best performances I have EVER been part of.) A musician can go a long time fueled on THAT kind of musical high. Okay, here goes.

KNOW HOW YOU ARE SCORED! Know how the scoring is weighted and make sure you are giving proper attention to the categories in the order of importance. To recap: **BLUES CONTENT** carries the highest weight and it is, therefore, the most important category. What I was told

by some members of The Blues Foundation board was: "Because the definition of blues can be so broad, make sure you stick to songs that leave no doubt they are **BLUES** songs." As someone who embraces the more soulful side of the blues, with influences such as Little Milton and Etta James, this was a hard pill to swallow because almost all my original songs have a funky feel to them. But we decided to opt for straight blues and perhaps sacrifice some of the points for **ORIGINALITY** because that is only weighted **2** points! **BLUES CONTENT** is weighted **4** points! See where I am going with this?

That brings me to the **SCORING CATEGORIES: BLUES CONTENT**, as I said, is weighted **4** points and is the most important category. But even if you pick a straight blues song, then add a funky slap bass line...the crowd may love you, but you will be docked points by the judges. So keep it straight blues; stick to 8, 12, and 16 bar formats, or songs that have a well-known blues feel. On that note, I saw several **AWESOME** bands that didn't go through because of this pitfall at the IBC (Tweedfunk and Jeremiah Johnson, the band that scared the daylights out of me in the semifinal round, both spring to mind). They may have had the crowd, including me, eating out of their hands because they were **AWESOME!** But they were both doing material that was funk/rock-based in some cases. Jeremiah confirmed that they were docked points for Blues Content when he and I spoke after they gave us our scores.

Your band's **INSTRUMENTAL TALENT** and **VOCAL TALENT** are weighted **3** points **EACH**, which makes them the second most important things to consider. And one does **NOT** outweigh the other. If I had it to do over again, I would cut the verses I sang and allow my band to play more instrumental parts. Also, it always seems to bring the house down if you can do something where everyone in the band who sings does so in harmony. Even if it's a 30-second intro to a song; I think working a part like that in is never going to hurt you. (continued on page 3)



FROM THE EDITOR

Deb Lubin



Hi Blues fans! This issue is a bit later than scheduled for various reasons, including my recently completed trip to the East Coast, which, of course, included some Blues! I had a wonderful time at the always fabulous Pennsylvania Blues Festival in the beautiful Pocono Mountains. Producer **Michael Cloeren** always books a few bands I've never seen before (a rarity at any festival), and I just have to be there, even if it means being in high heat and humidity and missing the local Redwood City Blues Festival. (WHY do these events have to be scheduled the same weekend??) The PA Blues Festival attracts folks from all over the country, including many friends that I see only at Pocono. A grand time was had by all, and local favorite Earl Thomas and the Blues Ambassadors wowed the crowd on their first East Coast appearance! I was like a proud mama! 🎸

In this issue, we present 11 CD reviews; more than twice the number in any previous issue! We also welcome three new CD reviewers: my heartfelt thanks to **Tom Hyslop**, **Joe Lempkowski**, and **Jeana Baron**, respectively, for their reviews of **Rick Estrin and the Nightcats**, *One Wrong Turn*, on Alligator Records; **R.J. Mischo's** *Make It Good* and **Nathan James** and the Rhythm Scratchers' *What You Make of It*, the latter two on Delta Groove. **Ron Purser** reviews the debut CD by local favorite bassman **Tom Bowers**, *My Baby Loves Me*. TGGBS President **Dorothy L. Hill** reviews two CDs by **Alexis P. Suter**, who will be new to most readers and is definitely worth a listen; *Blue to Brown* by **Dom and Rob Brown** (Dom has been the lead guitarist with Duran Duran since 2006); and *Heaven* by **Pinetop Perkins**, recorded in 1986 and issued by Blind Pig Records. She also reviews Delta Groove's *Longtime Friends in the Blues* by **Tail Dragger and Bob Corritore**. **Joseph Jordan** reviews **Peter Karp and Sue Foley's** second CD on Blind Pig, *Beyond the Crossroads*, and *Double Dynamite* by **The Mannish Boys**, a double CD on Delta Groove. Whew! Hope you enjoy the reviews and are moved to purchase a CD or two!

The lead story this month, by **Paula Harris**, provides insight for bands intending to compete at the International Blues Challenge in Memphis. Paula's band (the TGGBS entry) came in 3rd out of 110 bands at the 2012 IBC; she shares the valuable lessons she learned in Memphis. This article is a MUST READ for ALL "local" IBC winners! 🎸

We welcome new contributor **Buddy Akacic**, who reviewed, in his very unique style, a show at Yoshi's Oakland by **Curtis Salgado**. **Kennan Shaw** wrote an article about his experience at the Blues Music Awards, and **Dorothy L. Hill** and **Steve Cagle** contributed photos from the BMAs. Dorothy also contributed photos of TGGBS members who graced the stages at the recent Monterey Bay Blues Festival. **Nancy Wenstrom**, also a new contributor and the leader of local band Blues Kitchen, shared her experience at a fundraiser for public-supported radio station KKUP. Former TGGBS Board member **Wendell Hanna** wrote an article on Blues in the Schools, and Blues journalist **Julie Jenkins**, another new contributor (wow, I feel blessed to have so many new contributors!), penned an article on local Blues legend **Jimmy McCracklin**. 🎸

TGGBS has completed two preliminary rounds of our International Blues Challenge, with two more rounds to go before the finals. Please join us on August 19 at The Poor House Bistro and on September 15 at The Standby Club for preliminary rounds 3 and 4! Support TGGBS as we support local musicians!

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

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And because the scores are weighted equally, it makes the IBC truly a **BAND** competition. It eliminates the ability of a great vocalist with a mediocre band going through, or a band that has a KILLER guitarist who can't sing a lick from winning. Unfortunately, it also hinders all instrumental bands from winning as well. SO pay attention and make sure that EVERYONE in the band is shown off to their best advantage and that you have an equal mix of vocal and instrumental talent in your mix.

Now we come to the category that everyone debates so much over— **ORIGINALITY**. There is something called the "Mustang Sally" rule in the IBC that states that uninspired song selection will be penalized accordingly; they also specifically say that "performing covers note for note" is discouraged. Some people take this to mean that doing ANY covers will be penalized, but this is not so. Read the rules and if you can take a song that everyone knows and completely rework it to be unique, you may be more impressive than a band that does all originals. Lionel Young, who won in 2011, did ALL covers, but blew everyone away because of the way he delivered them. Wired, the band that won this year, did covers as well. SO pick your songs carefully. The best scenario is to have a group of ALL originals that blow everyone out of the water, but if you have 1 or 2 GREAT originals and 1 or 2 GREAT and uniquely different covers, you're better off to do the mix. And above all, avoid doing anything, cover or original, that can be construed as Soul, Funk, Rock, or anything other than Blues. I kept running to Terry Hiatt (my guitar player and Blues guru) and saying "Is THIS Blues?" it was his job to keep me on the "blues train" when I tend to want to hop on the soul train! LOL. If you're like me and you have a loose definition of what the "Blues" are, I strongly suggest finding yourself a self-proclaimed "purist" or "blues nazi" and asking him or her to keep you straight. (I am NOT implying that Terry is either a purist or a blues nazi! LOL. But he does know what he's talking about.)

STAGE PRESENCE. This doesn't need to be covered in depth, but there are some things to consider. You need to look like a band. That doesn't mean you have to wear matching zoot suits and two-tone shoes. It means that, when you are on stage, you need to look like you all work together and put a bit of thought into making sure you present a professional appearance. A general theme of all black and white, or something cohesive like black with red accents is enough. You should avoid wearing jeans, sweats, or athletic shoes. This is a competition. Take it seriously; your competition surely will. Also note: hats can look cool, but if you have a hat with a big brim or bill

and it casts a shadow over most of your face and eyes, you will automatically have a "disconnect" with the audience from the get-go.

Connection with the audience is the heart of "Stage Presence." Everyone is focused on you. There is a fine line between getting lost in your own world and ignoring your audience and portraying your passion and conviction to them. On the other end of the spectrum: Generally "antics" will only draw attention away from the musicality of what you are doing. Several Judges told me that "guitar wanking" was a pet peeve" of theirs. (LOL; then they had to explain exactly what that meant as I was unfamiliar with the term.) Most judges know enough about the music to differentiate between valid musicians and those that try to float by with overdone antics. If you want to jump all over the stage, dance during a song, jump off the stage into the crowd, or play your guitar behind your back, with your teeth, etc., that's fine as long as it DOES NOT DETRACT from the musicality of your performance. Everything you do should ENHANCE and COMPLIMENT your delivery. There is rarely a reason to resort to gimmicks. If they are an attempt to compensate for a weakness, you'd be better off practicing more and choreographing less.

KNOW YOUR MATERIAL. Frank DeRose, from Tip of the Top [a TGGBS-sponsored IBC band semifinalist in 2011] and a judge at The Golden Gate Blues Society finals, busted me for using a notebook on a music stand at a jam shortly before we were going to compete. And I admit I STILL use the notebook on a stand frequently. But, during the competition, it looks amateurish and like you don't know your own material, especially if you flip through it to figure out your next song (more on that in a sec.). If you have senior moments like I am prone to having, make HUGE cheat sheets you can tape to the monitor (evil grin!). I did it for the finals at Biscuits and Blues here in San Francisco, and for every stage of competition in Memphis. Memorizing would have been better, but, under stress, I have been known to blank out. The cheat sheets allowed me to be free of senior moments, and to look like I knew what the heck I was singing. But either way, you must be prepared.

TIMING YOUR SETS. Be natural with the audience, but know how long your songs are and know the order in which you're doing them. If at all possible, plan segues from one into another to make the show smooth and professional. As stated earlier, flipping through a book to figure out what you will do on the spot makes it seem that you have not taken the IBC seriously enough to time and prepare your set. Never ask "How much time do I have?" It is your responsibility to KNOW how much time



you have and select the songs and arrangements accordingly. Someone will be there at all levels of the IBC to give you the 2-minute warning. You should have an exit strategy for the last song if, for some reason, you called the songs slower or your set runs longer, for whatever reason, than you anticipated. You may have to end a song early. Be prepared to do so with grace, as if it were meant to be that way. Don't make a comment like "well we are being cut off" or anything like that; whatever you do on that stage needs to look like you MEANT to do it that way from the beginning!

If they tell you that you have 30 minutes, you need to plan a 25- to 27-minute set. Allow for interaction with your crowd and/or for a song to possibly be a bit slower/longer than your rehearsal. One of the advantages of having a planned segue between songs is that it will allow you to know where you are in the set. One of The Blues Foundation board members broke it down for me like this: "In the quarter finals, they're looking to eliminate the bands that can't follow the rules and adhere to the time limits. There is no faster way to guarantee you don't progress to the next round than to go over the time limit. There is NO penalty for going under."

HOW THE JUDGES ARE TOLD TO APPROACH SCORING.

The same Blues Foundation board member also said that, in addition to getting rid of those that can't follow the rules, the first rounds are to eliminate the uninspired or "cover" bands or those that don't do Blues. He also said "a James Brown tune, no matter how well performed or how well received by the crowd, is NEVER going through at the IBC." As I said, I saw this happen to several bands that I personally loved and who had the crowd eating out of their hands, but they were doing blues-tinged funk and rock and did not go through.

I was told that the semifinals are where they start weeding out the "bar bands" from those that are ready for truly bigger venues or stages. Here is also where personal taste comes into play. By then, almost all the non-blues bands are gone, so it comes down to "which blues band the judges like." Stage presence and a rapport with the audience/judges are very important at this stage. Plan what you want to say to lead into each song, but don't sound rehearsed. Tell a story about how you wrote a song, etc. Allow time for this. You will have different judges every night, so you can and SHOULD do your best material over and over again. Just remember that the quarterfinals, semifinals, and finals all have different time limits. SO plan wisely and know how you will fit the different songs into cohesive sets.

WHEN TO TAKE A RISK. If you are going to take a risk as far as musical style goes, the finals are the place to do it. All of the bands should be very good blues bands at this level, so the judges are instructed to look for something different and unique. Sometimes they do this and sometimes they don't, but it's a smart plan to follow if you are inclined to take a risk with what you perform. Also remember that, most likely, record companies are at the finals, either as judges or in the audience, and THEY will definitely be looking for something "fresh."

PLEASE NOTE: I was told that these guidelines are what the judges at the Memphis part of the competition are told to look for; The Golden Gate Blues Society (or any other local blues society that holds its own IBC) may have a slightly different set of guidelines. ASK what they are and be prepared to adhere to them. But always keep in mind that, if you do go through, what I have written here is what your scores should be based on.

DON'T SET YOUR HOPES ON WINNING! The unbelievably high level of talent you'll see will completely do you in if you have a "win or nothing" attitude. You need to prepare, rehearse, and go prepared to do "the best you can do." And you need to be satisfied that if you DO the best you can do, it is OK if you don't win. There are so many variables in any competition and it always boils down to this: the outcome is based on what one particular set of people who happen to be scoring you think. A different panel might think differently. Heck! THAT same panel might think differently on a different night. Judges are people, and each one has a different opinion and idea about what is good and bad. This is a competition and, unfortunately, one judge who decides you aren't his or her cup of tea can keep you from going through, or even stop you from winning. That's what happened to us; we had very high scores from all the judges except one, who gave us very low scores. That's the breaks with a competition; there is a lot to be gained, but there is a risk involved too. But if 6 out of 7 judges liked us, I'm OK with those percentages. You should be prepared to accept a less than favorable outcome without being bitter. You get out of it what you let yourself get out of it. And you look like a horse's behind if you whine about whatever the outcome is. It is a CONTEST! There will only be ONE "winner," but that does NOT make you a "loser" if that top spot is not you. Don't beat yourself up for not bringing home a trophy. Remember that competitions are held in 40 states and 20 countries to select the people you will be competing against. That is a lot of "winning bands." If you go to "bring home first place," you will most likely come home disappointed. Remember that, to GET to Memphis, you



had to win your local competition and that makes you a WINNER. And to compete on a local level, you had to be SELECTED as a valid "competitor." The winner of the IBC is a crap shoot at best. You can't predict who will be judging or how they will receive what you do, so be prepared to be content knowing you did your best. That is truly the ONLY thing you have control over. It will also ruin any possibility of networking with the other bands as you should if you view them as the opposition. It's just not a healthy attitude.

Be grateful for everything you take away from the experience at all levels of the competition. Don't be a sore loser. As I stated earlier, someone asked me if I was planning on going back to "win" next year since I "only came in third." This kind of mentality will make you bitter and most likely you will be looking at what you don't have rather than what you do. My attitude is "WOW- I came in THIRD...in the WORLD!" And I am a happy, blessed camper. I am also using all those contacts to further my career (and I got the same contacts as the two bands that placed ahead of me... as did those bands that placed behind me). The IBC is not only a priceless networking opportunity, it is also what YOU make of it! Make the MOST of it and know the difference in the things you can control and the things you can't. A positive attitude and a good showing is worth WAY more than winning with a negative one. This goes for the preliminary rounds of competition as well.

DON'T COMPARE YOURSELF TO OTHER BANDS. This is the fastest way to defeat yourself from the inside out. Don't DO it! You are NOT a judge and the judges are not YOU, so it is impossible to predict what they will like. Do your best and let the cards fall where they may. If you are performing toward the beginning or the end of the lineup, it might be smarter to go to other venues to watch the competition before or after your set rather than the bands that are competing in your group. We almost did ourselves in worrying about a bunch of cute kids that were up against us, only to find out later that we beat them both nights of preliminary competition. We ended up competing against them again in the finals. That could have been terrible had we not had the sense to pull ourselves together and focus on what we COULD control, which was OUR performance. Over-thinking is the enemy. Don't let other bands mess with your mojo (intentionally or not).

MAKE FRIENDS WITH EVERYONE. They may be competing against you, but there is nothing personal about the competition. Everyone is there to do their best. After the competition, you are all still musicians and, as such, you already have a LOT in common with

them. You never know, there may come a day when you work WITH or even for some of these people. Bad-mouthing them because you're bitter will pretty much blow any chance of them wanting to work with you, ever. This is also not the place to hang out with your "friends." The IBC is about networking and making NEW friends. Get out there and shake hands, ask who people are. Pass out cards and CDs; get their contact info and MAKE NOTES on it about who they are and where you met them. Especially if you run into someone that runs a different blues society. These people can put you in contact with festival and venue booking agents in their area after the IBC. If you make a good enough impression on them, they may be willing to put in a good word with those people, who are often their friends.

HAVE GOOD PROMO MATERIAL. You should take a ton of CDs, cards, and anything else you think will further your band. Tip of the Top made buttons last year, and people all over Beale Street were wearing them as promo. Any buzz you can create on a local level or in Memphis is always a good thing. But you should have at LEAST a good business card and hopefully some sort of demo to hand out.

MAKE NOTES NIGHTLY. I had a ziplock baggie and, each night, I took the cards with notes on them and stored them in the baggie. If I had conversations about potential gigs, I wrote more elaborate notes regarding what was said, who I should contact, and when the event was. I have since followed up on these by calling people and telling them who referred me to them. I also made notes on cards of musicians I met, who they were with, who they represented, and anything else of note. You will meet a ton of people. Make the best use of your time and keep who is who and what was said straight by writing it down while it is fresh in your mind.

PICK A VARIETY OF MUSIC. There will be over 1,000 musicians at the IBC, all doing 12-bar blues. Anything you can do "within the framework of traditional blues" to set your music apart will help you. FUNNY LYRICS are a HUGE hit! You can put humorous lyrics to a barn burner of a 12-bar blues and everyone will LOVE It! When we did "I just don't look good naked anymore," I had no idea that it would go over the way it did. We ended up putting it on our album because of the requests we got for this song. Mixing up some barn burners with some pretty ballads and a few "groove based/greasy" blues will give you a well-rounded set. Adding interesting breaks or punches can also give a 12-bar blues some new interest. When you hear headliners at major festivals, this is what they do. This is also what you are aspiring to be. On the ballot score card, it actually says that a 9/10 score is



“typical of those who play the main stage at Major Festivals, such as the LRBC [Legendary Rhythm and Blues Cruise] or King Biscuit Blues Festival.” Know what those headliners deliver, and aspire to deliver a similar mix yourself. Plus, beating your audience upside the head with one in-your-face shuffle after another or screaming the entire set will also wear both the crowd and the judges out rapidly. (Vince Caminiti, who runs the Blues Jam at Club Fox in Redwood City, busted me on this after the preliminary round locally. He said: “Paula, you have a voice that goes from 1-15 on a dime; spend more time in the 7-9 range and less time at 15. It’s exhausting to listen to!”) I took him seriously, and he was right. (Makes for an easier set too because I’m not working so hard! LOL.) Screaming at the crowd or playing frantically also makes you appear “desperate.” Again, at Club Fox, there is a saying that flashes on the wall at all the jams that says: “Play like you have something to SAY...not something to PROVE!” it’s a good motto. A faster tempo does NOT mean that you are projecting more energy. It’s far better to relax (at whatever tempo the song needs) and take the crowd on a journey. That won’t happen if you assault them (more on that in a second).

CHOOSE or COMPILE YOUR BAND WISELY. It may be a competition instead of a paid gig, but the possible benefits are unbelievable. Make sure you have people who are committed to putting in the effort it will take to truly give it your best shot. Make sure that the band you start with is willing to go all the way through the competition with you. That means rehearsals. This is not a jam, and you shouldn’t sound or act like a jam band. No one is going to win the IBC without specific arrangements and cohesiveness within the band. (To be honest, you probably won’t even be selected to compete in the earliest rounds of competition if you sound like that either.) The IBC can be one of the best experiences you will ever have as a musician. You should NOT be gathering a group of jammers together with a “Hey, lets jam together so we can enter the IBC!” mentality. By the same token, you can’t have a bunch of heavy hitters who feel that a “competition” such as this is beneath them. Several bands in Memphis had some award-winning and/or VERY well-known musicians in them. If you get to go to Memphis, it is not an amateur competition anymore. You will hear some mind-blowing music! Don’t throw a band together. You need to have a clear idea of what kind of blues band you are, and select the players that not only contribute to the overall band, but whose styles of playing merge well. The two best musicians in the world won’t be a good mix if they don’t have musical chemistry. I have seen Luciano Pavarotti sing with James Brown, Barry White, and Joe Cocker (three different

performances). ALL of them should have known better! To perform a style or genre of music, everyone needs to understand the genre and be able to interpret it the same way. (Soul and blues are about passion and are often imperfect and raw as a result; opera and other forms of classical music are about precision and control.) You can’t make chocolate and onions mix; some things just don’t go together. Don’t try what Pavarotti did with your band. Make sure you all have the same vision and are cohesive as players. You should be playing WITH each other, not AT each other.

CONTROL STAGE SOUND LEVELS. Try to keep your stage sound levels lower. You aren’t a rock band playing at a stadium. This is what I meant about assaulting your audience. If you see people putting their hands over their ears because your volume is hurting them, it isn’t a good sign. Most of the venues at all levels of competition other than the finals at the Orpheum Theater are small venues with a capacity of 200 or less. The smaller your venue, the more you need to control your levels. The sound guys will do what they can, but if you’re blowing out the mics and vibrating the walls, you pretty much tie their hands. You will have crappy sound if you don’t give the sound guys leeway to do their job regarding the volume. When you’re already maxed out, they have no control over the blending of the group. A “powerful” delivery is not the same thing as an obnoxiously loud delivery. Don’t confuse the two. Try rehearsing with as little amplification as possible and learn to listen to each other. Learn how to communicate with your band members on stage and be ready to adapt to different circumstances. I saw one woman with a really good voice desperately trying to bring down the band’s levels because she was being crushed by their volume. The band was galloping on like a dog off the leash. She ended up screaming and we STILL couldn’t hear her lyrics. Don’t mistake screaming for singing either. They are worlds apart. Songs are a form of communication, especially blues songs. Lyrical clarity can make or break you. What good are funny lyrics (or ANY lyrics) if people can’t understand what you’re singing about? Musicians can often have an “as long as I can hear myself, I’m good” mentality. Your band needs to have a “band mentality.” Each member needs to constantly be asking him/herself: “Can I hear the other players and is what I am doing complementing what everyone else is doing?”

LAST: BE READY TO TRAVEL SHOULD YOU GO THROUGH YOUR LOCAL IBC TO MEMPHIS. You will need to have whatever travelling cases or other equipment you need to ensure that your instruments get to Memphis in one piece. Our drummer, Al, ended up having to buy some

very expensive cases for his cymbals and pedals. I was sweating Terry and Joey being able to fit their guitars into the overhead compartments on the plane. If at all possible, you should ship your equipment rather than taking the risk of booking a flight that might have overhead bins that are too small (shudder of horror at having to check a guitar in a soft cover if it doesn't fit). You need to be able to set up and tear down in 10 MINUTES!!! Be prepared to give the folks at The Blues Foundation a list of what you need so that you have everything to get going quickly. They penalize you if you don't start on time or take too long getting off stage. Make sure that, if there is a problem with setting up, it is on THEIR end not yours! If you have trouble because YOU neglected to let them know what you need, you're SOL (and out of the running).

In closing, I need to say that we made some of these mistakes, and we also got a lot of the points I listed right. We didn't win it all, so I'm not trying to pontificate here. And I definitely DON'T "know it all" (whoa lawd, FAR from it!). I'm just one person listing things as I perceived them. All of it is colored by my own opinions. What is discussed here are all the things that, "IF" I were ever in a position to do it all over again, I would attempt to do. As you can probably tell because I had a lot to say, it was a HUGE learning experience. I'll sign off by saying that I highly recommend the IBC. It can seriously be life changing. It's the "American Idol" of Blues. SO don't "think" about it; get ready; get prepared; and DO IT! (But do it right!) Good luck to all of you and hopefully one of you will bring that first place WIN on HOME!

Photo of Paula Harris on page 1 by Andrea Zucker.

Check out this video by **Andrea Lueken** of Paula's "victory lap" at the local Pioneer Saloon jam following her win at TGGBS' IBC finals: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQr5MsVraw8&feature=plcp&fb_source=message

BISCUITS AND BLUES: SAN FRANCISCO'S PREMIER BLUES CLUB

by Robert Feuer, photos by Deb Lubin

Biscuits and Blues, San Francisco's premier blues club, stands near the corner of Mason and Geary, its red awning jutting out into the ebb and flow of people and machines.

Across its threshold, down its stairs, guests find a comfortable room, where, for a few hours most evenings, the room vibrates to the century-old calling of the blues. Often, one may encounter the club's owner,



Steven Suen, with or without his wife, Tina, two stalwarts in San Francisco's colorful blues history.

Suen, whose early history includes an

upbringing in Hong Kong and extensive travels through many countries, settled in San Francisco because his parents lived here and "San Francisco is one of the best places I've seen," he says during a recent phone interview. He enjoys the cultural and geographical

diversity of the area and the friendliness of its inhabitants.

After a college education in this country, which led him to the practice of accounting, taxes, and real estate, his life changed course on a day in 2006, when he walked into Biscuits and Blues at a time when it was doing badly and was up for sale by an owner who wanted to continue its blues tradition.

Growing up in Hong Kong, which had only one radio station at the time, Suen experienced minimum exposure to the blues, but Tina enjoys the genre and inspired him to purchase the club. "I don't know how to explain it," Suen says. "Most music is noise to her. She's the one who's totally behind this thing."

After the first year of ownership, he dropped most of his vocational and recreational pursuits to devote his time to Biscuits and Blues. "I consider it a privilege," he says, "but there's too much to do on a daily basis - however we have a mission here."

Above the supper club, the Suens added the Union Room, giving them the opportunity to book jazz, pop, rock and roll, and R&B artists. The room has a grand piano, which is making a Monday night jazz jam very popular.



Suen does the booking and says “No matter what genre, the quality of the music dictates the success of the club. I introduced myself to the blues. I’ve learned on the job.”

Biscuits and Blues has won many local awards and, in 1999, received a lifetime-achievement Keeping the Blues Alive award. Suen says the club has a solid reputation around the world, but, although he’s “keeping it above water,” he’s not making money, or even drawing a salary.



Suen values his relationships with musicians, and understands the rigors of being on the road. Referring to touring musicians, he says, “Every night they need a home and that stage is going to be their home for that one night. The most important thing is the musicians.”

Anyone who has had personal relations with him can testify to his sincerity. The Suens are gracious hosts who keep the focus on the music. A highlight is the annual anniversary party, where an exceptional lineup of local blues players perform for their hosts, each other, and

friends of the club. The food and drink are complimentary, and the evening provides a showcase for artists who may have escaped the notice of the general public.

Suen, though he finds it necessary to book touring national acts to attract the attention of tourists and other casual blues fans, says “There’s a lot of great local artists and most of the local people get to play on the stage one way or the other.”

Recently, he went to China to explore the possibility of improving the market for American musicians. “The Chinese people are craving American music,” he says, “but China isn’t ready for it yet,” claiming that fair compensation, in the form of pay or reimbursement for travel expenses isn’t available. He imagines opening a Biscuits & Blues there, but right now it’s “wishful thinking.”

Suen believes that “young musicians are essential to the continuity of the genre,” and tries to book this “new generation.” He plans to “continue to do the blues,” he says. “As long as musicians play the blues, they’re welcome here.”

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REVIEW OF CURTIS SALGADO AT YOSHI'S OAKLAND, JUNE 2012

by Buddy Akacic

Unusual cool East Bay rain that day. The Salgado Band in the state to do a casino show in Oroville that Saturday. Elegant Japanese dining on Jack London Square, downtown Oakland, California. Comfy full bar between the diners and the showroom. Curtis backstage with a Jimmy Reed T gifted to him by Jimmy's daughter. Around 75 blues and soul fans seated on a blue Monday. This is a world class jazz room now sharing the scene with its kindred peer. Dr Ed Coleman at the University of Oregon cc 1977 said that "Blues is the parent of all legitimate jazz." He's a professor from the Bay Area and played bass for years with Cal Tjader.

The Salgado Band takes stage at 8:10pm with tender BB style guitar licks performed by a bouncing player. Proactive body language pumping raw, hard edged in yo' face electric blues. Alligator *Soul Shot* sales pitch. Up funk with 3 backup singers. Memphis, Tennessee allusion into OV Wright. Epic soul expertise the way I hear it. Seated fans swinging and swaying into Frankie Lee's "Strung Out." Crisp, soaring vocal power.

This is a mature artist with balls out melisma, falsetto and vibrato. Stunning micless delicate, crying call and response with his guitarist. This is a long, long way since Eli's.

Sam and Dave, Otis Redding, virtuoso percussion on Iko Iko. 2nd line Too Loose. 1/2 dozen songs prior to pulling out the harp. Tony Stead on keyboard gets a standing O. "She Didn't Cut Me Loose, She Set Me Free." One lead singer, three backups. A peer at the table says "He's

slick." Ode to Oakland's Tower of Power. "Sorry Over Nothing."

Down the alley and off to OV Wright church. "I Was Born All Over." Curt and his drummer trading fours. Curt's been heard to say "He can sing better than I can." Nice to have serious soul falsetto all inspired coming from your drummer. Ode to his mother Hilda. Chicken/Egg or Woman/Blues the existential equation.

This is a totally professional show, tightly, thoughtfully choreographed, a sensitivity to nuance and timing. Serious show biz chops drenched in passionate soul. Understands the world of engaging his audience with warm humor and hip patois. Sometimes dripping with revival tent fervor. Encores with "20 Years of BB King," magic audience bonding.

Backstage after the show, I approached Curtis and said to him, "How is it that this show was even more skilled than the last show that I saw with you?" His reply spoke basically to the quality of the sound engineer, the audio acoustics of the room.

When each on stage player hears clearly what each of the other performers is up to they can achieve greater cohesion, put on a tighter show. Speaks volumes of Yoshi's as a class room and implies an alternate take on other rooms in our area.

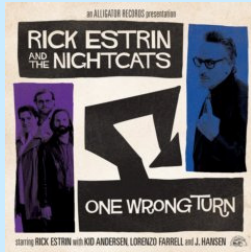
We can all take pride. Alligator Records, Yoshi's Oakland, Intrepid Artists, you and I.

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CD REVIEWS

Rick Estrin and the Nightcats, *One Wrong Turn* by Tom Hyslop



Little Charlie Baty's guitar heroics notwithstanding, the spotlight has always shone on the Nightcats' harmonica ace, songwriter/singer extraordinaire, and just plain major league attraction, Rick Estrin. So it is worth remembering that *One Wrong Turn* is only the

second album, post-Baty, to feature Estrin's name above the marquee. Happily, personnel and name changes have not resulted in any diminution of the brand quality that the Nightcats have established through the decades.

The CD features a dizzying array of styles, held together by a strong focus on the songs, a solid rapport between drummer J. Hansen, bassist and organ/piano man Lorenzo Farrell, and secret weapon Chris "Kid" Andersen on stunt guitar, bass, and keys, who comprise the Nightcats, and Estrin's force of personality. The frontman's well-established sense of humor is near omnipresent, nowhere more than on the side-splittingly funny, name-dropping gem, "(I Met Her On The) Blues Cruise," the vivid, too-much-detail saga of a regrettably shameful hookup. A chunky roots-rocker sporting (intentionally) slightly cheesy backing vocals, Stones-y horn charts, and raw tradeoffs between Estrin and Andersen in the solo section, this is the one everyone is talking about. Only a video could make it better and elevate it past novelty status to classic – and lo! one exists, although we must go to YouTube to view it. The Latin-tinged "D.O.G." and Estrin's indelible sketch of a lowlife, would-be ladies' man, "Desperation Perspiration" – serving low-key funk, replete with popping bass, cheesy keyboard accents, and a fine, porn soundtrack-worthy Fender Rhodes solo – are other workouts with humor at the forefront.

A keenly observational eye informs the title track, "One Wrong Turn," a fatalistic tale of the vagaries of fortune, with a syncopated yet slinky, noirish minor key sound, and "Lucky You," an acidic look into contrasting lives, written at a personal level, but with a clear socio-economic undercurrent. Hansen's thumping toms pace this up tempo number. The hip shuffle "Callin' All Fools" unfurls with the cool, slightly menacing elegance of a cigarette smoke plume captured in a vintage, B&W

photograph shot in a nightclub (remember when smoking was permitted in public?). Solos from Rick on harp (nicely rhythmic), Kid (a groovy, reverb-splashed little thing that starts out in Grant Green territory and ends in a chorus of stinging, sustained bends), and Farrell on organ are excellent. Eschewing his usual complexity and humor, Estrin has crafted here a plainspoken message that unites wounded lovers everywhere, in the CD's most deeply moving lyric.

Democratically enough, the spotlight shifts elsewhere to other Nightcats. Hansen's adventurous "You Ain't The Boss Of Me" splits the difference between driving, late-'60s soul and something à la "Dolly Dagger" from the Hendrix catalog, with solid, psychedelic riffing and Lonnie Mack-inspired (really!) lead guitar from Andersen. Estrin's splendid, up-front harp keeps the arrangement appropriately grounded in a hard blues sound. The great Terry Hanck adds tenor sax honk to Farrell's up tempo B3 instrumental "Zonin'," which also features wonderful jazz chording, an unexpected infusion of wah, and a fleet-fingered guitar break, all courtesy of Andersen. In general, the Kid's guitar is really overdriving his amps; chords are truly greasy and fat, while single-note punctuations remain trebly and biting. He makes judicious use of tremolo and other vintage-approved effects, where they are appropriate. But he lets it all hang out on his almost surreal album closer, "The Legend Of Taco Cobbler," a cinematic dreamscape that explodes outward from surf rock to incorporate mariachi horns, organ-driven ska, a bit of carnival sideshow, sweep picking and other metalesque flourishes (remember the '80s, guitar players?), dog-whistle slide (think Duane on "Layla"), and spaghetti Western tropes. It's a mind-blower, baby!

A brace of far more traditional blues songs rounds out this set. The charming swamp blues stroll "Movin' Slow," the perfect backdrop for your next bayou-flavored dance party, finds Estrin blowing on a rarely heard tremolo harmonica. And any aficionado of lowdown urban blues will deem the superb, West Side Chicago-style pastiche "Broke And Lonesome" essential listening. Kid really shines here in channeling Magic Sam, adding a few choice Otis Rush-isms.

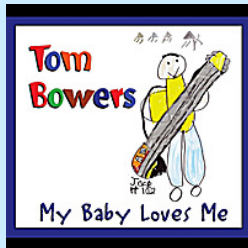
Rick Estrin's pen, harmonica, voice, and charismatic persona continue to grow in appeal and effectiveness. The bottom line? *One Wrong Turn* is a superior collection of songs from one of America's most talented, and surprising, bands.

Alligator Records – 2012

Check out: www.rickestrin.com and www.alligator.com

Tom Bowers, *My Baby Loves Me*

by Ron Purser



Tom Bowers is a recognizable bass guitarist on the San Francisco blues scene, having played with such notable figures as Jackie Payne, the late Johnny Nitro and The Doorslammers, Tia Carroll and Hard Work, Pat Wilder, Rusty Zinn, and Craig Horton. Tall, lanky, and

unassuming, Bowers has struck out on his own with this debut album, and is featured as the sole vocalist. If you dig that articulate West Coast Blues guitar sound, this album is for you. Bowers has rounded up a hotshot, go-to crew for blues. Two Kings of SF Bay Area blues guitar are featured: the swing maestro Anthony Paule and the young Norwegian guitar hero Kid Andersen, backed by the talented Paul Revelli on drums (who played with Joe Louis Walker and the Boss Talkers for many years, as well as many other well-known musicians).

This album has 11 tracks that cover a tasteful mix of swing, roots rock, rhythm and blues, boogie woogie, West Coast swing, rockabilly, and jump blues. There are no stale and worn out covers on this album. In fact, there is something for everyone here, and I really enjoyed the unusual picks, from the Fats Domino “Don’t You Know That I Love You” to the wonderful guitar work by Anthony Paule on Albert King’s “Bad Luck” to the R&B tune “Yes I Want You” by Ivory Joe Hunter, or the classic Freddie King rock and roll song, “I’m Ready,” along with one original by Tom, “The Hickey Song.” The album is polished, entertaining, and engaging. A disclaimer is in order here: as an amateur blues guitarist myself, I am biased toward what amounts to an instrumental showcase for the two guitar virtuosos—Anthony Paule and Kid Andersen. They are a dynamic duo on this album, and the sound is never shrill, busy, or overpowering—you won’t want to miss it.

Having said that, the real treat is listening to Tom Bowers up front and center as the vocalist on all 11 cuts. The myth that bassists are expression-challenged guys hiding to the side in a band is put to rest on this album. Bowers is not shy and his vocal talents as a band leader are evident here. He not only does a superb job vocally, but his bass work is quite impressive, especially on the up tempo tunes. Bowers and Revelli drive the band hard, confident in their two fine guitarists. A good example of the band’s tightness can be heard on the steaming hot James Rushing and Count Basie tune “Boogie Woogie I May Be Wrong.” This is an up tempo boogie with a lot of stop times, and Bowers’ singing is great on this one as he keeps it going with a walking bass. Paule

and Andersen trade back and forth the best of their swing and rockabilly licks, along with backup vocals.

Anthony Paule’s flawless signature swing work is outstanding on track six, “Tell Me What’s the Reason,” a classic T-Bone Walker tune (written by Florence Cadrez). A fun song is “Loud Mouth Lucy” (Chuck Willis), which kind of reminds me of the lyrical message in Albert Collins’ “Honey Hush.” If you like up tempo Freddie King style rock and roll, the band really shines on “I’m Ready.” Again, Bowers shows off his ability to carry the tune vocally while doing some pretty demanding bass work. I can also hear Kid Andersen’s smoking solo tactics on this one.

If there is one criticism of this album, it is that there is only one original, “The Hickey Song,” which tells a funny, personal tale of Tom and his wife Donna’s courtship. I suspect we will be hearing more from Tom Bowers and his stellar cast of characters, hopefully sooner rather than later.

Four Cells Music – 2011

Check out: www.tombowers.net

Pinetop Perkins, *Heaven* by Dorothy L. Hill



Joe Willie “Pinetop” Perkins was one of the most beloved performers in blues and his legacy continues with this previously unreleased material recorded in 1986. Like many blues legends, Perkins had humble beginnings, but, at the time of his death on

March 21, 2011, he had reached the peak of success with three Grammy Awards and so many Blues Music Awards (aka the W.C. Handy Awards) that The Blues Foundation renamed the piano category award for him. His peers and fans adored him—and he was indeed worthy of that reverence. We could never get enough Pinetop and this is another example of his incredible stamina and dexterity at the age of 73 when this was recorded and evident until his death at the age of 97 when he was still a touring musician.

Perkins performs solo on most tracks, with a little help from Tony O on guitar, Mike Markowitz on harmonica, Brad Vickers on bass, and Pete DeCoste on drums embellishing some tunes. Two solos were enhanced with the overdubbing of vocals. Who knew Pinetop’s music better than the late Willie “Big Eyes” Smith—and shortly before his death in 2011, Willie added piquancy to the lyrics on “Sitting On The Top Of The World,” a bittersweet tribute,



which is believed to have been his last recording. Otis Clay added vocals to the tune "Since I Fell For You" in an eloquent soulful rendering.

The first cut, "44 Blues," features Perkins on piano and coarse vocals delivered in a laid-back style. On "4 O'Clock In The Morning," the vocals are more refined with tastefully accented keyboard notes on this slow blues excursion. "Relaxin'" changes pace with a deliberately measured boogie-woogie piano solo. There are many highlights—"Ida B," "That's All Right," and "Just Keep On Drinking" definitely stand out with the band's tasty support. Pinetop's characteristic style is fully explored on "Pinetop's Boogie Woogie" and "Pinetop's Blues."

This CD displays the brilliance of Pinetop Perkins and illustrates his imposing sense of structure on piano, which influenced the next generation of players. This is a "must have" for lovers of Blues and collectors alike.

Blind Pig Records – 2012

Check out: www.blindpigrecords.com

The Mannish Boys, *Double Dynamite* by Joseph Jordan



An amazing double CD just hit the market and it's worth a shot if you're into traditional roots music with a truly modern blues slant. The (seven) Mannish Boys consist of players primarily associated with West Coast Blues, and include standouts on

each instrument. Producer/harp player Randy Chortkoff joins guitarists Franck Goldwasser and Kirk Fletcher, ace vocalists Finis Tasby and Sugaray Rayford, and a smokin' rhythm section of Jimi Bott on drums and Willie J. Campbell on acoustic and electric bass. The Mannish Boys have been together just 5 years, and this is their sixth album; the guys have got it down. (See several of their YouTube videos available online if you don't believe me.)

A remarkable cast of guest artists stops by, as well, on the two albums, including Elvin Bishop, James Harman, Mud Morganfield, Jackie Payne, Rod Piazza, Kid Ramos, Jason Ricci, Junior Watson, and a TON of other stellar players.

The Mannish Boys, of course, took their name from the mid-'50s song by Muddy Waters and Bo Diddley, and they live up to every inch of what that title implies: boyish enthusiasm and pluck matched with a maturity of musicianship that excels with each cut. Coming in at a generous near 2-hours, you get the feeling that they could

have made it a three-CD set if they hadn't been more judicious with their sparkling output. Coproduced by Chortkoff and Jeff Scott Fleenor, this, their third studio album, was recorded in the unlikely blues setting of Torrance, California. Called "a virtual blues festival in a single band," the Boys just roll through 26 songs of originals and extremely well-chosen covers, from Son House to Little Walter, from Booker T, to James Brown.

"Born Under a Bad Sign" just explodes with a new take on one of modern blues classic songs, while the track "Mannish Boy," with vocals by Muddy's eldest son Mud Morganfield, is all you could ever hope to hear of an update on an old classic.

The Mannish Boys continue to impress on recorded tracks and especially live, and have produced a hell of a two-disc recording that should be a must-hear on your listening agenda.

Delta Groove Music – 2012

Check out: www.themannishboys.com and www.deltagroovemusic.com

Tail Dragger & Bob Corritore, *Longtime Friends in the Blues* by Dorothy L. Hill



James Yancy Jones, born in Altheimer, Arkansas, moved to Chicago in the '60s and befriended Howlin' Wolf, who bestowed him with the nickname Tail Dragger due to his habit of being late to gigs. He became a fixture on the Chicago blues scene as a band leader and

achieved a fair amount of national recognition with several Delmark releases in the '90s. Bob Corritore was born in Chicago and immersed himself in the scene from an early age. His producing career started there and he has been a tireless promoter of Chicago blues. When he moved to Phoenix in 1981, he opened a popular blues club, The Rhythm Room, which still successfully showcases blues on a regular basis. He met Tail Dragger in 1976 and they became lifelong friends. So, it is fitting that these two have put together a first rate CD that is pure Chicago blues—they have been formed by the genre!

Tail Dragger provides the raw vocals and Corritore's brilliant harmonica playing permeates the session. They have chosen some of the best blues players, who provide a rock-solid foundation with like blues sensibilities. Henry Gray was Howlin' Wolf's pianist for 12 years. Kirk Fletcher



and Chris James are two of the finest blues guitarists, and Patrick Rynn on bass and Brian Fahey on drums round out the impeccable accompanists.

Composition of 9 of the 10 cuts are attributed to Tail Dragger (James Y. Jones). The first cut of "I'm Worried" features a rough vocal refrain, with Corritore beautifully supplying a harmonica backdrop. The blues standard "Sugar Mama" is a standout with Tail Dragger's vocals strong and forceful and with Henry Gray adding a refreshing vocal response to great effect. "Cold Outdoors" is a delightful Chicago shuffle with Corritore hitting the high notes on harmonica, embellished by Gray's rippling piano solo. "So Ezee" is a joyful upbeat admonition: "this is a message to the world, old folks and young ones, too, wake up and stop cracking jokes and use your head because it's so easy to be misled," with an abandon that's contagious and the whole rhythm section gives it emotive urgency. In what is the standout cut, Henry Gray is captivating on "Boogie Woogie Ball," adding comments as he dazzles the keys with breakneck dexterity. "Please Mr. Jailer" closes it out with a vocal plea by Tail Dragger for the release of his woman.

This CD is highly recommended for Chicago blues enthusiasts. Pure and simple, it's just hands down good gutbucket blues!

Delta Groove Music – 2012

Check out: www.taildraggerbluesband.com,
www.bobcorritore.com, and www.deltagroovemusic.com

R.J. Mischo, *Make It Good*

by Joe Lempkowski



Make It Good is former Bay Area resident R.J. Mischo's 10th release and his first for Delta Groove Music. It's a high-octane fueled album consisting of 13 original tunes that demonstrate Mischo's fine songwriting skills. One thing that remains in common with his previous

releases, this CD is a fine collection of old school Blues numbers mixed with some 1950s-era rock and roll tunes.

On most tracks, he is backed by some of the finest talent out of Austin, Texas, including guitarists Nick Curran and Johnny Moeller, bassist Ronnie James Weber, drummer

Wes Starr, and pianist Nick Connolly. On two of the tunes, he is more than adequately backed by drummer Richard Medek, and guitarist Jeremy Johnson from Minneapolis.

The first track, "Trouble Belt," starts the set with an up tempo number reminiscent of '50s rock and roll. It's a song about a woman in a leopard-skin top with a smile that'll make your heart stop. "The Frozen Pickle" is a wicked instrumental jam that showcases the fine instrumentalists on this recording. It starts off as a showcase for RJ's fabulous harmonica tone, followed by a very lush organ solo and a guitar solo that transports the listener back to 1955 before RJ wraps it all up.

The title track, "Make It Good," provides the listener with some great advice about treating a woman right, not spending all your money and acting like a fool. It features some very nice guitar work by Jeremy Johnson. "Papa's S.T. Special" is a crowd-pleasing and delightful country blues romp that RJ has been performing during his past couple of tours through the Bay Area. The studio version is no exception.

"Minnesota Woman" is a classic Rice Miller-influenced number bragging about going back home to the woman from Minnesota that he followed from California to Arkansas. "Up To The Brim" is an instrumental that pays tribute to the legendary John Brim. It sounds like it came straight out of the Chess Studios in Chicago back in 1953.

"The Biscuit Is Back" is an up tempo Rice Miller-influenced trip down to Helena, Arkansas, where RJ proclaims his thanks for the return of the King Biscuit Blues Festival in 2011. "Elevator Juice" is another fine instrumental showcasing RJ's fine amplified harmonica tone, which is second to none, and some fine guitar work by Johnny Moeller. "All Over Again" paints an interesting tale about the repetitive nature of the partying lifestyle.

Closing the CD is "Arumbula Part 2." ("Arumbula Part 1" occurs earlier in the set.) This is a crazy instrumental that's like a tapestry featuring some great chromatic harmonica mixed with some fine organ work by Nick Connolly that floats on top of a great jungle beat groove.

R.J.'s debut release on Delta Groove is a wonderful collection of songs exhibiting solid musicianship and songwriting. *Make It Good* would be a welcome addition to any collection of fine Blues music.

Delta Groove Music – 2012

Check out: www.rjblues.com and
www.deltagroovemusic.com



Alexis P. Suter Band, *Just Another Fool* (2008) and *Two Sides* (2011)

by Dorothy L. Hill

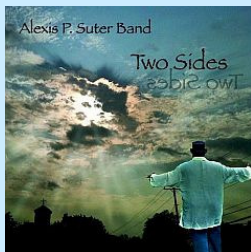
Alexis P. Suter was nominated for a Blues Music Award in 2012 as Best Soul Blues Female Artist and, although she had gained recognition at blues festivals and clubs in the Northeast, had never come to my attention. Her dynamic performance at the Blues Music Awards in Memphis this past May peaked my interest. Suter, like many blues artists, got her first exposure to performing in the church choir. The late, legendary drummer Levon Helm gave her career a boost by showcasing the band at concerts in Woodstock, New York, and featured the band on his own label on "Live At The Midnight Ramble."

The two CDs under review give insight into why Suter is worthy of more attention. Although there is little information in the liner notes, it is obvious that Suter's genre-crossing is influenced by her gospel background and her brawny baritone vocals are unmistakably full of richness and power.



On *Just Another Fool*, Suter's vocals are backed up by band mates Jimmy Bennett on guitar, Ray Grappone on drums and percussion, Peter Bennett on bass, and Vicki Bell, Linda Pino, and Glenn Turner on background vocals. Special guests are Benny Harrison, Bruce Katz, and Ted

Kooshian on piano and organ, and Deep Singh on percussion. Nine of the 11 cuts are original compositions. The opening cut, "Climbin' On Up The Mountain," is delightfully uplifting and enhanced by noteworthy background vocals and ensemble band support. One of the highlights is "Right On Time," with Suter's vocal purring leading up to a full-bodied refrain "...I'm so glad I metcha, happened just right on time...". This is a satisfying CD of soul and a good showcase of original music that takes the listener to another level with uncommon emotional depth.



Two Sides features only Suter's band mates, with the exception of Turner on background vocals. Again, the majority of the tunes are original compositions by Suter and/or members of the band. The opening cut, "Free," is a joyful exaltation of gospel-infused

testimony. Suter gets down and dirty on "All Over Again" in an upbeat offering "...I'm over you baby, don't come back

no more...," which will get your dancing juices going! Suter's vocals on Bob Dylan's "Knockin' On Heaven's Door" are splendidly articulate. Every blues album seems to include a tune related to rain and Suter covers the traditional song "Didn't It Rain" with exceptionally good guitar and drum support emphasizing the melancholy blues melody. Suter's guttural vocals on another traditional tune, "John The Revelator," are relentless with gospel fervor. "Only I" is pure soul and Suter's vocal delivery is magnificent. The tune "Rise" is credited to Suter and some band members—the striking emotion of this tune is fierce and stunning. The closing cut, "Drama," takes a different tack with a jaunty melody embellished by well-crafted time changes and Suter's wicked laugh. A good crop of 14 tunes makes this one a winner.

I would suggest that you check out both CDs; however, in my opinion, *Two Sides* is a more fully developed representation of Suter's ability to convey a message with believable candor. Neither of these CDs is blues per se, but, rather, the selections speak to the soul and Suter has a lot to say.

Hipbone Records – 2008 and 2011

Check out: www.alexispsuter.com and www.hipbonerecords.com

Dom and Rob Brown, *Blue to Brown*

by Dorothy L. Hill



Seriously, Duran Duran? Yes, folks, Dom Brown, who has been lead guitarist for the band since 2006 has put out a recording with his father Rob Brown that is a first rate blues CD. These days, with the genres bent in all directions, few recordings are totally what

traditionalists call the Blues, but this one nicely fits the bill. This British duo gathered together a few friends who have roots in rock and blues and the result is a fine example of good musicianship. My son hipped me to this CD and I was a skeptic until I listened and was really impressed.

Rob Brown handles lead vocals and his voice has a spellbinding blues growl with a muscular and earthy delivery. Dom Brown's guitar leads are filled with a ripened maturity so many rock stars lack. The nine original tunes are overflowing with vibrancy and delivered with passion and perception.

On the first selection, "Blue Boy," Rob Brown's guttural vocals are emphasized by a steady beat with drummer

Darrin Mooney and the textural warping of guitarist Dom Brown. "Going Down But Not Slow" has an irresistible shuffling groove with added orchestration by pianist Mike Bramwell and saxophonist Martin Winning. On the tune "Bad Boy," Rob Brown's vocals are saturated with an impassioned trance-like delivery. "I Get Loaded" is a swinging shuffle with Dom's delightfully expressive melodic exploration on guitar. Rob's vocals on "Walking Blues" are gruffly fluid on a slow tempo that percolates with emotion enhanced by Dom's purely expressive guitar solo. One of the highlights is "Sweet Mercy," which has a catchy staccato beat overlaid with Rob's gritty vocalizing. "Please, Please" has a country-infused feel with a lush vocal delivery, with Rob and Dom on vocals and instrumental textures added by Winning on saxophone and piano and Martha Riley on violin. Another standout is "The Heat Is Gone" with its churning swing and luxuriant vocals by Rob Brown and Kat Pearson

and Dom's rippling guitar styling adding dimension with swoops and soaring licks. The final cut, "Love Another Day," is a surprise--a short ode to leaving "...sweetness never leaves me, bitterness is never far behind...I know where the door is, I'll be on my way...." Outstanding!

This is a solid effort notable for a grease-popping fresh take on Blues. Of the recent CDs I've reviewed, I have to say that this was the most enjoyable. Check it out, you will be surprised too!

Remedy Records – 2012

Check out: www.dombrown.com

Peter Karp and Sue Foley, *Beyond the Crossroads* by Joseph Jordan



Nice story. Peter Karp and Sue Foley met through correspondence and a mutual regard for each other's music. They found they had a transcendent, almost spiritual, connection with each other and with their first album, 2010's *He Said, She Said*, brought those communications and concepts to musical fruition. With their second CD as a partnership, *Beyond the Crossroads* (also a highlight track on the recording, written by Karp), they've focused on, according to Foley, "writing great songs with common themes. Positivity, renewal, absolution."

Featuring 12 songs, all solo or self-penned, the CD comes in at just 42 minutes, but what a satisfying ride it is. Karp is a standout on guitar and keyboard, while the nationally known and solo blues star (with 11 solo albums to her credit), Canadian-born Foley just continues to smoke and smolder with her Tele and other assorted guitars. Her voice is not an acquired taste, but immediately accessible and pure to the bone (and heart).

The CD is not just a sensitive singer-songwriter elegy, but an alive and vibrant, and just plain fun, recording. Wouldn't necessarily call this a classic blues-music CD, but blues does infuse and inform most of the tracks. Foley's and Karp's vocals are sympathetic with each other and the tunes are alive with the vibrancy of two artists at the top of their game.

Recorded primarily in Winnipeg with additional tracks cut in New Jersey, the album is immediate and sometimes raucous (check out Foley's and Karp's guitar work on the rollicking "Plank Spank").

Produced by the two of them, and recorded with their terrific touring band along with several guest artists, the album is a satisfying addition to their small, but vital, recorded output. Hopefully, these two will be making great music, solo and collectively, for years to come.

Blind Pig Records – 2012

Check out: www.karpfoley.com and www.blindpigrecords.com

Nathan James & the Rhythm Scratchers, *What You Make of It* by Jeana Baron



You might know Southern California's Nathan James from his work with James Harman, or he may have first caught your attention during his soulful (IBC 1st place award-winning) collaboration with vocalist/harp man Ben Hernandez. Perhaps, like me, the

name Nathan James hadn't yet crossed your radar. Now, after listening to *What You Make of It*, James's national debut on the Delta Groove Music label, all I can say is, "Nathan James, where have you been all my blues-loving life?"

On this superb release, James teams up with bassist/vocalist/harp man Troy Sandow and percussionist Marty Dodson for a thoroughly enjoyable excursion through an eclectic collection of tunes. Digging deep into American



roots music and demonstrating his mastery of traditional styles (Piedmont finger picking in particular), James artfully blends styles and adds his own unique sound for a vibe that's fresh, funky, and fun.

One element that gives James's music its unique flavor is what he refers to as "washtar soul," the tenor of his homemade guitars fashioned from washboards and axe handles that allow him to pick or strum while simultaneously rubbing the board. (Genius!) His "washtar gitboards" and his 3-string 'tri-tar' are featured on all but one tune. Another factor that lends itself to the singular sound of this CD is the recording technique. Recorded live in studio with only bare bones equipment, the overall sound is raw and haunting--evocative of days past.

With 14 songs (10 James originals) and six or seven different styles, there's truly something for everyone. Delta/country blues, trance, jug band, uptown blues, bluesy soul, and even a sweet Cajun waltz are all represented. I love almost every track on this CD, even warming to the two tunes that feature kazoo, an instrument I normally find a bit off-putting. I found myself playing this CD over and over again and have no doubt that Nathan James and his band would be a blast to see live!

A quick overview of what you'll find on the CD:

"Chosen Kind." With some lowdown, dirty, harp-driven funkiness, James declares he's finally found the one!

"What You Make Of It." James's voice and the hypnotic groove of this tune sent me back in time to my teenage bedroom listening to The Doors. I believe James has channeled Jim Morrison here!

"Black Snakin' Jiver." A fun, rag-timey Blind Boy Fuller cover.

"Later On." A marvelously sexy cover of a great Jimmy McCracklin tune.

"Get To The Country." A Delta-blues-styled James original.

"Make It On Your Own." James's tribute to a departed friend.

"Rhino Horn." A playful song penned by James Harman, who also lends his voice and harmonica to this cut.

"Pretty Baby Don't Be Late." A sweet, acoustical number with James on National guitar.

"Blues Headache." Written by James and Sandow, a moody instrumental inspired by Slim Harpo.

"Pain Inside Waltz." An old-time waltz inspired by Cajun fiddle tunes.

"I'm A Slave To You." The smoking saxes of Johnny Vai and Archie Thompson are featured on this great '60s soul cover.

"First And The Most." Another tune featuring the hot horns of Vai and Thompson

"You Lead Me On." Dodson's second-line beat and Sandow's chromatic harp drive this trance-like country tune.

"Tri-tar Shuffle Twist." James showcases his 'tri-tar' with this joyful instrumental.

James proves himself to be a triple threat—an accomplished musician, a talented songwriter, and a decent vocalist with impressive range. Throw in his innovative instrument designs and you have one extremely talented guy. If you like your traditional blues with a twist, you'll find much to smile about on this CD.

Delta Groove Music – 2012

Check out: www.nathandjames.com and www.deltagroovemusic.com

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Cathy Lemons & Workman\$ Comp
Howell Devine



Round 3 of the Golden Gate Blues Society's International Blues Challenge will be held August 19 at The Poor House Bistro.

Round 1 was held at The Grand Dell Saloon on July 15. The participating bands were Scary Larry and the Monsters, The Smokin' Kingsnakes, and Pinkie Rideau and Blind Resistance. Pinkie and her band won this round.

Check out these videos by Bobbi Goodman for a look at each band that day.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bgvu5tBHvEs> – Pinkie Rideau and Blind Resistance

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VO9ue9Ew UE> – The Smokin' Kingsnakes

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4uiRHSomE3k> – Scary Larry and the Monsters

Round 2 was held August 4, the day before this newsletter was prepared, at Neto's Market and Grille. The participating bands were The Lovelight Blues Band, Papa's Garage, and the Feral Moon Band. The Feral Moon Band was the winner of Round 2. Video clips are not yet available, but may be by the time you read this, so please check YouTube.

The winning bands from Rounds 1 and 2 are shown below. Come join us for Round 3 and vote for your favorite band!



Photos by Dorothy L. Hill and Angelo J. Rossi



MY EXPERIENCE AT THE BLUES MUSIC AWARDS IN MEMPHIS

by Kennan Shaw

I aspire to being an optimist. I'm pretty close, but when some see the glass as half empty, and others see the glass as half full, my question is "How do you know what that is in the glass, anyway?" There's just too much comedic value in cynicism to let it go completely.

"Optimistic cynicism" or "cynical optimism" is pretty much how I approach the Blues Music Awards (BMAs) every year. I really look forward to those few days in Memphis, seeing everybody that I hardly ever get to see, but I know that, when it gets right down to it, the awards are going to make me shake my head ruefully and laugh, in a deep, mirthless tone.

Okay, maybe it's not quit as dark as all that. I think The Blues Foundation is a good organization, dedicated to doing good things, and that the awards are its way of honoring "the family," so to speak. However, like any awards for things artistic, I have great reservations also.

Take the Grammy Awards, for instance. Or better yet, don't. I watch the broadcast about every 4 years, and then just feel sad that 4 hours of my life were so casually thrown into the garbage to elevate the profit margin of people who hate music so much that they feel the need to flog it in the modern day public square of primetime.

Country music has a different awards show on television every couple of months, and the gleaming white spokes-models/stars and airbrushed outlaws smartly gush over "the fans that make all this possible."

I've said it before, and I'll say it again; no one is ever going to win *American Idol* singing Howlin' Wolf songs. Buddy Guy isn't going to be hosting *Saturday Night Live* any time soon. Tommy Castro will not be lip-synching the Thanksgiving Halftime Show at Dallas Stadium surrounded by the Up with People dancers. The Blues Music Awards will never be on network television, and no matter what anybody wears, there won't be a "red carpet preview!"

I understand how easy it is to stand outside something like this and criticize it. I see it all the time; sometimes people feel their friends have been ignored, and often people try to make it a racial thing. As with any popularity contest – that's what it is after all – people feel disenfranchised. What I say to those people is this: it is only marginally more difficult to join the Blues Foundation and have a voice in the process than it is to sit outside it and piss and moan. I voted this year, and

pretty much nobody I voted for won, which is a bummer, but at least I did my part.

Now, let me get off my soapbox and tell you the truth about the Blues Music Awards; nobody goes for the awards show. It's really, really long. Heck, by the end of the night, I couldn't even tell you who won! Let's see; Charlie Musselwhite won for...a couple of things, and Samantha Fish looked cute as hell in her ball gown, rockin' that Tele, and I think she got 'Best New Artist,' and Curtis Salgado gave a great, great speech when he won for...something...but the rock-solid, deep down "can-I-get-a-witness" truth is that the main reason people go to the BMAs is...The Hang.

The awards show is held on Thursday night, so that means that everybody is on Beale Street Wednesday night for the party! Beale has become that special brand of boozy adult theme park, like Bourbon Street in New Orleans, or Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco; bars and t-shirt shops living off the reputation of days gone by, while the locals avoid the area like it's quarantined. Beale on this Wednesday night was as vibrant and lively as any place in the world. Not only were the BMAs in town, but the L.A. Clippers were playing the Grizzlies in an NBA playoff game in the arena a block off Beale, and the street itself was closed to traffic and lined with custom motorcycles, in some kind of "Bike Night" celebration. Literally thousands of people strode, staggered, and stumbled up and down the street, all under the watchful, good natured eyes of Memphis's Finest.

The musical focus of all the revelry is the Rum Boogie Cafe, and the return, after a one-year hiatus, of the Nick Moss Pro Jam. The Rum Boogie is the focal point; right in the heart of Beale, old STAX signs hanging above the stage, the walls more cigarette smoke than paint, and a humongous collection of autographed guitars dangling from all fixed surfaces. Give a Hollywood set director the order for a "Memphis Blues Club" and this is what you'd get. Don't look too close at anything, though, or you'll find the \$40 acoustic signed by The New Kids on the Block and it will cross-circuit your brain.

Chicago guitar slinger Nick Moss and his fabulous band, the Flip Tops, run the jam like it's in their backyard. I love Nick's wearily voiced admonition to the gathered players, posers, drunks, and fans: "I don't care who you are, nobody plays that doesn't put their name on the list.



Also, if ‘bigger’ names show up, they get preference. That’s just the way it is. We’re going to TRY to get everybody up, so relax.”

To find a place to stand is lucky. A place to sit is golden. Me? It’s good to have friends! This year, I got to play with up and coming ‘Blues Diva’ Mary Bridget Davies, the fabulous guitarist Kevin Selfe from Portland, a keyboardist way over on the other side of the stage, that may or may not have been Lee Pons(!?!), a guitarist whose name escapes me completely (sorry again!), and the incomparable Jimi Bott on drums. It’s not going out on a limb to say that if you’re a good bass player, chances are the majority of your “man crushes” are on drummers. Jimi is a “bucket list” quality drummer, and I was thrilled to get that opportunity!

The joint is loud, busy, full, and fun, and there’s music all up and down the street, from the Hard Rock Café to B. B. King’s. The smell of barbecue permeates the air, and if you stand on the corner of Beale and South Third Street, eventually you will see anyone and everyone!

The day of the awards show is no different when it comes to hustle and bustle, with world-class blues talent starting early on Beale. The Marriott on Main Street is the hub of activity, and ‘people watching’ in the lobby is only made difficult by the overwhelming desire to appear cool. Or so I’ve heard.

The little bar off the lobby is a good place to spot people and say ‘hi’ as they come through. It’s easy to make friends in this business, but we seldom get to see one another. Once in a while, we might be on the same festival, close enough on the bill to catch a set or hang out a little, but almost everybody is at the BMAs, and a few words in the hotel lobby, or a minute or two of conversation on the streets of Memphis go a long way.

The evening’s festivities start off with a reception in the Convention Center’s atrium: a no host bar and long ticket lines where conversation is usually cancelled out by a handful of up-and-coming acts playing on a big stage at the far end. Hats off to the sound company; this year, it wasn’t painfully loud, even in the glass cave that is the street level anti-room at the Center. This is Professional Mingling; and I usually adopt a continuous clockwise sweep around the room, pausing long enough to say “hi,” introduce myself to various mutual friends, and keep moving to avoid having conversations reach the “awkward silence” stage.

After about an hour, it’s on up the escalators to the main hall, and the awards ceremony. This was my third year at the awards, but the first time I became aware of how

your table reflects your status. Silly me, I just figured it was random, but I learned otherwise pretty quickly. Front and center, it was explained to me, are the “Movers and Shakers.” Me, I’m just looking for a place to eat my chicken/fish combo and get a cup of coffee, and I’m happy to be sitting with friends to do that.

The performances are great, because it’s an opportunity to hear a lot of acts you’ve only heard of in a nice, condensed package. Ten-minute sampler, then move along! The presentations are okay, as long as someone doesn’t write in “jokes” for the presenters, and all the winners seem very thankful. Curtis Salgado’s speech about how the Best Soul Blues award should have gone to Otis Clay instead of him was heartfelt and beautiful. Performing is a huge honor, but you really want a good spot; too late, and everyone has wandered off. Too early, and you get back to your table to find someone else has eaten your salad. And, yes, I’m still mad about it 3 years later!

Between desserts, I managed to pay my respects to Bob Margolin. Bob played with Muddy Waters, knows everyone, and is my blues idol. He’s generous, funny, and generally the coolest guy in the room! I make a point of honoring the Blues Godfather whenever I can.

The moment I dreaded and looked forward to the most was the “In Memoriam” presentation; a slide show of all those we lost in the last year. And this year, it was a huge list, populated by giants. Etta, Pinetop, Big Eyes, and Hubert brought tears and rousing applause, and every heart in the room grew heavy at the mention of Michael Burks, who died suddenly and unexpectedly on his way home from a European tour the week before the BMAs, where he was scheduled to appear.

The night kind of winds down when all the awards have been presented. Tab Benoit and Susan Tedeschi/Derek Trucks win pretty much everything. People congregate out in the hall because, around midnight, the little melted cheese croissants magically appear in the warming dishes. I had a nice conversation with the fantastic Scot Sutherland and his lovely wife Jenipher on a rare occasion when you get to see them both together, as opposed to him being on tour or her bringing cupcakes to a Des Moines gig.

As the last performers play to emptying tables and the dedicated few, the crowd drifts down and out of the hall. The bar at the Marriott fills up, and I see Tab Benoit, clutching a fistful of trophies doing a little tap dance in the lobby. Perfect nightcap!

If you're a fan of the blues, you owe it to yourself to make a trip to the BMAs. First of all, there's a very good chance that a lot of people you enjoy listening to are going to be there, and be very accessible. Festivals are the best when it comes to performances, but at the awards, everyone lets their guard down a little. There's no sense of "I'm working here."

Secondly, I haven't even scratched the surface of the shows that go on all around the town. Get your rest, and drink plenty of water, because when you get here you will not sleep much, and you will not eat smart. There are shows that start at brunch and run until late night snack. And run everyday through the weekend. As far as the food goes, it's all barbecued or fried. All.

I should be able to tell you in great detail about all of the amazing entertainment, but my Memphis is something else; I'd just as soon stroll outside than stand in a crowded room. The ghosts of Memphis are a little different; there's an edge to them. Memphis is where "man's inhumanity to his fellow man" got a backbeat.

The Lorraine Motel looks untouched by time, those same cars in the parking lot. The men pointing or huddling around the fallen figure of Martin Luther King, Jr., have been replaced by silhouettes. It's as if the entire scene, that one terrible moment, has been preserved by sadness and loss itself.

And that's the blues. That's where it's from. You can trace a line from that feeling, standing and looking at the Lorraine Motel, all the way to the current crop of BMA winners. If you just look at the two ends of the string, it doesn't seem to make sense, but if you allow yourself to ride the string from one end to the other, it's crystal clear. And that's why I'm cynically optimistic. That glass may be half full, but you have to find out what's in that glass before you know whether that's a good thing or not.

PHOTOS FROM THE 2012 BLUES MUSIC AWARDS



Chris Thomas King and Eddie Turner
by Steve Cagle



Susan Tedeschi and Derek Trucks
by Dorothy L. Hill



Charlie Musselwhite
by Dorothy L. Hill



Johnny Sansone
by Dorothy L. Hill



Denise LaSalle and Gaye Adegbalola
by Steve Cagle



Otis Clay by Dorothy L. Hill



**Biscuit Miller and Dr. Love
by Dorothy L. Hill**



**Dianna Greenleaf and Bob
Margolin by Dorothy L. Hill**



**Joe Louis Walker
by Dorothy L. Hill**



Terry Hanck by Dorothy L. Hill



Mike Zito by Dorothy L. Hill



**Jonn Del Toro Richardson and
Rich Del Grosso by Dorothy L.
Hill**



KKUP AND BAY AREA BLUES WOMEN SHOW MUTUAL SUPPORT

by Nancy Wenstrom

On Saturday, June 2, I had the pleasure of being part of a live radio show featuring Bay Area women in the blues. A total of 12 female disciples of the blues came together to make some great and very inspired music at the request of J.C. Smith. This unrehearsed and impromptu 3-hour session was a mutual benefit for both the musicians and the radio station.

For its 40th anniversary, KKUP 91.5FM listener-supported radio held its annual fundraising drive and over the weekend managed to raise about \$15,000 for the station...way to go, public radio fans! The station is also celebrating 20 years of the blues program that J.C. Smith (aka Johnnie Cozmic) hosts every Thursday from 3 pm to 6 pm. That's a long time, and we salute this great station for its support of great music that is often lost in modern radio broadcasting, along with support for local artists that otherwise might not get a chance for airtime.

Over the course of the 3-hour live jam session, I had the pleasure of playing (guitar, vocals) with the following talented women: Sarah Baker (piano, vocals), Tia Carroll (vocals), Diva Ladee Chico (vocals), Wendy DeWitt (piano, vocals), Jackie Enx (drums), Patty Hammond (bass), Stacey Kay (sax), Lara Price (vocals), Livia Slingerland (guitar, vocals), Pat Wilder (guitar, vocals), and Nancy Wright (sax). If I had included the list of flattering adjectives I wanted to put in front of each of these talented women's names, it would have sounded pretty cheesy. Just suffice it to say that they are all unique and gifted individuals and it was very powerful having all of them together playing and singing. If you were lucky enough to hear this broadcast (no pun intended), I think you would probably agree. In these 3 hours, the station raised about \$1,400 from call-in donations, more than was raised in the 24 hours prior. Many of the artists also donated several of CDs as thank-you gifts to some of the donors who called in right after the show.

J.C. Smith said that this event was the first of its kind at the station, as they never had an all female lineup

perform live. He told me that: "Women musicians don't get enough attention in the business and they work just as hard or harder than their male counterparts. All these women in one room, with no egos and no agendas, playing great music was a great show of girl power." He had the idea to put this show together because he thought it would be a good platform for top talent that doesn't get enough recognition, unlike male artists or other established musicians.

Now these were his words, not mine, gentlemen...I'm just quoting. Personally I've learned most everything I know about playing the guitar from all the great male players I've had the privilege of working with or listening to over the years. But I also was grateful to get a chance to play in an event such as this and enjoyed playing with women I know and meeting some fellow female musicians. J.C. is right and, in my own words, this was a gracious, talented, and no-nonsense group of ladies out to have a good time with the music, and give their time to support the station, many of whom had gigs to go to or a very long drive back home. Sarah Baker came all the way to San Jose from Santa Rosa just to do the show.

Next on the agenda, it looks like most of us will be getting together one more time for a set at the San Jose Jazz Festival on Saturday, August 11, at 3 pm. It should be fun and if you didn't get to catch the radio show, maybe you can hear and see us there.

In closing, I would like to mention and thank Gil de Leon, the conductor; Steve Algram, the sound engineer; and Starving Musicians of San Jose for providing the backline. Maybe I speak for all the women when I say thank you to J.C. Smith for his courage in putting together this impromptu show live on the air and supporting local women musicians. I know there are many of us out there and we represented only a handful, but sometimes it is events like these that give us the impetus to keep going and say, "Why should the guys have all the fun?"

TGGBS BLUES IN THE SCHOOLS

by Wendell Hanna, PhD, Music Education

Blues in the Schools (BITS) presentations sponsored by The Golden Gate Blues Society in 2011 and 2012 have been exceptional and I would like to share some highlights and give a BIG thank you to the musicians/educators who gave their time and energy in sharing their expertise in the Blues.

STEVE FREUND



In May 2011, we were lucky to have Steve Freund give a presentation on the history of the Blues at San Francisco's School of the Arts (SOTA). SOTA is an

audition-only, public performing arts school, i.e., San Francisco's "Fame" school. Many graduates go on to the best performing arts colleges in the United States and into professional careers in the arts. Steve gave a brilliant hour-long presentation to high school band and orchestra students. Following are some of their comments about what they learned.

New Things I Learned about Blues History

- Guitarists used to put holes in their amps.
- Blues is split into pre- and post-war styles and pre-war jazz and blues are one and the same.
- Blues has African roots and started at slower tempos and gradually got faster.
- Blues originated from slave music during the civil war and, before WWII, banjos were popular in the blues.

What Engaged Me the Most about the Presentation?

- Side facts about artists, fun facts (Leadbelly singing his way out of prison)
- Some of the later songs
- Everything
- I was engaged by the rhythms because they were very catchy
- I liked they way the singers sang.
- I enjoyed hearing the evolution of the music through each consecutive recording played.
- The music engaged me because it is something you don't hear much any more.
- I was engaged by hearing my roots.

- I liked the lady who sang the Louis Armstrong song; I think she was the first blues singer.
- I liked the post WWII music because electric guitar was growing in popularity.
- Listening to examples of music was engaging because we could hear the progression of jazz within each piece.
- The first part was boring music, but I liked the second part because the music was more contemporary and modern and something I could relate to.

What Was Least Engaging about the Presentation?

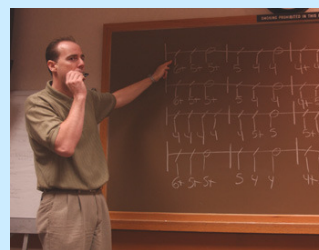
- Most of it; blues isn't very interesting to me.
- I was not engaged by the instrumentation because it was so much the same.
- I didn't like the slow tempo of some of the songs.

What Will You Check out at Home about the Blues?

- Ray Charles, Robert Johnson, T-Bone Walker
- I am going to listen to Janis Joplin tonight (my parents call me Janis when my hair is messy)
- Nothing, I don't like the blues, the singing is bland.
- Elmore James and Robert Johnson
- Popular blues and rock from the '50s and '60s
- Chuck Berry and Ray Charles
- Nothing, I like house music and intend to get home, turn on my speakers, and blast some Deadman5 and Portal Z
- Santana's cover of Black Magic Woman
- I will watch YouTube videos of blues

Thank you, Steve, for a wonderful presentation. The students learned a lot about the history of the blues.

DAVID BARRETT



In January 2012, at the Bay Area Music Educators Conference at San Jose State University, David Barrett taught music teachers how to teach their kids to play the blues. David gave a

2-hour interactive lecture to over 50 Bay Area music teachers, focusing on how to learn improvisation using his *Blues Chorus Form* method. David is a master teacher of the Blues; he has published over 60 book/CD sets and videos on blues harmonica and improvisation techniques, writes a featured column for *Blues Revue*,

and is the writer for www.HarmonicaSessions.com and the Harmonica Masterclass Workshop Free eZine. The music teachers LOVED David's session, which included improvisation by participants and detailed handouts. Teachers promised to bring the method back to their music classes and turn their students on to the joys of blues improvisation.

The old proverb says, "Give a man a fish; you feed him for today. Teach a man to fish: you feed him for a lifetime."

Thank you, David, for teaching the teachers and for your prolific and tireless work in blues education!

JOHN GARCIA



In March 2012, John Garcia gave a fantastic blues guitar presentation at Sequoia High School in Redwood City. All 45 students in the

guitar class had been studying guitar all year in "block" periods, which are extra long, and they had even studied the blues scale. John had 1.5 hours to hang out with the students and show them, up close and personal, what blues guitar is all about. The first half hour, John gave a wonderful concert and historical tour of blues guitar by playing acoustic and electric guitars. Students really enjoyed it and asked John lots of great questions afterwards. John then asked students to bring out their own guitars and gave an hour-long workshop featuring

cool blues guitar tricks, licks, and techniques. John also covered the most important scales and forms to practice in order to become a great blues guitarist.

Thank you John, for an amazing hands-on workshop with the Redwood City students. Hopefully, a few of them were inspired to continue with their blues education and went to the Redwood City Blues Festival held the last weekend in July!

TIA CARROLL

In May 2012, Tia Carroll presented a day of blues



education at George Washington High School in San Francisco. George Washington High won the *Glee* (the TV show) *Give A Note Award* of \$10,000 this year, for being one of

the most deserving music programs in the United States. Tia presented to both choral and band students on how to vocally improvise blues songs and how to write blues songs. She was incredibly generous with her time; she stayed all day and taught multiple classes. Afterwards, the students raved about how much they learned. Students were especially inspired by Tia's stories of her world travels performing music, yet being able to maintain a balance between a non-music career and family at the same time.

Thank you, Tia! The students were really touched by you and they will never forget you or your music.

CATCHING UP WITH A LEGEND: JIMMY MCCRACKLIN

by Julie Jenkins



In 100 years, I would never believe that I would have to "catch up" with a 90 year old man. This was, in fact, the case with Jimmy McCracklin, who celebrates his 91st

birthday on August 13, 2012. The pianist is a blues icon and one of the most prolific songwriters and performers of our time. He has laid claim to over a thousand records

and hundreds of recordings. When I called him for an interview, his daughter, Sue, said: "Can you call at 6 a.m.? He's up and gone pretty early."

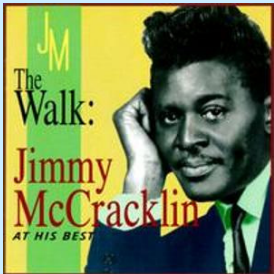
Jimmy McCracklin was born August 13, 1921, in St. Louis, Missouri. As a young boy, he sang with his sister in church, which is where he developed his love for music. He began his adult life as a boxer, but he told me "I really wanted to get away from boxing and get into being a blues man." He was heavily influenced by Walter Davis, who was an extraordinary blues pianist and singer in the '30s and '40s from St. Louis, with over 150 recording credits to his name. This impressed Jimmy and helped

motivate him to begin his own career in music. After a stint in the Navy, he found himself in Richmond, California, where he spent the next several decades making his dream of becoming a blues man come true.

Prior to World War II, Richmond was a small town, but soon would become a bustling port city just north of Oakland. The town would become home to many post war transplants from Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and McCracklin's home state of Missouri. These folks found factory jobs in the growing industrial city. They also brought their music with them. Their music could be heard in big nightclubs and small juke joints, such as Esther's Orbit Room, Minnie Lou's, and the Savoy, which was owned by Jimmy's sister-in-law, Willie Mae "Granny" Johnson. Jimmy paid homage to the Savoy in his song *The Richmond Song*, written in 1946.

*Now Richmond California is a great little town!
And I live there, Jack! And I gets around!
If you ever go there and you want to Jump for joy,
I'll tell you where to go, that's The Club Savoy!*

Jimmy recorded his first record, *Miss Mattie Left Me*, for Globe Records in 1946. He went on to record for the Modern label and eventually recorded his biggest hit for Chess records in 1957.



McCracklin told me, "I took the song 'The Walk' to Chess records five times before the Chess brothers gave it a listen and decided they liked it. The other guys threw it back like it wasn't nothin'." Three weeks later, someone told me, 'You might have a hit!'. He performed the song on Dick Clark's American Bandstand. McCracklin went on to say, "Wasn't nothin' like it is now. Record players were everywhere in the country. I was just lucky enough that I broke through in a lot of places. I put the stuff together and got my own musicians."

I asked Bobby "Hurricane" Spencer, his long time tenor sax player, what makes McCracklin's music so special, "His blues was not everyone else's blues. He had what we now call funk in his music. It had more sophisticated arrangements. Take, for instance, one of his most famous songs, 'Think'. It has 11.5 measures and a change in the bar. You just don't hear many people write music like that." Longtime writer, music journalist, and critic Lee Hildebrand put it best when he said, "I consider Jimmy McCracklin to be the greatest living blues songwriter."



he has recorded in every decade since he began his career, his recordings include *Miss Mattie Left Me*, 1945; *Savoy's Jump*, 1957; *Twist with Jimmy McCracklin*, 1961; *High on the Blues*, 1971; *Blasting the Blues*, 1983; *My Story*, 1991; *A Taste of the Blues*, 1994; *Tell It to the Judge*, 1999; and *Jumpin' Bay Area 1948 - 1955*, 2003.

His song "Tramp" was written for and recorded by Lowell Fulson before becoming a huge hit for Otis Redding and Carla Thomas on the Stax label.

He hasn't stopped yet. In his 90th year, he released his latest CD, *Hey Baby*, which is dedicated to the love of his life, his late wife, Veulah. McCracklin told me, "Every morning I would wake up and see her and say 'hey, baby!' When I came home from touring and walked in the house, I'd say 'hey, baby!'."

McCracklin's latest CD has the blues legend being backed by his daughter Sue McCracklin and her band Sweet Nectar. It's a combination of tried and true blues with a bit of soul and is available on CD Baby.

Happy 91st Birthday, Jimmy!

Photo Credit: Brant Ward, as printed in the San Francisco Chronicle in 2007. Text updated from that presented in Blues Junction, 2011.

TGGBS MUSICIANS PLAYING AT THE 2012 MONTEREY BAY BLUES FESTIVAL

by Dorothy L. Hill



Paula Harris



D'Mar (Derrick Martin)



Alvon Johnson



Terry Hiatt



Adrian Costa



Henry Oden



Joey Fabian and D'Mar



Eddie Neon



Tovia Bradley



THE GOLDEN GATE BLUES SOCIETY

www.tggbs.org

The Board of Directors of TGGBS consists of the 11 Officers and Committee Chairs.

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The Golden Gate Blues Society is a 501(c)(3) 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;
- Educational 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 Greater Bay Area Blues community.



THE GOLDEN GATE BLUES SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization – *Blues Foundation Affiliate*
Dedicated to the preservation and growth of the Blues as an American art form

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