

# GOLDEN GATE GROOVES

## THE HOUND KINGS

*Interview by Joseph Jordan*



The Hound Kings: Anthony Paule, Alabama Mike Benjamin, and Scot Brenton, *photo by Bruce Fram*

The sensational new acoustic blues music trio, the Hound Kings, is starting to make big waves on the national blues scene.

Made up of seasoned Bay Area music veterans Alabama Mike (vocals), Anthony Paule (guitar), and Scot Brenton (harmonica), the group has just put out an outstanding

(and hella fun) album, *Unleashed* (on 9 Below Productions) and the guys sat down (via telephone) with TGGBS on June 10, 2013, to give us their thoughts on the making of the album, how the group came about, and what it means to each of them.

(Please see a review of *Unleashed* later in this issue.)

## FROM THE EDITOR

*Deb Lubin*



Well, here we are, in the middle of summer, and festival season! The Golden Gate Blues Society is getting ready to begin our International Blues Challenge events for local bands to compete for the opportunity to represent TGGBS in The Blues Foundation's IBC in Memphis in January 2014. Please see the flyers for our first three IBC events later in this issue. Congratulations to HowellDevine, our 2013 representatives, for making it to the finals in Memphis. We are very proud that they got as far as they did, reaffirming our enthusiasm for their music. They're making a splash in the Bay Area and beyond. *Joseph Jordan* reviews their new CD on Arhoolie Records in this issue of *Golden Gate Grooves*. 🎸

In other big TGGBS news, we held elections recently and have a new President and Vice President, as well as a new Board member. Congratulations to *Stan Erhart* (President) and *Joseph Jordan* (VP) for taking the helm from *Dorothy L. Hill*, who served us tirelessly as President for 3 years. Dorothy is now an official advisor to TGGBS. We also gratefully welcome *Julie Paisant* as a new advisor to the Board. Julie was an active Board member of the Monterey Bay Blues Festival until its sad demise this year. Welcome also to new Board member *Julie Jahns*, known to many of you as a result of her frequent presence at Bay Area blues shows. Looking forward to working with you all! 🎸

One other important event being sponsored by TGGBS is worth extra mention here. Thanks to involvement by Board member *Karen Richards*, a Health & Wellness Blues Fair is being held later this month (see the flyer on the facing page). All Bay Area musicians who do not have health insurance are encouraged to attend and take advantage of the free health screenings and other information related to health and wellness. Karen has also arranged for some great local blues entertainment. We are very excited to be involved in this fair! Hope you will be too. 🎸

We have 10 CD reviews in this issue (see the table of contents below for the listing) and our second book review (of local and national favorite *Mark Hummel's* new book about life on the road). Hope you enjoy the reviews and are moved to purchase a CD or two and the book! Check out *Dorothy L. Hill's* photos from the Blues Music Awards held in Memphis this past May. This event is a blues fan's mecca and I encourage YOU to make plans to join us next year! 🎸

This issue also includes two interviews by *Joseph Jordan*; in addition to our cover story on the Hound Kings, Joseph interviews *Christine Vitale*, who has been a heavyweight in promoting the blues for a long time. I think you'll enjoy getting to know more about her. Please also see the article by *Angelo Rossi* on a Blues in the Schools program he recently spearheaded. TGGBS is very grateful for Angelo's participation in this great program! And last, but certainly not least, humorist/keen observer/bassman *Kennan Shaw* gives us his unique perspective on gift giving. 🎸

On a sad note, the passing of the legendary Bobby "Blue" Bland—truly a giant of the blues and a voice that will live on—has affected us all. RIP, Mr. Bland. Play on in heaven with your many friends! You will be missed. 🎸

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

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*The Hound Kings interview (continued)*

**TGGBS:** Tell me a little bit about the making of this album.

**AP:** The making of *Unleashed* is really the making of the Hound Kings...they're inextricable. Alabama Mike and the band were asked to play for a Santa Rosa [California] Film Festival party after the screening of a roots music documentary, and because of the limited budget they had to pay us, we went and played as a trio. Afterwards, we said, 'Hey, that sort of sounds good. We should do something with this.' That was in October 2011. It took a while, but in June of last year, we got together and said, 'Hey, let's do this thing.' We picked a name; Scot has a studio [9 Below Studio], and we started working on songs. Mike made a bunch of trips to my house. He had a lot of lyrics, but he doesn't play an instrument outside of a little bit of harmonica, and not enough to write songs with. Mike and I sat and worked on a lot of the songs, took them to Scot, and he fleshed them out, and after a number of trips to San Francisco, we recorded them at Scot's studio.

**AM:** Actually, the idea of the album came up a while back. We were in the studio making the last [Alabama Mike] record [*Tailor Made* on Jukehouse/9 Below Records], and I kind of got the idea of making an acoustic album, but we never got around to it. After I got sick for 2 years [with San Joaquin Valley Fever, an often serious fungal infection of the lungs] and everything, we'd been wanting to do it, so I got with Anthony Paule to talk about it, and he said, 'Are you well enough to do this? Do you want to try it? I got a little music.' And Scot, he said he wanted to be involved with it, so we decided to go as a trio. I had all the material [lyrics] already. Anthony and I sat there last summer to put all the songs together. We went into the studio and got with Scot, and everything was written, arranged, and ready to go.

**SB:** Anthony and Mike and I had talked about doing something that was different for us, and that was acoustic, and it sort of went from there to 'why don't we do an all-acoustic album, and do something that's more of a trio than a full band?' It's kind of a different opportunity to approach venues and not get the traditional volumes that you'd get in an electric Chicago blues band. We thought that would be fun to do, so we started to get together and get some material together and practice and come up with the arrangements, and we just had a lot of fun doing that. We decided to do it as absolutely live as we could. The CD was recorded in my studio [9 Below Productions] and we set up three

microphones. I sat at the engineer's desk, and we essentially recorded it in one room, and worked very few overdubs. It was intended to be live and raw, trying to catch a moment in time, and I think that's what we basically did. It was a lot of fun to do it. Mike is a tremendous vocalist. His lyrical skills are excellent, and Anthony is certainly one of the best guitar players in the Bay Area, if not the country. None of us had worked in this kind of setting before. Most of my work on the harmonica has been in electric blues band settings. This was a cool opportunity to get creative and do other stuff.

**TGGBS:** Who wrote the lyrics and melodies?

**AM:** I wrote all the lyrics, and Anthony and I got together on the melodies. A few songs, I already knew what I wanted and just played them.

**TGGBS:** Alabama Mike, your lyrics are so strong. You've got a modern sensibility about being able to touch into people's lives and the human condition. How do you come up with such compelling lyrics? Have you been a poet?

**AM:** No, I haven't been a poet before. I just write to express how I feel about a subject. It's like an outlet for me. I write exactly how I feel about a situation. Everybody is unique in their own way. This is the way I express myself and it just comes out in writing. Some of 'em I have melodies with them, and some of them I don't. I have an idea. I have an idea, but sometimes it doesn't work out that way. Sometimes the lyrics take on their own life. Things happen in life. We go through some things. You want to express it in your music, which a lot of people do, and I do too.

**TGGBS:** Scot, did everybody work on everything, lyrically and melodically?

**SB:** Kind of. Mike definitely contributed the majority of the lyrical content, and Anthony and I put music underneath that. We arranged what the groove would be, and the chord structures and the melodies and so forth. That was a very collaborative and pretty much on the spot process. It didn't happen in one setting. We sat together and worked on the stuff and Mike would take it away and come back in and we'd make changes to the arrangements. Some of the songs are firmly in the bag of acoustic blues or Muddy-style songs, and we weren't trying to reinvent the wheel on the covers. But some of the other songs are not really traditionally blues tunes. Quite a few of our original songs have a different vibe and feel from a lot of traditional blues songs. When I was doing "The Real McCoy," what was going through my mind was Dusty Springfield—that



kind of a vibe, like "Son of a Preacher Man," that mood.

*TGGBS: Anthony, Alabama Mike wrote most of the lyrics and you wrote most of the melodies. Is that correct?*

*AP:* Mike wrote all the lyrics...probably 99 and 9/10ths of them. Mike's a great lyricist. Mike and I worked for quite a while and we took what we had down to Scot's and finished arranging them. It probably took us 4 or 5 days of Mike coming up to my house, with lyrics, and we just sat around, me playing acoustic guitar, and he'd sing a little bit. I'd go, 'Does it go like this?' And we'd try different grooves and different things, just to see what would work out musically. I wrote the music and he wrote the words for the most part. Then Scot put his contribution to it.

*TGGBS: So Anthony, you basically got lyrics without melodies behind them?*

*AP:* That's right. Mike would have a pretty good idea of the melody, but he didn't know what kind of chord changes, or what kind of rhythm or groove was going to go with it. A lot of them are just standard 12-bar progressions, not anything special. Others have a little different kind of progression. So I just helped work on the groove and arrangement more than the melody.

*TGGBS: The album was produced collectively by the Hound Kings. What was each of your contributions in the production of the recording?*

*AP:* When we would go to record, it was a pretty democratic process. We all worked on the arrangements together and we all decided if a "take" was a "take" or not. After we were done recording, it was pretty much just me and Scot that did the mixing. Night after night, we mixed the tunes together. Mike was involved a little bit in that, but not nearly as much as me and Scot. Scot did not like the idea of him mixing alone; he wanted somebody right there to help check his judgment. So I actually worked on the mixing and we co-produced the recording.

*SB:* We all had a hand in the mixing. It was mixed at my studio, and the majority of the hands-on mixing was done by Anthony and me. In terms of instrumentation, we didn't start out thinking it would be strictly guitar, harmonica, and vocals necessarily; it was just that, as we worked through the process, we came out the other end with the songs. It just happened that the songs we really thought worked the best were just a stripped down instrumentation, the kind of music you'd play sittin' down on the porch for a party or something.

*TGGBS: Did you have to shift gears a lot or was it a pretty easy transition?*

*SB:* Actually, recording acoustic instruments is an all-together different challenge. Because we decided to do this in one room, there was very little margin for error; we were not going to be able to overdub anything. There's no "QuickTracks." The microphones are in one room, and what you put out is exactly what goes into Pro Tools. You have to be a lot more concerned with the performance itself, because it's so spare. In an electric setting, some of the musical things can go awry, and it can get covered up a lot easier. In a performance like this, it's all there right in front of you. You can get away with a lot more in an electric setting because there are other instruments and other sounds that can fill out the space. This recording is as old school as it can get. Back in the '50s, you'd turn the tape player on and play 'til you got something that sounded like a good take and that was it.

*AM:* Everything that had to do with the record, we all were involved in it as a group, and that's the way we're working with this thing. Everybody brings something to the table. If you don't have anything to bring to the table, then you can't be involved. That's the way we approached it. I bring my writing skills, and everyone (else) has something to offer.

*TGGBS: Did you approach this album differently from your two earlier albums, which were electric blues? [Both Alabama Mike and Anthony Paule have two earlier albums.] Did you have to shift gears a lot, or was it a pretty easy transition?*

*AM:* I kind of liked that style anyways. What really got me motivated was one of my idols of the blues, Lightnin' Hopkins. I like Hopkins and his phrasing, along with Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker. I like the roots of the blues. I'm comfortable with that. It is a lot different when you're trying to do acoustic blues 'cause you're out there butt naked. It was different for each one of us. It's amazing how lazy you can get with all the accompaniment. But now, here I am exposed. It's just the real blues, man. A lot of those old bluesmen, they did it as a one-man show. It just gives me more respect for those guys, to do that kind of work, and at the level they were at. That's amazing, man.

*AP:* Right. Playing an acoustic guitar is a lot more demanding of me. Playing electric guitar in a band is much easier, because if I stop playing for a second, the band will carry on. But in this setting, I'm the one carrying on the bass and the chords, and a lot of



responsibility falls on me. It takes a lot of me. It's a challenge, really, to be honest.

*TGGBS: Did you record live in the studio or were there any overdubs?*

*AM:* Everything was recorded live. Every song. You know, the album has just kind of grown into its own. And doing this album, I was comfortable. I was glad I had the freedom to do it on an independent label 'cause with different labels, they want you to do what they want you to do. I think we kind of owe it to acoustic blues lovers. Not a lot of people are doing this, as they're fired up and rockin' out and everything. But I feel like I owe the bluesmen [of the past] that. So, we put out this acoustic offering and say, 'Look, this is for you.' If it goes someplace, I'd definitely love it. I'd stick with it if the people tell me that's what they want. And the way they'd do that is to buy the record and to watch us work. If that's what they want, we'll be doing another one. If that's not the case, then we'll get back to what makes the money.

*AP:* We played around with some percussion on some of the songs, and none of it was really working. It was definitely live in the studio. We all had to get a good "take." And, sometimes, we had to play a tune several times before everybody felt comfortable with their performance at the same time. So it's 100% live. You couldn't really go fix one part because we were all sitting in close proximity. There was no way I could go and fix a guitar part because everybody was in each other's microphone.

*TGGBS: Alabama Mike, your first two albums [Day by Day and Tailor Made] garnered well-deserved national acclaim. Now you're relishing another musical form.*

*AM:* When I was first starting out with the acoustic performances, I got a lot of positive feedback. From what I've been hearing and from the reviews that we've got, everybody likes it. It's refreshing to take this kind of approach again. People love this stuff. You can't fool peoples' ears. They might just settle for this and settle for that, but when the real stuff comes through, that's what satisfies them. There's a difference between settling for something and being satisfied. I feel like this is who I want to be. The Hound Kings, the basic nature of the music, although it's uncommon, it's the real raw music, and that's the way I approach it. The acoustic blues is the birth of the blues, and everything else, I call it "the afterbirth." I came up with the name of the Hound Kings. I wanted it to represent that we're serious about this. The name sounds kind of greasy.

I wanted to take this music from the roots all the way, up to the top.

*TGGBS: What did you enjoy most about your experience, working with the guys or your finished project?*

*SB:* First of all, there are very few records out there that I've heard in a long time that are as fundamental as the one that we did. I really like that. I found it to be one of the most creative experiences that I've had musically because I wasn't thinking about it like, 'Oh, this is a [Little] Walterish song.' For the original stuff, it was: 'How can I make the parts sound different from what anybody else might play?' I don't know if that was successful or not, but it was the goal. I didn't want it to sound too derivative of the great harmonica players that I love and that everybody loves. So that part was very interesting to me, and a very freeing experience because I would just try to play whatever came to my mind. Whatever came out was like, 'that's it.'

*TGGBS: Anything more about the album?*

*SB:* For the many years I've been in and around the blues scene, and worked with different people, I haven't had that much time working with Anthony. He and I were always with different groups and our paths did not cross musically that much until we ended up doing stuff with Alabama Mike. It was really great just to see the depth of Anthony's talent. He's very, very diverse in terms of what he's able to do. This album was an interesting challenge for him, because it's out of the normal range of what he'd been comfortable with, and it's the same with Mike. Mike is used to working in an electric band with a lot of musicians, and I could really showcase Mike's ability to show emotion on this CD. He's mainly sequestered [in the studio] on electric recordings, but on *Unleashed*, it really comes through all that much cleaner in its stripped down version. I think everybody that contributed has done a really good job with the album. I hope it does well, but more than that, I hope that people who listen to it enjoy the listening as much as we enjoyed the making of it.

*AP:* The album's getting some good radio play and I would love to be able to do some festivals. I'm hoping next year we can get more festival gigs and do some traveling. Mike's never been over to Europe, I'm pretty sure that's true, and I think they'd just love this kind of thing over there. I'd also like to work on some more songs. We haven't worked [lately] on any new original material, but Mike's got a box full of lyrics on all kinds of pieces of paper. I'd like to see him pull a few more of



them out and turn them into songs with him. I'd love to do another album. I've loved acoustic blues since I was in high school. I used to listen to a lot of Delta Blues and stuff, Piedmont style, and all that music. I used to try and play it when I was a kid and I'd work on it and work on it. I've always played a bit of acoustic blues, but this is actually the first time I've ever gotten to use it in a performance or recording setting. Kind of fun

after all these years of loving it. And after playing it for so many years, it was nice to actually put it to work.

*TGGBS: Did you have fun?*

*AP: I did yeah. Absolutely. We had some good times down in Scot's basement.*

Check out: [TheHoundKings.com](http://TheHoundKings.com)

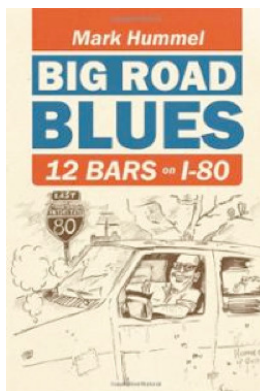
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## BOOK REVIEW

Mark Hummel

### *Big Road Blues — 12 Bars on I-80*

*Reviewed by Joseph Jordan*



Major-league Bay Area harmonica player, master musician, superb vocalist, and now author, Mark Hummel has written his first book, *Big Road Blues — 12 Bars on I-80*. In turn, it's at once hilarious, tragic, heartfelt, and hail and hearty, as Hummel recounts hundreds of incidents of life on the blues highway, which he's traveled almost

worldwide for more than 30 years.

Featuring a plethora of artists (many of whom are now no longer with us), promoters, advance men, record producers, club owners, and both fair and ne'er do wells, Hummel's tome takes shape in 46 chapters, most of which can be read independently of the others.

Mark and his group of oft-changing personnel, the Blues Survivors, have lived a life of joy and heartbreak on the road, wondrous highs and lowdown betrayals, which are all part of being an extremely busy working band.

With outstanding line-drawn illustrations by Franck Goldwasser (aka Paris Slim, currently a guitarist/vocalist member of The Mannish Boys band), this trade-sized paperback checks in at a generous 300 pages, and none of them disappoint.

Hummel's tale starts at the beginning of his career. He was born in New Haven, Connecticut, and raised in Los Angeles, coming of age in the early '70s. His introduction to and infatuation with the blues—by way

of radio and record collections of babysitters, family, and friends—came early. His younger days, experimenting and learning his craft on harmonica, have ultimately made him a West Coast Blues master, well-known throughout the Western Hemisphere.

As he states at the beginning of the book, "I'll probably rile some feathers with these stories.... Obviously, I don't forget."

Superb journalist/musician Lee Hildebrand contributed the Foreword, and states, "[This is] perhaps the first book ever to chronicle the experiences of a blues band as it travels back and forth via vehicle across the United States, Canada and Europe..."

The book is, at heart, a collection of vignettes and, as the author states, "Any of these variations contribute to the myriad of stories that become staples of a traveling musician's life." Early in the book is a chapter entitled, "How I Got into the Blues," with Mark slowly learning his craft, and then it takes off at a gallop from there.

*Big Road Blues* is filled with creatures, mostly human, who Hummel and band come across in a life on the road. You'll read everything from musical mayhem to practicing proctology, and yet there's more! Another favorite quote, "My life is first and foremost music. I'm a blues evangelist, and it's like a religion to me."

Regarding Hummel's many influences (James Cotton, Little Walter, Jimmy Reed, Brownie McGhee, and Jimmy Rogers, to name a few), it's a reverent book. As wonderfully opinionated as Mark is in person, for this reader, it would have been informative to read more of

his perspective on the continuing topic of race in the blues, but that's not at all the theme of the book.

Hummel makes a final, resoundingly positive, thought in stating, "I've got the memories of the times I did. I was there and did it. I've always tried to follow my

dream and make plenty of good friends along the way. It was all worth it."

You more than ought to take a look at that life. It's a road, and read, well worth traveling.

\$19.95 - Mountain Top Publishing LLC - 2012

Check out: [www.markhummel.com](http://www.markhummel.com)

## BLUES MUSIC AWARDS, MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE, MAY 2013

*Photographs by Dorothy L. Hill*



*Rick Estrin accepting his award for Harmonica Player of the Year*



*John Nemeth, nominated for Soul Blues Male Artist and for Soul Blues Album of the Year*



*Paula Harris, nominated for Best New Artist Debut for Turning on the Naughty*



*Randy Chortkoff, accepting the award for Traditional Blues Album of the Year for the Mannish Boys' Double Dynamite*



*Steven and Tina Suen, owners of Biscuits and Blues in San Francisco, attending the BMAs*



*Chris "Kid" Andersen, nominated for Guitar Player of the Year*



*Terry Hiatt, guitarist with Paula Harris and The Beasts of the Blues*



*Blues Music Awards (continued)*



*Scot Sutherland, nominated for Bass Player of the Year*



*Dianna Greenleaf, nominated for the Koko Taylor Award (Female Artist of the Year)*



*Janiva Magness, winner of the awards for Song of the Year ("I Won't Cry") and Contemporary Blues Female Artist of the Year and nominated for BB King Entertainer of the Year*



*Barbara Carr, nominated for Soul Blues Female Artist of the Year*



*Joe Louis Walker, nominated for Contemporary Blues Album of the Year (Hellfire), Guitarist of the Year, Contemporary Blues Male Artist of the Year, and BB King Entertainer of the Year*



*Derrick Martin (aka D'Mar), drummer with Paula Harris*



*Irma Thomas, accepting her award for Soul Blues Female Artist of the Year*



The winning SF Bay Area band at each event will go on to compete in the finals, at which one band will be chosen to represent TGGBS in The Blues Foundation's International Blues Challenge in Memphis Jan. 21- 25, 2013



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## EDUCATION AND PASSING THE TORCH: BLUES IN THE SCHOOLS

*by Angelo Rossi*

As much as we all appreciate the Blues and the rich American musical genre it represents, we must be vigilant in educating those who will follow us. The Blues is the “link” between yesterday and today’s popular music. It winds through our collective history like the Mississippi River, stretching back to Africa some 400 years ago. It is as important an American story as will ever be told, and is as diverse and colorful as the flags of every nation. American Blues music was born of the struggle for independence and freedom, tempered by a depression and racism. It remains as relevant today as any story in the evolution of manmade strife and suffering...from the earliest days of the sharecropper’s whip to W.C. Handy to Robert Johnson to Alabama Shakes and Gary Clark Jr. The torch of this rich American tradition was meant to be passed on. This story was born to be told over and over again, like the call and response of laborers in the field and the endless repetition of 1, 4, 5 at Blues jams. The story of the Blues does not stop there, the river keeps flowing and reaches the mouth of the cradle of indigenous America, only to be recycled and reborn into the more modern idioms of pop, rap, hip hop, or whatever you want to call it—it’s still the Blues.

So, how do we pass the torch? How do we ensure that the story of the Blues lingers, not only in the history books of our youth, but woven into the fabric of the future—how do we keep the Blues alive?

My response to this question was born from a simple request from a grand lady, Ms. Dorothy Hill, then President of The Golden Gate Blues Society. I have had the pleasure of knowing Dorothy for more than 20 years. The Blues and all that it represents are so important to Dorothy that she has made it her life’s work. For that, we should all be eternally grateful. Sitting in front of Club Fox in Redwood City, a discussion with Dorothy was centered on community outreach. Outreach beyond the jams. It was a question of how do we reach the youth, to pass the torch, to educate? Who will volunteer for this task? Dorothy, with her beautiful face and distinctive pulled-back hair, began to put away her camera and gather her things for her return trip to San Francisco. I found myself saying, “I’ll do it.” She smiled and said thank you.

Holy %\*&%! What did I just get myself into?

So there I was, not sure what I had just volunteered for, or how to approach the task. I was simply happy to

have stepped up for Dorothy, who had asked for some help. It took me forever to figure out what type of volunteering this would entail to actually pulling it off. As a musician, I know about the Blues. Having had a stint in corporate America, I know about presentations. So, how about starting with a simple Blues presentation for high school students? A phone call to a friend, who also happens to be a history teacher at Woodside High School (Redwood City, California), set me on my course. We set a date.

I solicited ideas and help with this volunteer task from many as I began to build a presentation in my head. In the end, it was Kid Andersen and Terry Hiatt who volunteered to be my foils in this endeavor. Due to scheduling restraints, Terry was the first to join. As the date grew near, like everybody else I know, I procrastinated. I waited until 2:00am, the morning before the class was to be taught, to bring forth a simple slide show that stretched back 400 years in American history, and spanned the early 1900s to today, to tell a story of who, what, where, and why. Lucky for me, when you play an instrument, and you have friends who can really play that instrument well, you can even get high school history teachers to believe in the Blues and to help you pass the torch.

The day came, and Terry and I met up in the parking lot of the high school. “I don’t know much about the history/timeline details of the Blues or how you want to tell that story, but I will support you,” Terry said. And so, together with Tina Abbaszadeh’s brilliant storytelling camera, we convened at Building 6-C, Room 12, for the inaugural cruise of our history lesson. What we found there were some 35 to 40 anxious high school juniors who were both attentive and open to what we had to share. They were respectful of the journey we led them on, a journey down the ole’ Mississippi River, through Clarksdale, Chicago, New York, Texas, New Orleans, and the history of American Blues. They took notes, asked questions, and called and responded to the music that Terry played and to the songs that we sang together. They were open to the timeline and the names of Muddy Waters, Bessie Smith, Howlin’ Wolf, Etta James, and Freddie, Albert, and BB King.

It was great fun to tell the story, to sing the songs, to venture into the math of 1, 4, 5. It was as much fun as playing and recording music with my friends; perhaps, even more so.



I was asked to write this article by Deb Lubin, another tireless and dedicated supporter of the Blues. I'd like to convey the importance of the "educational component" within The Golden Gate Blues Society charter. What makes any of us qualified to volunteer for this type of community outreach? You may as well ask, "What makes me want to play the Blues?" or "What makes me want to listen to or attend a performance of the Blues?" Quite simply, our combined love of the Blues, in whatever form it takes, more than qualifies us for this

task. The next generation is open to it, and we may even inspire one or two of them to become Blues musicians, historians, or both.

In closing, I want to thank The Golden Gate Blues Society and all of the volunteers who work tirelessly to help keep the Blues alive, especially Dorothy Hill, for all that she does and for pushing me to do something beyond showing up at a jam to show that I can play the Blues.

## CD REVIEWS

### The Hound Kings, *Unleashed*

by Joseph Jordan



One of the more remarkable albums to come out of the West Coast in years is the debut CD *Unleashed* by the acoustic trio, the Hound Kings.

Playing straight-up Delta and contemporary blues

with a marvelous mixture of thoughtful-to-raucous original tunes and a couple of terrific covers, this album has been waiting to be made.

Northern California-based musicians Alabama Mike (Benjamin) on superlative vocals, the gifted Scot Brenton on harmonica, and mainstay Anthony Paule on guitar have fashioned 10 tracks of recorded magic.

One can't say enough about Alabama Mike's rough-and-tumble chops. He can put more emotional expression in a song than most blues singers can dream about. His voice is at once gruff, tender, and heart-warming. This Talladega, Alabama-raised shouter and balladeer can give you goose bumps with his startlingly fresh, yet seasoned and experienced, vocals. Mike's got a couple of exciting solo blues CDs out, and the Hound Kings feature yet another side of this excellent musician.

Guitarist Paule has been a stalwart and incredibly valuable member of the Bay Area blues community for years. He has a couple of vital solo LPs behind him, and here, as an integral member of the trio, he absolutely shines. Although the number of solos he takes on the CD is minimal, his playing is spot-on throughout. Multi-instrumentalist, but here happily relegated to harp, Scot Brenton shines in his role as interpreter of the melodic

counterpoint to Alabama Mike's vocals. Brenton can mince a Jimmy Reed solo, or a Little Walter growl, even in the same song.

"SSI Blues" leads off the disc and it is a hilarious take on the need for some extra cash that only a government paycheck can bring. "The Real McCoy" is Alabama Mike's autobiographical entry, which even fits in his mama's wishes for her beloved son.

Perhaps the standout cut on the recording is "The Thang," which tells a poignant story of love, longing, and loneliness in a brief 4-minutes plus. It is a heartbreaking song filled with tender mercies and life-truths.

"Red Light" is one of the two non-original songs. As written by Mercy Dee Walton, it is a pretty hilarious entendre with a wallop of a chorus, and verses that will have you rolling on the proverbial floor.

This is a rave review; *Unleashed* is one of the best recordings of the year. Run don't walk to one of the band's live performances, but short of that possibility, don't hesitate to pick up a copy of this CD.

As Alabama Mike often says on stage: "This is the blues y'all, and we're not going to apologize for it!"

9 Below Productions — 2013

Check out: <http://thehoundkings.com>

## John Primer and Bob Corritore, *Knockin' Around These Blues* by Dorothy L. Hill



Every true Chicago blues aficionado knows the name John Primer (Jr. Wells, Muddy Waters, Magic Slim, etc.) and I am constantly amazed at the number of newbies who say "who"? Hopefully, this CD, featuring a supporting aggregation of some of

Chicago's best musicians, will redress that issue. Spicing it up on harmonica, Bob Corritore brings his love for Chicago blues full circle, joining Primer and such luminaries as Bob Stroger and Patrick Rynn on bass, Billy Flynn and Chris James on guitar, Barrelhouse Chuck on piano, and Kenny "Beedy Eyes" Smith and Brian Fahey on drums.

The 10 cuts are solid selections and will satisfy, with tunes that range from Jimmy Reed's "The Clock," Lightnin' Hopkins' "Going Back Home," Willie Dixon's "Just Like I Treat You," Little Walter's "Blue and Lonesome," and Robert Jr. Lockwood's "Little Boy Blue" to Primer's original "When I Get Lonely" and Corritore's original "Harmonica Joyride."

In fact, "Blue and Lonesome" is 7 minutes of the most impressive traditional Chicago blues one is likely to hear by living musicians—master guitarist Primer thrills with burning intensity and powerfully assertive vocals, while Corritore skillfully affirms his harmonica virtuosity, keeping pace at every turn. The slow shuffle on "Going Back Home" stretches to 7:53 minutes and it just doesn't get any better than this, as they say "take your time, man." There is so much to like on this CD and I cannot recommend it more highly—if you can dig a thoroughly traditional package of musical goodness, Chicago style.

Delta Groove Music — 2013

Check out: [www.johnprimerblues.com](http://www.johnprimerblues.com)  
[www.bobcorritore.com](http://www.bobcorritore.com)  
[www.deltagroovemusic.com](http://www.deltagroovemusic.com)

## Kevin Selfe, *Long Walk Home* by Kennan Shaw



When I was asked to review Kevin Selfe's new release, *Long Walk Home*, on the Delta Groove label, I warned the newsletter editor that I couldn't, and wouldn't, be impartial. I said, flat out, I really like Kevin and the guys in his band. I'm going to write a

good review. The truth of the matter is that I don't have to lie; the disc is damn good. I've known Kevin longer than I've heard him. Portland has a vibrant and talent-laden blues scene, and Kevin was always around whenever I came through town. His warm smile and humble, nice-guy personality were always welcome Pacific Northwest landmarks.

The first time I heard him was on the radio during some long van ride between gigs, and the guitar player playing a slow blues caught my ear.

Let me explain why that's a big deal: I've played bass since dinosaurs roamed the Earth. I figure if you added it all up, I've played bass behind just guitar solos, alone, for a total of 3 years, 7 months, 14 days, 1 hour, and 16 minutes of my life. I am, to say the least, not easily impressed. So, for me to say "Hey, who's playing that guitar solo?" it's a big deal.

*Long Walk Home* doesn't disappoint. Kevin's tone is distinct, clean, and authoritative. His trio is fleshed out by veteran bassist Allen Markel, another "great hang" and someone I don't get to hear play enough, and the great, great Jimi Bott on drums. I have a lot of "drummer crushes," and Jimi is a big one. Jimi's credits are deep and wide, and here he adds to them by also handling the engineering and mixing duties.

If I made a record with Jimi Bott, it would open just like *Long Walk Home*, with a flat-tire, Texas shuffle, like "Duct Tape on My Soul." The trickiest groove in blues is handled with power and finesse by this rhythm section, and the horn arrangements, by trumpeter Joe McCarthy, are inventive and a treat for the ears. Kevin's vocals were the surprise for me, as the affable smile on the cover gives way to a deep, thoughtful voice.

The 11 songs here are all familiar grooves, just played better than you're used to hearing them. Mitch Kashmar guests on two cuts and his chromatic harp (why don't more guys play chromatic?) sounds great on



"Mama Didn't Raise No Fool." Mitch takes over the lead vocal on "Dancing Girl" and the switch is as sharp as a well-placed changeup pitch from Matt Cain.

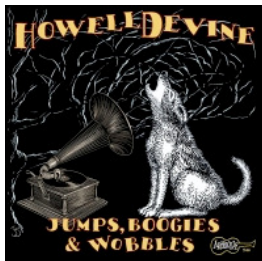
I don't want to spoil it by going track by track, but my favorite is saved for last. "Put Me Back in Jail" fires out of the gate like a race horse, all slide guitar, boogie piano by Steve Kerin, and thunderous drums. The fast, tight Lightnin' Hopkins' style groove makes you want to stomp your feet, and makes me wish I were playing in this band RIGHT NOW! It's big, it's fast, and it's filthy! And here's why it's so good; listen to the bass. Allen is the eye of the hurricane here. With chaos all around, he drives it straight down the middle, and leaves that tiny space between notes on his double shuffle feel. That tiny little space, which wouldn't even get notated if you wrote out his line, that is where the funk lives! You can't play that line any more perfectly. Sublime!

Look, there are a million guys playing guitar leading their own blues bands. A lot of them are good. Some of them are great. I'm overjoyed to say that Kevin Selfe has made a great, well-produced, beautifully written, masterfully played disc full of fun songs. And the players are really, really good people, too!

Delta Groove Music — 2013

Check out: [www.kevinselfe.com](http://www.kevinselfe.com)  
[www.deltagroovemusic.com](http://www.deltagroovemusic.com)

## HowellDevine, *Jumps, Boogies & Wobbles* by Joseph Jordan



The extraordinary emergence of HowellDevine, a trio of Bay Area-based musicians, is remarkable, not only for their burgeoning and explosive national notoriety, but for the accolades they've gained from seasoned professionals and young fans alike. No less than

the legendary Chris Strachwitz of Arhoolie Records signed them to the label for this, their second CD.

According to the outstanding liner notes by journalist Lee Hildebrand, "[this album represents] the first new blues recording to appear on Arhoolie in over a quarter century."

Pete Devine, Joshua Howell, and Joe Kyle Jr. can be rightfully proud of this outstanding contribution to the

proud tradition of juke bands and "retro-blues" that fully informs their playing.

Joined on only a few songs by additional musicians (among them, Ralph Carney on tenor sax), *Jumps, Boogies & Wobbles* shines with just a very few players. Really, they and their material are just that good. Devine's drums, washboard, jug-blowing, and immaculate percussion joins the extraordinary talents of Joshua Howell on vocals, guitar, and harmonica and the marvelous Joe Kyle Jr. on upright bass.

With three original tunes and overflowing with original sounds, this group's music might just turn out to be one of the great CDs of the year. It is flirty, fun, and frolicking, just like the men who made the music.

Coming in at a little less than 52 minutes and just brimming with verve and roots glory, this CD will make more than a few fans sit up and take notice that it doesn't take a ton of electricity to light up a nightclub or concert hall.

The CD was mixed and mastered by Joshua Howell and recorded by David Bell.

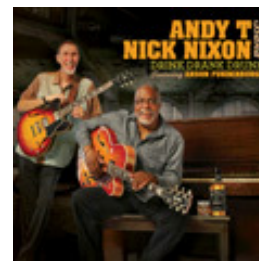
If you're only into modern and rock-blues, forget this one, but if you're at all interested in the roots of the blues, added to a little Mississippi and seasoned with the Chicago sound, then run, don't walk, to get this one.

HowellDevine finished among 9 finalists (out of 120 bands) in The Blues Foundation's 2013 International Blues Challenge held in Memphis, Tennessee, and were representing The Golden Gate Blues Society.

Arhoolie Records — 2013

Check out: <http://www.howelldevine.com>  
[www.arhoolie.com](http://www.arhoolie.com)

## Andy T - Nick Nixon Band featuring Anson Funderburgh, *Drink Drank Drunk* by Dorothy L. Hill



Andy T (Talamantez) and (James) Nick Nixon formed a bond when they met through the Nashville Blues Society and, as they say, the rest is history. This is their debut recording and it is a gem. Of course, getting Anson Funderburgh on board as producer and guest artist is a huge bonus since neither



Andy T nor Nick Nixon are well known names in blues despite their impeccable blues credentials. Andy T relocated from Southern California to Nashville in 2008 after a successful career touring with international acts, such as Smokey Wilson and Guitar Shorty. Nashville native Nick Nixon began his vocal career in church and high school performances. In 1974, his group Past, Present and Future recorded a single for Chess Records and he toured nationally with another band, the New Imperials. Although he continued touring occasionally, Nixon took a day gig teaching music for Nashville's Park and Recreation Department, which earned him a Blues Foundation Keeping the Blues Alive award for education. Anson Funderburgh is recognized as one of the best Texas blues guitarists and for his work with the late legendary Sam Myers.

In addition to the headliners, 13 musicians are listed in the credits, which would appear to be overkill, but it works on this 12-track CD, 4 of which are originals.

The opening track, Gatemouth Brown's "Midnight Hour," with Nixon's agile and rich-hued vocals is an impressive cover that fully explores the jazzy theme with blade-like guitar expression by Andy T. "Don't Touch Me (I'm Gonna Hit the Highway)" exposes Nixon's soulful spin on a cover of this Johnny 'Guitar' Watson tune. The title cut, "Drink Drank Drunk" is just a fantastic groovy shuffle with saxophonist Ron Jones adding texture in the background. Andy T's original tune "Have You Seen My Monkey" is a showstopper with accordionist Christian Dozzler introducing the Cajun melody and Nixon's impassioned vocal delivery. "Dos Danos" is a pleasant jazz-oriented instrumental tightly executed by Anson Funderburgh taking the lead on guitar. "On My Way to Texas," cowritten by Andy T and Nick Nixon, is another highlight, with drummer Danny Cochran's rhythmic underlay to Nixon's propulsive vocals and Andy T's captivating guitar playing.

This CD is a highly recommended effort with a wide-ranging track selection featuring the dashing vocals of Nick Nixon, who warrants the heap of praise he is bound to get once the blues world gets this in their hands. The entire aggregation also gets a high five from me!

Delta Groove Records — 2013

Check out: [www.andtyband.com](http://www.andtyband.com)  
[www.deltagroovemusic.com](http://www.deltagroovemusic.com)

## Eddie B's Greasy Blues Bash, *Got to Move* by Kennan Shaw



Shortest review ever: do you enjoy the Bay Area Blues scene? Then you should buy this disc.

What? What more do you want? Guitars by Kid Andersen, Jon Lawton, Bob Welsh, and Marvin Green;

harp by Jimmy Dewrance, Aki Kumar, and Gil DeLeon; drums by Hans Bosse and Ron Chavez. Bob Welsh even plays piano. Eddie B handles all the vocals.

Even the photo credits are all familiar Bay Area names: Joe Lempkowski, Peggy DeRose, Jimmy Dewrance, and Rachel Kumar.

The whole thing was put together at Kid Andersen's Greaseland Studios, and produced by Kid and Eddie. The disc sounds great, too! Lively and gritty, almost as if it were recorded in, I dunno, a kitchen or somethin'.

You probably own it already!

Still confused? Alright! Here's the story; long time Bay Area Blues bassist decides it's time to make a record. He picks out a bunch of songs he likes, and everybody comes to lend a hand. And the whole thing sounds great! Greasy Blues Bash is the perfect title for the recording because it sounds like a big, fun party.

Ever been to the Grand Dell Saloon? How about Murphy's Law? Dig those jams at Club Fox? Because this record sounds just like a really good night at those places.

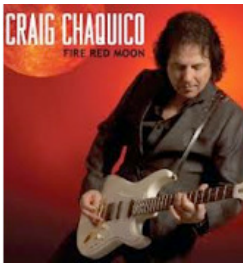
Look, if you haven't bought this disc yet, or decided to, there's nothing more I can tell you. It's not *Live at the Regal*. There are some fun Elmore James covers, but hardcore Elmore fans aren't going to flock to this disc (although Lawton kills on that stuff!). To quote "The Deer Hunter": This is this. This is not something else.

This is a yearbook. This is a post card from the Bay Area that says "Wish You Were Here!" This is a bass playing brother stepping up to the plate! This is a lunchbag, with a cartoon lovingly drawn on it just for you. Listening to this CD makes me homesick. This disc is a job well done, and a lot of fun along the way.

Domaci Records — 2013

## Craig Chaquico, *Fire Red Moon*

by Joseph Jordan



The rock-guitar superstar (ex-Jefferson Starship) that is Craig Chaquico has recently and successfully morphed into another artist entirely and his most recent playing commits to a spiritual, new agey, mellow-down-easy jazz sound.

With *Fire Red Moon*, his first CD for the outstanding roots label, Blind Pig Records, Chaquico turns his playing into a blues-infused panorama of modern pop music. His chops are still those of a powerful, prototypical guitar hero, but can alternately be tasty and evocative to the extreme. The intersection of the rock he knows so well with the blues he's more than dipping his feet into is worth a listen. Hear what he does with Robert Johnson's "Crossroads," informing it with energy and sass.

Unbelievably, Chaquico's entering his fifth decade of stellar guitar work within the genres of rock, jazz, and now, modern blues. That's a remarkable feat and one he pulls off effortlessly. Not for everybody, but more than plenty for some!

Seven of the 10 songs are originals, with the disc spanning 47 minutes. *Fire Red Moon* features five instrumentals, with the remaining tunes highlighting the talents of vocalists Rolf Hartley, Noah Hunt, Bill Slais, and Eric E. Golbach. Chaquico still knows how to support lead vocalists, while not allowing them to exceed his own guitar thunder. The title track finds Chaquico blistering through a guitar-drenched wasteland populated only by his drummer. What starts off as a guitar showroom exercise turns into a powerful piece of finesse, power, and restraint.

The standard "Rollin' and Tumblin'" starts off with energetic hand-claps and then builds to Chaquico's guitar taking on the role of both rhythm and lead instrumentalists.

Where to place this album among all the other releases of the day? Classic rock? Well, yes. Easy-listening jazz? Okay, but the Sacramento born and raised cat can play the blues when the spirit moves him, and move him it does in *Fire Red Moon*.

Blind Pig Records — 2012

Check out: <http://craigchaquico.com>  
[www.blindpigrecords.com](http://www.blindpigrecords.com)

## The Mighty Mojo Prophets, *Flyin' Home from Memphis* by Dorothy L. Hill



Long Beach, California, musicians Tom "Big Son" Eliff (vocals) and Mitch "Da Switch" Dow (guitars) combined forces in 2007 to form The Mighty Mojo Prophets. They achieved national recognition in 2012 when they received a Blues Music Award for Best New

Artist Debut and had the honor of performing at the awards pre-party. They have now followed up that self-titled and self-produced CD with this Delta Groove Music release.

Eliff and Dow are credited with composing all the tunes on this CD. The supporting cast consists of Alex Schwartz on drums, Dave Deforest on bass, Mike Malone on piano and organ (and backing vocals), Mark Sample on tenor saxophone, Johnny V on trumpet, and Alex "Lil A" Woodson and San Pedro Slim on harmonicas.

The opening cut, "Sweetness," sets the theme for the West Coast swinging jump blues, a fitting description of the majority of the 13 cuts. The drummer comes on hot and heavy on "The Gambler" and effectively drives the melody while Eliff tells the tale, "say, my daddy was a gambler, oh mama was sanctified and that's a hard way to grow up, just tryin' to keep yourself alive..." and Mike Malone's too short solo on organ enhances this terrific tune. The horns get a chance to shine on "I Can't Believe" and there's another taste of Malone's fantastic organ playing. "California" (think melody of "Caledonia") is a true jump ode to "flyin' home from Memphis" and the horns contribute a wonderful punch. What a departure on "Strong Medicine"—straight out of Mississippi with Dow's slide guitar and Woodson on harmonica make this a keeper and my favorite. "Jo's Jive" is a delightfully catchy instrumental with stop and go hooks and is just the right number to get dancers onto the floor in a live setting (or maybe in your living room). "She's Gone" about guess what...is definitely more suited to the country music charts. "Street Corner Preacher" is more to my taste and definitely a highlight with its gut-bucket juke joint beat. The closing cut entitled "Whachulookinfor" comes in at 2:28 minutes for an entertaining jaunt that is enhanced by Malone's ragtime-influenced piano support.

Although I am not a big jump blues fan, I found this CD extremely likeable. There is nothing socially new in the



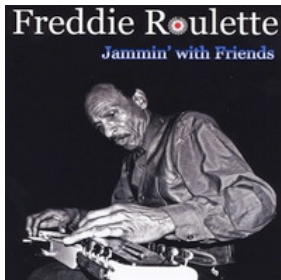


original lyrics, but there are some clever snatches and it is a "feel good" CD, just the right ticket to have in your CD player driving down the freeway with the sound turned up to shattering levels.

Delta Groove Music — 2013

Check out: [www.deltagroovemusic.com](http://www.deltagroovemusic.com)

### Freddie Roulette, *Jammin' with Friends* by Joseph Jordan



In May, lap steel blues guitarist Freddie "Spider" Roulette turned 74, and he's lost absolutely nothing, as is to be expected from a master of this peculiar instrument.

Roulette can make the lap steel cry, sting, wail, tease, and please and relative newcomers to the sound will relish in its inventive sound: part Hawaiian, part country, but all roots.

Singing only two songs (sharing lead-vocals with Kathi McDonald, Davey Pattison, and Chris Cobb), but playing his extraordinary, explosive lap guitar, Roulette's album jumps out at the listener with the freshness and strength of the efforts of a much younger blues man. Produced by drummer Michael Borbridge and featuring an outstanding cast of players, including Harvey Mandel (who's all over this recording,) Barry Melton, Rich Kirch, Michael Warren, Steve Evans, Eugene Huggins, David LaFlamme, Terry Hanck, and Pete Sears, the 10-song production reeks of talent. For those of us in the Bay Area lucky enough to see Roulette regularly, this recording will be more than pleasing as it captures the essence of Roulette's live musicianship and consummate chops.

No label listed — 2012

Check out:

<http://www.michaelborbridge.com/music.html>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freddie\\_Roulette](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freddie_Roulette)



### Perry and the Pumpers, *Movin' at Midnight* by Joseph Jordan



Fifteen songs in 62 minutes makes this jumping little collection of stompers and slow-burners move at a rollickin' pace throughout. Perry (formerly with Elvin Bishop's band) is harmonica-player and lead vocalist Perry Welsh, who with his

great friend and bandmate, keyboardist Phil Aaberg, have put together an enjoyable mix of well-known standards mixed in with one original.

Band members and Bay Area stalwarts Paul Revelli (drums) and Steve Ehrmann (bass) add immeasurably to the proceedings. Further contributions by Bay Area locals Steve Freund, Kid Andersen, Johnny Cat Soubrand, Elvin Bishop, and Lisa Leuschner Andersen make this party rock record reel in the good. Recorded in San Francisco and produced by Aaberg and Ehrmann, this is more than a vanity recording; it's a cohesive album put together with obvious love and devotion to the American roots music scene, and the blues.

Sweetgrass Music — 2012

Check out: [www.sweetgrassmusic.com](http://www.sweetgrassmusic.com)

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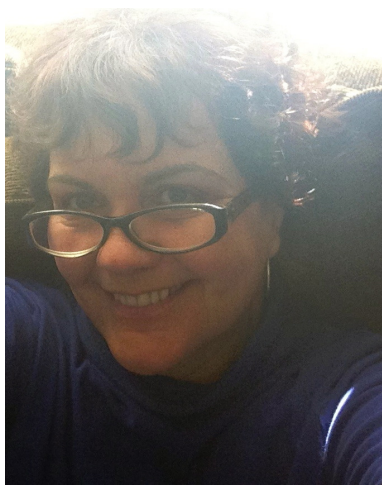


**SAN JOSE'S NEW ORLEANS JOINT**

## CHRISTINE VITALE: QUEEN OF THE PUBLICISTS

*Interview by Joseph Jordan, Photo courtesy of Christine Vitale*

The extraordinarily successful Bay Area music publicist, Christine Vitale, is responsible for promoting and



publicizing the new album, *Unleashed*, by the Hound Kings. An internationally known music insider and marketing expert, Ms. Vitale was kind enough to give TGGBS some of her time with the following interview. TGGBS asked her about the oft-times

delicate process of getting an album out to media, and having them respond to it. (Check out her website at: [http://www.christinevitale.com/.](http://www.christinevitale.com/))

*TGGBS: What was it like working publicity on the new Hound Kings album, “Unleashed?” Although the musicians in the trio are well known in the greater Bay Area—Anthony Paule is known internationally and Alabama Mike is starting to garner serious national attention—what was it like trying to break, what is essentially, a “baby band” and what kind of challenges did it pose for you?*

CV: I worked the last CD of Alabama Mike’s internationally (*Tailor Made* on 9 Below Productions), so people do know a little bit about Mike, and Anthony has been around forever (laughs). Anthony’s done a lot of recording. People all over know who he is. He’s got a pretty good fan base. People don’t know Scot [Brenton]. And Scot surprised me. His playing is just amazing on that CD. It’s just great. The challenge is, I think, kind of the same as it’s always been [with promoting/publicizing other bands/artists]. It’s getting financing for a project. It’s much different than it was 5 or 10 years ago. Now you really must buy advertising in publications found online and in print.

*TGGBS: It’s that overt that they say: ‘Buy advertising and we’ll give you copy?’*

CV: In some cases, yes. They don’t try to hide it. It used to be with a wink of an eye. But now, it is more overt, and even if you don’t have ‘that’ conversation

with someone, it’s obvious. So that’s hard. Just getting financing for an album so you can promote it is the difficult part. With the Hound Kings album, the talent is there. People love the talent. They love the band. The songs are good, but it’s a little extra work for me. I’m glad I have the relationships I have with radio [DJs], because they know I usually send something decent (laughs), so they respond to me positively, and product is well received, which is great.

*TGGBS: I’ve often thought about that awkward line between receiving copy by buying advertising. It always kind of smacked to me of payola.*

CV: Yes, but you never talked about it, you know? You just didn’t talk about it. But yeah, yeah. Years ago, one of the major publications actually said that if I brought an ad, it would affect the placement of a review. And that was years ago. Now, so many people can have a blog. You don’t have to be affiliated with any business, really. You can have your own website and blog, and you can print all these wonderful reviews. You can support the music, but the publications now want you to buy an ad or something. I really do understand it, but it’s a lot harder to get things done. Also, anybody can now make a recording at home, with their computer, and a lot of it sounds good. They can do their own artwork, and make their own CDs. The market is inundated. I feel really fortunate that I got my foot in the door several years ago because it’s really tough now. It takes longer to get an album on the radio, or the Internet, to get any airplay. It’s not that I’m whining about it, but it does have its challenges, which are a little bit different than before. People want to be respected and thanked. You’ve got to have a little finesse.

*TGGBS: I would think this album posed some easy, if not delightful, challenges in that it’s so different from most electric blues albums.*

CV: It did, it did. And it’s a good CD.

*TGGBS: You have a new story to tell with it, as opposed to yet another electric band playing music.*

CV: Once again, it’s pretty strange out there (laughs) because there are some people that like it all if it’s done well. But there are still guys from the Stevie Ray Vaughan school of rock-blues who like strong electric guitar, and that’s what they’ll play (on the air). Other guys like the acoustic thing. It’s often two camps, it’s



odd. Some people who are really into electric blues don't care for it.

*TGGBS: What do you see happening with Unleashed at this stage?*

CV: There's a lot of good interest. If there's going to be more, the band has to play out more. Work and work and put the pedal to the metal. Just work. It's still that thing where you have to go out and promote it that way too, with live shows. Unfortunately, you can't go out on the road like you could 10 years ago, where bands could crisscross the country for months at a time. The band, though, has to do more work and bring in the next CD.

*TGGBS: What might you need to do to take this album to the next publicity level?*

CV: As far as roots and blues music is concerned, shy of going for a Grammy or Blues Music Award, it's there; it's out there. Some reviews are coming in. It's not like there'll be any hit songs off it because that doesn't exist anymore. There's nothing "crossover" about it. It's just really good, and a lot of radio and Internet airplay media love it.

*TGGBS: Are there any detriments to putting out one's own album?*

CV: One thing that's really important is the artwork on the cover. It's got to catch someone's eye. I've had it happen twice with other groups where they had really good talent, but the artwork was horrible. And I had talent buyers and radio people tell me they just chucked it. And that's not good. So after I begged them, 'here's another one worth listening to,' they listened, and just loved both bands. The visual has got to catch your eye. And that's just it; it's got to catch your eye.

*TGGBS: The Hound Kings album hits right away, and many journalists and radio personalities don't listen to more than the first few songs on an album, and with that goes almost its whole chance of existence. It's kind of frustrating to a publicist, I would think, to not have them listen to the whole thing.*

CV: Well that's where my relationships with people come into play. I can get them to listen (laughs).

*[EDITOR'S NOTE: In the spirit of full disclosure, in addition to being a superb publicist, Christine is also Anthony Paule's better half.]*

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## THE LONG-DISTANCE STARE

by Kennan Shaw

We've all seen it.

You're at the club/theater/cheese shop and the band is playing; maybe you're not paying attention or chatting with a friend and you look at the band, and there he is on the bandstand. Playing guitar – maybe good, maybe not – but he's staring blankly off into the distance. Perhaps not totally bored, but just disinterested.

If you're like me, it's now the only thing you see. Tunnel vision deluxe. Also, if you're like me, after a while, if he doesn't "come back" to the gig, it pisses you off a little.

Now, I'm NOT talking about "Bass Face." That's completely different. See, we bass players have a lot to keep track of up there. Things like whether the singer knows where to come in, if the guy playing the solo is going to wander off the chord changes, and whether the drummer will, well, just wander off. All of that stuff bouncing around in your head, coupled with keeping a fat groove, twists your features into that "stern/serious/something smells bad" face that we low-enders make. We try to smile. We are having a good time, but we're workin' here!

That's not what I'm talking about at all. I mean that look that says "anywhere but here." The nerve! After all, we're paying good money to sit here—sometimes—and now, I'm definitely not tipping the band. Again. Ahem.

I am here to tell you, brothers and sisters, we have ALL been there. Yes, even musicians are human. There are many causes for the Long-Distance Stare, and most of them are deeply valid. Maybe it's a recent disagreement with a significant other. Maybe that famous band you saw last night made you realize how far you are from where you want to be, talent-wise. Or maybe they stunk up the joint, but you paid to see them, dincha?

It might be that somewhere around the third song, you realized you've been playing this same room for far, far too many years. It could be that all those so-called "hobby" bands—guys with day jobs who 'Just do it for fun'—are working as much as, if not more than, you. It might have something to do with the fact that the basic pay scale for your beloved career choice hasn't improved, and has actually gotten worse, in the last 60 damn years!

Now I'm depressed. Glad I don't have a gig tonight.



So how do we talk ourselves off this ledge? Is there a light at the end of the tunnel? Surely things will get better. Right?

No. No it won't. Life is hard. That is a simple fact. Love fades. People leave. Life isn't fair. Nobody takes musicians seriously. And you should probably quit. Get a real job. There are too many musicians. There are plenty of people waiting to take your place if you don't want to do this. See ya!

But it's not that easy, is it? You love this. It's a bigger part of you than anyone outside of it can understand. There are moments of utter transcendence sprinkled throughout a show, and every once in a while, the musical epiphany; everything around you—room, sound, crowd, and all five senses—align like the planets on the dawning of a new age and you can play anything, and it will be Fuh. King. Perfect.

Not often enough, though. So you stand, plugging through yet another shuffle, knowing there's no magic tonight. This is work.

I can't solve your problems, but I can tell you a couple of things that I think about whenever the Long Distance Stare taps me on the shoulder.

The first one is easy. Put it this way; not all gigs are created equal. I have done some amazing gigs, for big money, in front of a sea of people, been treated like a king, annd that hardly ever happens. Most gigs are pretty good, friendly crowd, working with fun people; y'know, nice.

Some gigs, to put it delicately, make you reconsider the validity of all your dreams. You might be in a place you wouldn't venture into in the light of day. Maybe the crowd is wrong ("We're the 'Good Ol' Blues Brothers Boy Band"). It could be that the drummer has just been paroled out of the Prison for the Criminally Unrhythmic.

On those nights, which are fortunately few and far between, I tell myself this: Many people who consider themselves musicians are sitting at home tonight. I have a gig. Say it, think about it, let it soak in. Mm hmm. Winning.

The other little trick I play goes back a few years, and is a little more profound, to me anyway.

I worked as house bassist in the same jam for close to 10 years. The venue would change, the night would get switched around, some of the players would change, but there I was, week after week, playing bass.

After about 9 years of it, things became very stagnant. Every week, it was the same jammers, playing the same songs, making the same mistakes, week in and week out. I didn't understand; this can't be satisfying to them, can it? Why aren't you improving? Why don't you practice? Why are you subjecting me to this too-loud version of Sartre's "No Exit"?

The only time I didn't have the Long Distance Stare was when I had literally passed out on my feet, still playing the bass line. If something did get played right, it would jar me enough to wake me, and then I'd realize the nightmare was REAL. I'd had it. Surely I'd peaked, and this was my lot in life. This wasn't why I played music. If I couldn't play seriously, then why play?

Then one day I read an interview with the incredible jazz bassist Abraham Laboriel. In the interview, he told a story about doing a recording session. At the session, the songwriter didn't know how to convey exactly what he wanted, so Abe would do a take and the guy wouldn't like it. After quite a while of this, with the songwriter unhappy without being able to explain why, and Abe equally frustrated with the process, Abe took a break to get some air.

He walked outside and thought too himself, "I can't keep doing this." He had just about made up his mind to go in and quit, tell the guy to find someone else for the session, when he had one of those epiphanies himself:

"This" he decided, "is a gift." I always picture the clouds clearing and a ray of sunlight reaching down to engulf Abe right about here.

Abe realized that his bass playing was a gift he was giving to the songwriter. Not a job, or a chore, but a gift, given with love. And when you give a gift, of course you want it to be "just right" to the recipient. So now when he went in, his whole mood had changed, and the session breezed along. He wasn't playing a session. He was giving a gift.

That day I wrote "This is a Gift" on the side of the upper horn of my bass, so that whenever I looked down, there it was. And at the next Jam night, I used that thinking, and rediscovered my love for playing my bass in ANY situation. The concept of giving a gift through my playing is a very powerful one for me.

Think about it; nobody's ever looked bored giving a gift!

So, come back to the bandstand, my bored looking friends. Revel in the gig, and share your gifts with everyone.

Or just buy some sunglasses. Dark ones.



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[www.tggbs.org](http://www.tggbs.org)

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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.



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