



GOLDEN GATE GROOVES

MY EXPERIENCE AT THE 2012 INTERNATIONAL BLUES CHALLENGE: MEMPHIS

by Paula Harris

Paula Harris and Blu Gruv won the band portion of The Golden Gate Blues Society's International Blues Challenge in November 2011 and competed as one of 110 bands in Memphis in February 2012. The following is Paula's personal story.



Photography by Rob Smith of RobSmithPhotos.com

January 31, 2012 - Tuesday

Got up at 4 a.m. to drive hubby to SFO for his 8am flight. So I sat at the airport until our flight was "supposed" to take off at 10:30 a.m. But after sitting on the plane for an hour, they had us deplane and we tried to reschedule another flight. We ended up getting back on the same plane and finally taking off around 1 p.m. We got to Dallas only to find that our original seat assignments had been cancelled (gasp of horror!). Thank God the plane was nearly empty, so we all had our own rows from Dallas to Memphis. As we started to descend, I opened the window shade and looked out at all the lights of Memphis spread out below me. As I looked at them, all the jitters from the trouble with the flights, the

nervousness of why we were in Memphis, and the burden of feeling like we needed to show well for our Golden Gate Blues Society lifted off me. A calm feeling of peace came over me and I knew that we would do our best and that would be enough no matter what the outcome was.

February 1 - Wednesday

Got up early (6 a.m.) to make sure that the promotional material we wanted to pass out had made it to Memphis. After going round a bit with UPS, we got everything worked out. So my hubby and I had breakfast at Cockadoos (holy killer biscuits batman!). What a great way to start the day. *(continued on page 3)*



FROM THE EDITOR

Deb Lubin



Here we are again, getting ready for the biggest blues event of the year, the Blues Music Awards in Memphis, Tennessee! Life seems to be moving at warp speed these days, and I'm running to catch up! 🎵

In this issue, we focus mainly on the 2012 International Blues Challenge (IBC) that was held in Memphis in February! The Golden Gate Blues Society (TGGBS) sent two representatives, a band: **Paula Harris** and **Blu Gruv**, and a duo: **Wendy DeWitt** and **Kirk Harwood**. Our cover article was written by Paula, detailing her experiences in Memphis; not to ruin the suspense, but the band came in **THIRD** out of 110 competing bands! An amazing feat and we're very, very proud of them! To think, we had to convince Paula she could sing the blues! And although Wendy and Kirk did not win, they had a great experience. Read about it in **Robert Feuer's** article on the duo and see the review of their new CD by **Joseph Jordan**. Personally, I think the CD is fabulous! 🎵

For the first time, we've included articles not written specifically for this newsletter. It isn't my preference (I want everything we include to be fresh and intended specifically for *Golden Gate Grooves*), but these two articles are special. The first is by **Stella Blue**, a guitarist/singer from Springfield, Missouri. She wrote an overview of her experience at the IBC, which I hope will convince more local bands to enter, and there is a local angle. The second article is a very comprehensive article on the life of **Johnny Otis**, which deserves a wide audience. Johnny was a very important figure on the national scene for a very long time and **David Mac** of Blues Junction Productions did a masterful job. 🎵

We have four CD reviews in this issue, by Wendy and Kirk, as mentioned above; Lady Bianca; and Mud Morganfield (Muddy's son) by **Joseph Jordan** and Marquise Knox, a young bluesman from St. Louis by **Dorothy L. Hill**. 🎵

Local bassist **Kennan Shaw** wrote an article on the life of a sideman, and I'm hoping he'll be a regular contributor to *Golden Gate Grooves*. His unique perspectives and sense of humor are refreshing! 🎵

Biscuits and Blues, the renowned San Francisco blues club, turned 17 this past March and TGGBS President **Dorothy L. Hill** sent in some photos of the occasion. A grand party was enjoyed by many musicians, industry people, and fans! Other than the BMAs, I think it's the best party of the year! A highlight of this issue is an article on **The Saloon** and owner **Myron Mu** by **Cathy Lemons**. The Saloon is the oldest bar in San Francisco and Myron books blues 7 days a week. Cathy has worked there for about 25 years and has an insider's perspective of this most-unique venue. 🎵

Finally, we have some photos of the wonderful Louisiana Red (Iverson Minter) who passed in February 2012 at age 79. I hope you had the opportunity to see/hear this bluesman live. If not, do yourself a favor and check out his recordings!

And I should mention that TGGBS held elections for the Board of Directors recently and Judy Edmonson, Joseph Jordan, Susan Preece, Karen Richards, and Jenifer Santer were elected for 2-year terms and members were treated to a wonderful performance by the Chris Cain Band! Support TGGBS as we support local musicians.

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

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We had to go to Club 152 for orientation and to find out what venue and time we would be playing that night. To see almost 800 musicians from 40 states and

20 countries, all gathered to compete for the same prize, was intimidating to say the least. We ran into Derrick Martin (D'Mar) and Chris Gill, who were competing in the solo/duo category and I enjoyed seeing some familiar faces (D'Mar plays drums on my album). We found out that we were toward the end of the night at the Rum Boogie Café; I was thrilled!

People were talking about some of the talent we were up against and I tried not to pay any attention, but when you find out you have someone amounting to blues royalty (David Kimbrough) and finalists from last year's IBC (Taylor Scott and Another Kind of Magic, who, by the way, are cute as a button, barely bearded, INTENSE kids who play the blues like their lives depend on it, plus a lady who plays the guitar like a dude), it starts to play mind games with you.

We got up to perform and the energy in the room was palpable. I looked out and there were so many friendly faces. I was blown away by how many friends and family



had driven and flown from all over to support us. We began playing and, as the crowd responded,

we fed off their energy. The performance was the best we have ever given. Standing ovations are always a "high" for a band. I left, again draped in that peace that I and the boys had done all we could, but still amped up on adrenaline over how frikkin GOOD the other bands were! And, yes, I admit it now, Taylor Scott had me sweating! Did I say frikkin GOOD???

February 2 - Thursday

Woke up at 9 am and felt like my lungs were full of sand. They allow smoking in Memphis, and our venue, the Rum Boogie, was one of the smokier venues around. I turned

on the shower and steamed up the bathroom. After sitting for about 45 minutes or so, I felt better, but had blood in my nose. So when I looked at the schedule and we were the fourth band to play, I was very glad and resolved to leave after we played rather than watching the other bands. My voice was only at about 80%, but we got through the set OK. It wasn't as good as the night before and the energy was off a bit, but the crowd didn't seem to notice. More standing ovations!!

After we finished playing, I went out to dinner with my family and friends that were in town. When we got to the restaurant, we found that one of the friends, who is a civil court judge in Memphis, had rented the entire downstairs of a wonderful restaurant called Flight. We had about 20 of us in the dinner party and it was a much needed break from the stress of competition. After dinner, we went back to Beale Street to hear the semi-finalists announced. We were at BB Kings because they don't allow smoking. When they called our name, I was surprised at how many people applauded. I was also surprised at how many came over to congratulate us. I felt like a celebrity or something (big ole grin!). Once the announcement was made, the rest of the band wanted to go jam, but I knew that I needed to rest my voice so I went back to the room for some rest. DO I get brownie points for denying myself those famous JAMS? (Still can't believe I did that!)

February 3 - Friday

I woke up at 8:30 a.m. and first thing checked the Blues Foundation website to find out what our semifinal venue was, and what order we were playing. We were at the Superior and right in the middle of the pack. At breakfast, I was again bombarded with tidbits that the first band in our venue, the Sugar Prophets, was a finalist from the previous year and that the band right after us was a killer horn band with a Tower of Power vibe and great stage presence. Oh, and David Kimbrough was right before us...AGAIN...in this venue. Well, hey at least we didn't have to contend with the cute kids again! LOL.

We had a band meeting that afternoon and worked through the problems from the night before that had caused the energy to be a little off. The Superior was packed...literally...as in SARDINES! And the Sugar Prophets were seriously on top of their game! David Kimbrough played WAY better than he had the previous two nights and I was thoroughly impressed. I kept telling myself, okay, blues content is weighted by 4, vocals by 3, and instrumentals by 3 as well. We can DO this.

Time for us to go on stage. I stood there and felt my body shaking with adrenaline, but my mind was

completely calm. It was the oddest thing I've ever experienced. That night was the first time I ever got to both perform and actually take note of what we were doing as a band and how the crowd was reacting. Applause is one thing, but to see each face hanging on each note is something completely different. And the



band was playing better than they ever had. Joey was laying down a PHAT bass line and he was LOCKED

with Al on the drums. Al was taking no prisoners either. Doug and Terry were blistering their fingers off during solos. And stage presence! OMG, each one was giving it his all. THIS was absolutely one of those performances where everything goes right—as a band, as a performer, as a set. I felt like we had the crowd right in the palms of our hands, and we DID! And they were so enthusiastic that I literally was moved to tears after several songs got whooping, hollering, standing ovations. I had to take a moment to compose myself. When you get standing ovations from people there to support you it's one thing, but when you get one from people there with other bands, it is mind blowing, exhilarating, and humbling. It was a magic moment. One of the best in my 20 years of performing. It was the kind of moment that made everything worth it, no matter where we placed...or didn't. The entire band agreed with me. And we exited the stage feeling great...for about 15 minutes.

Then...well then...JEREMIAH JOHNSON happened. OMGOMGOMGOMGOMG! This band was tight; they were experienced; they were expressive; he could SING! And I was blown away! The trumpet player actually blew me a kiss while he was dancing and playing! If you haven't seen them, seriously, check them out! This guy and his band are a machine! When they came off stage I went over and hugged him. I was so impressed with their show! I told him "Dude! You just scared the cr@p out of me!" And he didn't even pause before firing back "Well, while we're on the subject, girl, you're the sh!t" LOLOL. I was then asked to host the jam afterwards while the scores were tabulated and I agreed. We got a great jam going until the representative got back with the scores.

Once he came back and reclaimed the microphone, I moved to the back to be with my group of family and friends. I had convinced myself that I was going to be OK if we didn't make it to the finals and I was getting ready to congratulate Jeremiah when they went through to the finals because they ARE a killer band! I had thoroughly talked myself into believing that a big horn band was what was going to beat us. When they called our name as the finalist from the Superior, the whole place exploded. People were jumping up and down and screaming. Make that SCREAMING! I was so shocked that I just put my head down between my knees and burst into tears. There were flashes going off all around me and I remember thinking as the 10th person hugged me "Oh lord, that's going to be an UGLY picture!" I also looked up to see my drummer Al Diaz FILMING it with his cell phone in my face. I had eyelashes and mascara everywhere. (Still have to find a way to pay Al back for that! LOL.) I hugged my guys and told them how proud I was of them and then told them all to get to bed for some rest because —HOLY CRAP! We were in the FINALS! (another OMGOMGOMGOMGOMG!)

February 4 - Saturday

Woke up at 6 a.m. all amped up like I always am before a big performance. And I can't remember ever having one as big as today's was going to be.

I went down to breakfast, then came back for a steam shower. Even though my voice was only at 70% (the smoke and lack of sleep were telling on me), I still felt pretty good about today. We only had a 20-minute set and I knew I could make it through that. I sat in the shower warming up until I could hit the high notes in "Damn Your Eyes" and "Turning on the Naughty."

I reflected that I didn't really have a clue how they were actually scoring bands. SO many bands that I loved hadn't made it through, and here we were in the FINALS. What I took from that was to stop worrying about other bands. I had no control over what they were or weren't going to do, and obviously no truly clear understanding of how the judges were interpreting the scoring criteria. So I resolved to not even listen to the other bands in the



finals and to concentrate only on what we were going to do.

When I got to the Orpheum, the line of people was wrapped

around the building waiting to get in. Another

OMGOMGOMG moment! We dropped our stuff in the back and checked in. I did watch a bit of the first act and damn, they were great! I got out of the theater and went up to the lobby and visited with friends. I poked my head in for a bit of each act and was blown away by all of them. I felt humbled and honored to be playing on the same stage with them. When I realized that Eden Brent and Janiva Magness were two of the judges, I was even more freaked. I went outside and had a quiet moment. That same peace that has been with me the entire week came back and I went back in, ready to do the best I could.

We were second to last and the place was packed to the rafters. And it's HUGE! And LOUD! The monitors were 8 feet back from the front of the stage. And they didn't have a cordless mic. I was trying to figure out how I was going to use a stage that big with a corded mic when the sound guy asked me if I needed a longer cord. I said YES!

When the show started, I was almost thrown off by the horde of photographers in the orchestra pit below us. And there were so many flashes going off throughout the



audience that it was like paparazzi scenes in the movies at red carpet events. My mic cord kept getting tangled in the monitors, so I finally stopped trying to use the stage and just concentrated on singing. We were hitting the punches, the dynamics were there; the notes were there; and the audience was electrifying! When I gave tribute to my

biggest influence, Etta James, and sang her song "Damn Your Eyes," it got a standing ovation. I could see men in the audience wiping their eyes. What a moment! Then we moved on to the last song of the set, an original called "Turning on the Naughty." We got another standing ovation and I can't even explain the high. Standing ovations are wonderful, but to have something you created get such a response is pretty much beyond explanation.

I felt like we had a great shot at the competition, but was just grateful to be in the top 9, and to have had the

experience of performing in that room to that crowd. I would have been fine had we not placed at all.

When they called my name for third place, I expected to feel a twinge of regret that we didn't win. But I didn't.



Like I said, I had given up trying to figure out how the performances scored, or what the judges were looking for. I was just happy, proud of my band, grateful for all my friends and family that had traveled from so many places to support us, and grateful for all the new friends and fans we had met

during the week. And I was so glad that we could go home to The Golden Gate Blues Society and all the blues supporters in the Bay Area with a top 3 finish! Not too bad for their second year sending a band to the IBC.

Aftermath: February 14 - Tuesday

In closing, I have some thoughts. One, if your band is considering entering the IBC, DO IT! When I read Carlos Velasco's account of Tip of the Top's IBC journey last



year, I NEVER in a million years could have imagined that I would be writing the same thing this year! If you

are a musician, and a band asks you to compete with them at the IBC, DO IT! The exposure you get, even on a local level, is priceless and there is NO faster way to get your name out there in the blues community! If you are wondering if your music is good enough and you want to see if people like it, DO IT! Go to jams, sit in, get to know the musicians in your area and test your tunes out. Don't let doubt stop you, don't let other people place limits on what you can or can't do. Don't even let yourself place limits on what you can do. GO FOR IT! The IBC is the best way to catapult you into the mainstream of the blues.



If you are a blues fan and you want to see some of these great events you're reading about right here, or if you've been thinking about joining a blues society, DO IT! The blues are alive because of the loyal fans that support it and the artists that perform it. And the Bay Area has some of the best talent anywhere in the country. Also consider joining the Blues Foundation at www.blues.org. They do more than anyone else to ensure that the Blues live forever. And membership gives you the right to vote for the Blues Music Awards, so you never have to wonder "how" someone you adore in the industry didn't get an award!

And lastly, THANK YOU to The Golden Gate Blues Society, which held the IBC locally and gave me a chance like this... even when I didn't know to hope for one.

Photo Credits:

Page 3 top: Club 152 by Susan Preece.

Page 3 bottom: Paula Harris and Blu Gruv at The Rum Boogie by Susan Preece.

Page 4 left column: Paula Harris and Blu Gruv at The Superior by Andrea Zucker.

Page 4 right column: The Orpheum by Julie Bitnoff.

Page 5 left column: The Finals at The Orpheum by Rob Smith of RobSmithPhotos.com.

Page 5 right column, top: The Award courtesy of Paula Harris.

Page 5 right column, bottom: Paula at the Finals by Andrea Zucker.

LIFE LESSONS IN MEMPHIS: THE IBC

By Stella Blue

The following is another personal experience from the International Blues Challenge by singer/guitar player Stella Blue from Springfield, Missouri. This was originally posted as a blog on Facebook. Reprinted with permission.

As I packed my bags with my thrift store clothes and loaded guitars and potato chips into the van, my mind raced with thoughts of hope and fear and excitement. Steve [Callstein] and I were headed to Memphis, Tennessee to compete in the International Blues Challenge. The entire trip, the songs we would play raced through my head over and over again ; each guitar part and lyric imprinting into instinct. "what will they think of me?" "What if I break a string?" "What if I lose my voice?" "I hope I don't let everyone down." All these things overwhelmed me as we made our way into uncertainty.

Arriving in Memphis, my heart raced and I felt like I was visiting an old friend. We were to play that night in the first night of quarter-finals. After checking into the motel we snatched up our gear and made the long trek to our venue "Kings Palace" on Beale St. Arriving early we had plenty of time to get nervous and drink too much water. We watched as group after group got up and did their thing. I was blown away at the many different styles and talents. I was praying, I was sweating, I was tired of waiting. I was intimidated by everyone's social grace and confidence. Twenty bathroom breaks and a pack of cigarettes later it was our turn to play. I was nervous. So many great musicians from all over the world and I had to top them. Our first night I felt we did a good job, but

we had troubles with the sound, and no time to fix it without getting docked points by the judges. We played, the sound evened out, I felt we did a good show. I also felt that most of the other acts did a good show too. I did not want to wait till after the next night to find out if we were advancing to the semi-finals. As we headed back to the motel with all our equipment I could only think of one thing : " I am so out of shape!"

Day two I awoke without the nervous thoughts of the previous days (months). Today I was doing it my way. When we got up to do our set I stopped doing what everyone told me and I just stood up and played and wailed like I would not ever get a chance to do it again. Everyone seemed to love it. I know we did. What a feeling. When it was time Steve and I headed to see the other Blues Society of the Ozarks (BSO) entry, Three on a Wire. All I can say is, wow! Those three played their hearts out for a completely packed house. The crowd loved them. They were not carbon copy like a lot of others seem to be. We waited after playing until everyone was finished in each venue so we could hear if we were to join the ranks of the semifinalists. We waited and waited. I wondered if we would ever find out.

An hour after falling asleep at BB Kings on a bench in the window, Steve nudged me as it was time to hear if we made it through to the next round. I wanted it so bad. I



worked so hard. I practiced so much. How could I not at least get to the next round? As the MC read the names from each venue, I got more and more nervous. "Say my name!" "Say our name!" "Say it, dang it! ". But as they finished the list, I realized they weren't going to say my name. I was crushed. I congratulated the artists moving on (as we had made new friends in everyone we met). I smiled and laughed with each person I spoke to all the way back to the motel. Then, once no one could see, I cried. I had bared my soul. And it wasn't good enough. I wondered why God had brought me there and made me a musician if I'd never do anything great. I would realize later that sometimes its good enough even if you don't walk away with a trophy and a big head.

The next day, Steve and I made our way up and down Beale St. watching the groups we had decided to cheer on to make it to the Finals. We were overwhelmed, inspired, and schooled by so many talented artists. We suddenly felt lucky to even have been allowed to be among them and play alongside them. One of our favorites, Paula Harris and her band made it to the finals at the Orpheum Theatre. We were so happy for them. I was praying they would win. They were amazing and not a "cookie cutter" kind of amazing. They were unique amazing.

For the finals, the Orpheum was packed! They bands were ferocious. The crowd was eating it all up. Paula and her band were up second to last. They were the kind of



band that I would join their cult following. In the end, they got third place. I wanted first for them, but way to go!

After the week I had, I realized that third is good too. Even being in the crowd is good. Even getting a chance to share your music and soul is good. I knew this because I finally realized that although I did not win, I learned how to grow.

In 4 days time, I experienced a major milestone in my life. I learned that I have good friends that love me and believe in me, even if I didn't win. I learned to be myself. I learned that if I don't believe in myself, I can't expect strangers to either. I learned where I am, where I need to be, and what I need to do to get there. I also learned that its not about me and my dreams; Its about THE BLUES. (Thank you BSO for memories and lessons that I will never forget!)

Photo above of Joey Fabian from the Paula Harris Band and Stella Blue courtesy of Stella Blue.

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CD REVIEWS

Wendy DeWitt and Kirk Harwood, *Industrial Strength* by Joseph Jordan



The duo of Wendy DeWitt and Kirk Harwood has been a musical couple for some time now and their simpatico for each other's chops is evident with every track on their new CD. The album features 13 songs, 9 originals, with Harwood on drums,

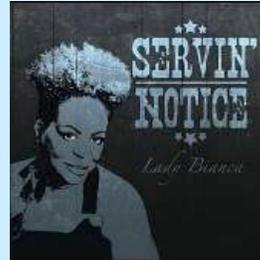
percussion, and occasional vocals and DeWitt, an absolute master of boogie-woogie, stride, and barrel-house piano, on all keyboards. It's a recording that will have you tapping your 10 toes at home or in your car while you unconsciously drive recklessly over the speed limit because of it. The two produced the LP at Moon Valley Studios in Sonoma County with the help of Pete Carlson. There are some great players on this CD, including guitarists Steve Freund and Anthony Paule, reed and brass players Nancy Wright, Macy Blackman, and Marty Eggers, and an old musical and inspirational friend of DeWitt's, Western-swing guitarist Tommy Thomsen.

DeWitt's spirited vocals are not the strongest part of this album, although "If I Could Just" lays her vocal talent out superbly. Wendy always tackles everything she does with a relish and with a deep love for her music. The Gershwin's oft-recorded "Summertime" is reinvented here with a surprising musical signature displaying DeWitt's contralto and saxophonist Wright's backup and solo instrumental brilliance. Listen to "Lucky Old Son" to hear DeWitt's sensitive take on Beasley Smith's beautiful ballad. "If I Could Just" marries boogie woogie with a little country, no mean feat. And if you want to really hear how good a piano player Wendy is, just listen to her take on the great Albert Ammons' "Boogie Woogie Stomp" and "Wings of Love." This sixth LP by DeWitt displays her at her best and gives her adoring Bay Area audience, and hopefully many newcomers to her sound, something to revel in. Great CD packaging as well, cuter than an 88's ear.

Wette Music – 2011

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

Lady Bianca, *Servin' Notice* by Joseph Jordan



There is an incredible short list of Bay Area players that deserve everyday household-name recognition on the national (if not worldwide) scene. The extraordinary Lady Bianca is one of them. The Lady has been making music now for many years and she's

a master of blues, soul, gospel, boogie, what have you. A truly great pianist, and sultry and inspiring vocalist with an intrinsic embodiment of the elements of music bred deep within her, Lady Bianca has all a listener might wish to listen to. Of the 12 songs on the CD, 11 were written by the Lady (Bianca Thornton) and her longtime musical partner, Stanley Lippitt, and they produced the CD as well, with help from co-producer Steve Hart. They cut the entire LP in the unlikely blues location of Marin County, at San Rafael's The Site Recording Studio.

"Stealin'" has a Latin-soul beat to it that fits the song perfectly, and Bianca and Stanley's duet on the one cover song on the CD, "It Hurts to Be In Love," is a charmer. The Bay Area is well represented by the sidemen, musicians that any local concert-going fan would know well: among others, guitarist Steve Gannon, saxman Carl Green, organist David K. Mathews, drummers Michael Skinner and Tovia Bradley, and featuring bass by the Lady's son, Oshmin O. Oden. The highlight of the album (and there are a few candidates) is surely "What Am I Gonna Do Without You," in which Gannon plays fiery backup to Bianca's piano and organ work. "Wake Up Baby" is a sad lament on a cheatin' man, who the singer gets hip to. Listen to this recording with gladness, as the Lady has bestowed upon us another gem in her vast repertoire of musical genius, and I ain't lying'.

Magic-O Records, Stayfree Productions – 2011

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

Mud Morganfield, *Son of the Seventh Son* by Joseph Jordan



Sons and relatives of music notables makin' their own names are not new to the scene, but one has to be a little more than intrigued when the name "Morganfield" shows up. The eldest son, once known as "Larry," of the legendary

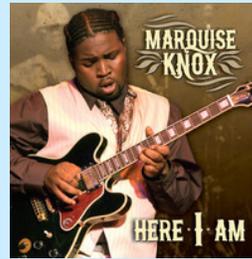
Muddy Waters has just released his first LP and it's more than worth a listen. At 57, Mud looks like, and at times even sounds like, his famous father...no kidding. (By the way, Mud is not to be confused with his more musically prolific brother, Big Bill Morganfield.) According to the storyline, it wasn't until 2005 that Mud started thinking he might make a career out of singing the blues, although he'd been singing since the early 1980s. Produced in Chicago by extraordinary harmonica player (and owner of the Rhythm Room in Phoenix) Bob Corritore, this 12-song CD carries a first-class list of national players, including Corritore, guitarist Billy Flynn, pianist Barrelhouse Chuck, and drummer Kenny "Beedy Eyes" Smith (son of one of Muddy's standout drummers, the late Willie "Big Eyes" Smith) and a couple of musicians better-known in Chicago, Rich Kreher on guitar and Harmonica Hinds, not surprisingly, on harmonica. Mud wrote 7 of the 12 tracks on the CD and even recorded a slow-burner of his old man's "You Can't Lose What You Ain't Never Had." A vocalist only (at least on this CD), Morganfield leads off with the hilarious and traditional sounding "Short Dress Woman." A highlight among the many on the album is Mud's own "Health," on which he sings in a plaintive baritone and reveals a strong and effective vibrato. It will be interesting to see where Morganfield goes musically from this CD onward. Overall, this is a good set of outstanding tracks and those who love traditional Chicago Blues and who've been waiting for a worthy release can grab a copy and feel fulfilled.

Severn Records – 2012

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

Marquise Knox, *Here I Am* by Dorothy L. Hill

Marquise Knox is probably one of the most gifted young artists in blues today and one you may not have heard. Knox, who hails from St. Louis, Missouri, was recognized in 2010 with the *Living Blues* magazine's Best Debut



Award for *Man Child* and nominated by The Blues Foundation for a 2012 Blues Music Award for Best New Debut Release. Although he has toured extensively in Europe and played major festivals across America, he has remained under the radar

except for attention from the most zealous blues fans. I first met Knox in Clarksdale, Mississippi, when he was 16 years old and was blown away by his prowess at that time. This CD proves that he has matured into a confident bluesman as he delves into traditional blues reminiscent of his idol, none other than Muddy Waters. Knox recorded this CD at Blues Heaven Studios in Salina, Kansas, in 2011, when he was 19 years old. Supported by Wayne Sharp (Michael Burks band member) on piano and Hammond C-3 organ, Eugene Johnson on bass, and Mike Battle on drums, Knox holds forth on vocals, guitar, and harmonica.

The title cut leads off with Knox professing his love of the blues although "...I ain't got no big name...ain't no future in a young man playing the blues..." adding a commanding punch of guitar styling on this upbeat tune with an irresistible groove. On "You Better Pray," Knox channels the vocal style of Muddy, enhanced by a dynamic slide guitar display. "Two Can Play Your Game" has a satisfying jaunty melody. "Tears Feel Like Rain" is a dramatic slow burner, with Knox building the tension on guitar. In a cover of "Feel Like Goin' Home," Knox's slide guitar solo dazzles with dexterity. America's Blues" is a blues shuffle that explores the lyrical landscape of contemporary social ills. "Can A Young Man Play The Blues?" is a delightfully deep exploration, "not only can I play 'em but I can sing 'em too," with Knox's sensitive vocal pacing balanced with bursts of expressive guitar styling. The cover of "I Can't Be Satisfied" is eerie--close your eyes when you listen to this one to experience what you hear! The danceable melody of "I'm Bad" is a sparkling offering. The final cut of "Two Trains Running" erupts with a soulful vocal that is deeply from within and does uncommon justice to this cover.

As a diehard lover of traditional Mississippi to Chicago blues, I love this CD! With 12 cuts, 9 of which are originals and 3 of which are Muddy Waters' covers, it is gripping and timeless, but most of all, a significant effort by a gifted young man steeped in traditional blues who shows the ability to put his own stamp on the blues.

APO Records – 2011

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

THE LIFE OF A SIDEMAN

by Kennan Shaw, Bassist with the Candye Kane Band



Dear Deb,

Thanks again for the opportunity to write for The Golden Gate Blues Society newsletter. It's really an honor to be asked, and I worked really hard on that article about the trials and tribulations of being a Professional Blues Sideman.

But...here's the thing; I can't send it to you, because it sucked. It came out sounding whiny and insecure, sprinkled liberally with doses of rampant egotism. Half of the paragraphs read like Thurston Howell the Third complaining about the difficulty of finding good help these days.

Check this sample paragraph out:

"My band mates and I were sitting in a lovely café next to the canal in Amsterdam, and relating hilarious stories about some of the funnier 'bad bandleader' moments from our career, when our revelry was cut short by a call telling us that our dinner that evening had been moved to after the sound check. If we didn't get a snack right then, it would literally be hours before the restaurant had our food ready!"

See? I mean, dinner was kinda late, but I don't want to be known for things like this. I've had the very good fortune of going places and seeing things that I never would have if I didn't have the gigs I did. I'm constantly amazed by the stuff I get to do just because I play bass.

It's not all fun and games. Some of the points I made in my article were pretty valid. I talked about how being a professional sideman takes a certain mentality; you have to walk the line between having total confidence in your abilities, while subverting or redirecting a good deal of what gratifies your own ego. Most of the time, I'm proud and confident about my talents, so when I don't get the call for a certain gig, it's tough to feel like I can be so easily replaced. It can be a bitter pill to swallow to realize that you're not necessarily integral to the sound of the band or artist you plays for, as far as they're concerned.

And if you're a member of the rhythm section, well, nobody listens to you anyway! As a bass player,

sometimes I see myself as the sheep dog; keeping a watchful eye over the flock and making sure nobody wanders too far off. Such heroism, however, goes largely unsung. It's like being Bruce Wayne listening to someone describe how amazing Batman was. No one ever leaves a baseball game talking about what a good game the catcher called. No one leaves a beautiful house talking about how the foundation really holds up the joint perfectly. No one ever leaves a fancy restaurant after a five star meal talking about the silverware. And yet, there we are, fluttering somewhere between Ginger Rogers and Rodney Dangerfield.

The real trick, as it turns out, is doing what we do, to the very best of our abilities, and remembering that no matter how good we nail it, it's not our name on the marquee, is it? A couple of years ago, I was interviewing Bobby Vega, a bass player who's a huge influence on me, and I asked him who were his best bosses as a sideman, and he said "You know, I never really looked at them as 'bosses', once you look at them as bosses, you're kind of out of the gig. You were there because they wanted you to play, not because they wanted you to kiss their ass."

I struggled with this for years; of course they want you to kiss their ass, I thought. Headliners run the gamut from temperamental artist to flaming egomaniac! You have to kiss a little backside to stick around, right? I'm just now starting to understand, though. In the past, I've run myself ragged trying to be invaluable because I'd like to be that integral part. And it doesn't really matter. There are still times when it's not going to be me. I don't like it, and it doesn't make me feel good, but now I'm beginning to get what Bobby said: if I'm there, it's because somebody wanted me to play. I can live with that.

So, you see my problem with the article? It's too easy for someone reading all of that to say: "If this stuff is too hard for you, just quit. There are plenty of people who'll gladly take your place." Heck, I've said that in the past, usually right after listening to one of the myriad rock songs about how 'tough' life is on the road. Note: this is not a 'steel horse,' and I'm not a cowboy.

Of course there are huge upsides to being a sideman. The greatest thing in the world is to travel somewhere cool, and play music for people that really want to hear it. I don't have to book the gigs, promote them, or arrange any of the logistics for moving a traveling circus around. I

show up in the lobby when I'm told to, and get in the van. I just got home from a month in Europe, playing in nine different countries, and all room and board covered, just because I play bass. I ate like a king, met some fascinating people, signed autographs, and played for big, enthusiastic crowds. Life is good! And that all sounds like bragging!

The whole story makes it sound like the sideman's ultimate lot is nothing but bragging and complaining. After all, bragging and complaining are infinitely easier than conveying the fact that I'm happy, proud, and

especially grateful to be a working musician. I wouldn't trade this job for any other in the world. I just can't seem to put that into words. At least not entertaining words.

I know I've let you down, and I'm sorry. Maybe I can write about something else, like, all the cool bass players that live in the Bay Area, who get all the damn gigs. Or...maybe not. I don't know. I don't want people to think I'm a total jerk! Then who'd hire me?

Photo by Bob Hakins, 2012.

BISCUITS AND BLUES 17th ANNIVERSARY PARTY

Article and Photos by Dorothy L. Hill

Has it really been 17 years? Yes, and the occasion was appropriately celebrated on March 11, 2012. The club was filled to capacity and invited guests included longtime patrons and a plethora of musicians. The party



was hosted by owners, **Steven and Tina Suen**, with food and drinks on the house. Despite the obstacles involved in running a blues club these days, this dynamic

couple has continued to build on the reputation of Biscuits and Blues as the premier blues destination in San Francisco. This annual affair is their way of thanking the blues community and, at the same time, for us, as blues fans, to thank them for their dedication.

Renowned DJ Noel Hayes held down the mic as Master of Ceremonies for the evening. The house band was led by Chris "Kid" Andersen with Sid Morris on keyboards, J. Hansen on drums, and Kedar Roy on bass. Theirs was a feel-good set to start off the party, with Andersen leading the charge on guitar and vocals and showcasing Morris and Hansen on several selections. When MC Hayes asked the band to do a couple more tunes announcing that there would then be free food and drinks, Andersen humorously commented that he had some CDs for sale and they were not free. Good cheer was the call of the day, and the joyous feeling was infectious.

The cast of musicians taking the stage shifted as the afternoon passed into evening with a taste of everything from down home blues to jazzy blues. In contrast to the



music, there was a change of pace with Steven and Tina taking the stage to introduce the club's staff and thank them for their

dedicated service. A touching presentation was made by **Rick Estrin** who bestowed **Steven** with the "Keeping the Blues Alive" plaque that had been awarded to the club in 1999 by The Blues Foundation. They had never received the plaque and it was about time, I say!



The impromptu musical sessions were filled with tremendous performances

enthusiastically embraced by the audience. The list of players was long, but, needless to say, showcased some of the Bay Area's best, including Sista Monica, Rick Estrin, Aki Kumar, Derick Hughes, Steve Gannon, Alvon Johnson, Tebo, Paula Harris, Daniel Castro, David Landon, Keith Crossan, Anthony Paule, Craig Horton, and so many more (I know I forgot someone and apologize!). Great party: if not the best, pretty close!

BISCUITS AND BLUES ANNIVERSARY PARTY *(continued)*

by Dorothy L. Hill



The Cake



Kedar Roy



Alvon Johnson and Tebo



Kid Andersen and Rick Estrin



Daniel Castro



J. Hansen



Sista Monica



Keith Crossan and Mike Rinta



Sid Morris



Craig Horton

WENDY DEWITT AND KIRK HARWOOD REPRESENT TGGBS AT THE INTERNATIONAL BLUES CHALLENGE IN MEMPHIS

Article by Robert Feuer, Photos by Deb Lubin



Wendy DeWitt, who, with drummer Kirk Harwood, won The Golden Gate Blues Society's (TGGBS') International Blues Challenge (IBC) in the solo/duo category, describes her experiences at

the finals in Memphis as “pretty overwhelming.” When they weren’t indulging in southern cooking, like fried pickles, their whirlwind schedule included all-day competitions, jam sessions, music workshops, visits to classic Memphis music venues, and tours of landmarks like Sun Studios.

“When you get out of your little neighborhood and see what the big picture is all about it’s inspiring,” DeWitt says during a recent interview. “It alters your thinking. You’ve got to know the sea you’re swimming in.”

The DeWitt/Harwood adventure began by defeating three other participants in TGGBS' IBC solo/duo competition. DeWitt says they incurred some out-of-pocket expenses for the 6-day Memphis trip, but most were paid from revenue collected at TGGBS events and a star-studded fundraiser at Biscuits and Blues.



The Memphis contest, says DeWitt, began on Jan. 31 and included acts from all over the world. (The Blues Foundation reports that 709 musicians from 41 states and 12 countries competed.) Quarterfinals, semifinals, and finals were held in each of two categories, bands and solo/duo acts, with 19 venues involved. Two days of quarterfinals, from 10 a.m. to 11 p.m., saw the same 10 to 12 acts performing 25-minute sets. “It was amazing how they could coordinate it all,” says Harwood.

Volunteer judges, many from outside the music industry, scored on the basis of presentation, stage behavior, vocal and instrument quality, blues content, originality of material, and dress. “The criteria were all over the map,” says DeWitt. “It’s not about how good you are – that’s so subjective.” Extra points were given, she believes, for those who were “bluesy and down-home,” such as wearing overalls or using homemade instruments. The judges have a set of rules and a timeline they take seriously. For example, arriving late costs one point.

Prizes were awarded to the top two finishers in the solo/duo category and the top three finishers in the band category. The winner in the latter received prizes that included a plaque, \$2,000 cash, an interview with the online site BluesWax, free advertising, and a professional press kit. The winner also get bookings, including festivals and a spot on the Legendary Rhythm and Blues Cruise. “Your career could really take off,” says DeWitt.

Included in the International Blues Challenge week are educational panels on subjects such as booking and promotion and music workshops for different instruments. Harwood joined the drum workshop, which he describes as “all about how to play shuffles.” He brought cymbals, a snare drum, and a foot pedal to Memphis, though, he says, it’s not necessary to bring your own equipment.

Scheduled to open the first day of competition, the duo was delayed when there were no keyboards on site. Each contestant must be present at 10 a.m. in case of scheduling changes, but once you’ve completed your time on stage, you’re free to explore Memphis. DeWitt describes the Beale Street scene as “a big tourist area and not necessarily all blues anymore. Most of the old venues and some original buildings are still around, but the real blues scene is scattered around in small clubs.”

DeWitt and Harwood checked out many of those, and joined in jam sessions, some of which went on all night at various venues, including the classic New Daisy Theater. A highlight of their trip was a tour of the original Sun Studios building, which houses a fully operational recording studio, exactly like the original. There, DeWitt sat at the piano once used by legends like Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis.



*The Golden Gate Blues Society is now accepting band and solo/duo applications for our 2012 International Blues Challenge to select musicians to represent TGGBS at the international event in Memphis in 2013!
YOUR participation is encouraged!*

Calling all Bay Area Blues Bands
for the

IBBC



<http://www.tggbs.org/>

The Golden Gate Blues Society

Apply NOW !

THE SALOON: SAN FRANCISCO'S OLDEST HOME OF THE BLUES

by Cathy Lemons



The Saloon is my home away from home. Ever since I walked into that bar in 1986—walked through those two huge double doors facing the corner of Fresno Alley and Grant Avenue (and all

because I had heard some badass blues floating down the street to me), I knew it was THE place to be. Magic. There is magic in the old place. And Myron Mu, the current owner, knew there was magic when he decided *not* to let the liquor license expire. Myron knew nothing about the bar business or blues when he took over The Saloon. He didn't even have ANY business experience. He was a classically trained musician who played the French horn and subbed for the San Francisco Symphony—no small feat in the classical world.

But Myron Mu's family owned several buildings in North Beach and The Saloon was one of them. The previous lessee (probably Tommy Brown) didn't keep up the lease payments and the liquor license was about to expire. Once a liquor license expires in a busy place like North Beach in San Francisco, where there are so many contenders, there is, as Myron told me, "a propensity not to renew." And so, for 2 months, the fate of the old bar rested on a decision made by someone in the Mu family. And Lisa Kindred.



Lisa Kindred came to San Francisco from New York City in the early 1980s. And she had changed from folk singer to blues mama. Lisa had tons of connections—she'd made a record on Vanguard and toured the country. She knew Joan Baez, David Crosby (she is mentioned in his biography), Joni Mitchell, Bob Dylan, and Nick Gravenites, who had encouraged Lisa to get into

blues, and she had even brushed against the great Thelonious Monk, whom she once described as a "huge buffalo coming straight for her."

Lisa knew everyone who was worth knowing in blues, and her partner was the great bass player Geno Skaggs, who had recorded and played in Chicago with greats like Earl Hooker, John Lee Hooker, and Jimmy Reed.

Lisa Kindred was no dummy. She wanted a place to sing and she wanted a place for her friends to play. She had found out through the grapevine that someone in the

Mu family was a musician.

That someone was Myron, a rather short, nondescript individual, who wore a Beatle haircut and round glasses like John Lennon, and who dressed day in and day out in a dark blue windbreaker-like jacket, sneakers, and jeans. A practical sort—but definitely not from the cookie cutter.

Lisa approached. She told Myron that if he took on the



bar, she would teach him the ropes.

And that is precisely what happened. Myron had to learn the business quickly because from the minute he started hiring bands, the people came. He had to make friends with the cops; he had to pay all kinds of fees and fines for various types of licenses; he had to learn how to bartend; he had to learn how to figure out from the pouring of the liquor what the money should be at the end of the night; he had to get an accountant for the tougher tax stuff; he had to find and hire bartenders who would not steal him blind and who would stay; and he had to hire the right musicians. He accomplished all of this and more. He has sustained a blues community for 28 years.

But before I get to Myron Mu, I want to describe The Saloon and what it's like to be inside, either listening to music or playing music. And I should touch on its history.

Let's start from the beginning. The Saloon is, indeed, the oldest bar in town—built in 1861—and the original owners, the Wagner family, who still come to San Francisco every February 24 for the Saloon's annual reunion, called it in the 1860s Wagner Beer Hall. In 1861, if you walked through what was then two huge swinging double doors, you would have seen the same ornate



wooden bar to your left, you would have seen the same high ceilings, the same long windowless walls that have an almost fleshlike texture to them, and you would have squinted through half light.

From the 1860s up to the 1920s, there was a long wooden trough underneath along the length of the bar. It was there so that men could quickly relieve themselves—this, of course, was before women were even allowed to enter a bar.

And back in the 1860s, there existed a maze of underground tunnels, some of which led from the very basement of The Saloon out into the cavernous passageways of Chinatown. I doubt that the Wagner family would have had anything to do with white slavery, but instead used the tunnels for some practical purpose. But it was common in those days, throughout North Beach and Chinatown, that young women and laborers were scuttled by their captors through these underground trails, all much like the ones that have long been sealed but that you can still see and trace with your hands along the bricks in The Saloon basement.

And then, of course, we must address the rumored brothel above The Saloon. Yes. There was a brothel. And apparently a very successful one! Men of the San Francisco Fire Department frequented it so often that when the great earthquake and subsequent fire of 1906 struck the City, the firemen rushed in a pack to their favorite haunt and put out the flames. Thus, the Saloon still stands—a remnant and relic of the Barbary Coast past—and all because of the brothel.

The past is the past, but it is somehow alive in the present. I was at The Saloon just two nights ago, a



Thursday night. I saw Wendy DeWitt and Steve Freund, dear friends that I have played with and known for decades, and Kirk Harwood, a new member of our

family who was on drums. I sang three songs during the night and I felt alive as I always do on The Saloon stage. I felt “heard.” I felt understood. And I felt an affinity with

the players that I can’t describe. Because they are part of The Saloon family.

Few posers come to The Saloon. You can be who you are in this magical old place. And I always wait for the crazy joy that starts when a certain blonde starts to strut on the dance floor; the crazy joy that ends with everyone moving together in front of the stage, like we are all one, some dancing alone, some swaying, some two-stepping together or just locked in some crazy embrace, and some even doing pushups—30 to be precise—and some even showing their adornments so to speak—on occasion. It happens.

Last Thursday night, I began to notice the details that I take for granted. When I came up to the building, I stood outside to smoke a cigarette and I studied the front stained-glass picture window that faces Grant Avenue. There are tattered posters and flyers taped haphazardly from the inside of the bar to that window—and when you peer in, you can only see a flicker of light that runs the length of the old bar. And a few familiar faces, like Gregory’s [the doorman and so much more]. Then I walked over to the other side, almost sliding down in my high heels from the small hump in the sidewalk in front of The Saloon door, to see the part of the building that faces Fresno Alley. On each side of the building, large



rounded hippie-like wooden letters stand out against a deep purple and say “1232 Grant.” But on the Fresno Alley side, the letters really stand out. And I looked up at the five windows above from Fresno

Alley—brothel windows no more. Most lights were on—small plants in one window. One white curtain was draping down and was held together by a band—looked like a ponytail. And it was very peaceful looking up.

And then I went inside and was greeted by smiling faces; there was Jessica and old midgetlike Millie in her dark blue coat at the bar, and a bunch of other regulars, the bartenders Augie and Huck, the writer John, and a few others. And there was Wendy with her beautiful smile playing with her fast fingers at the piano and singing, and there was Freund playing his ass off as always, strange ornate licks, and there was Kirk back there drumming away and clearly having the time of his life. And I took my place at the far end of the bar, crossed my booted legs, and leaned into the wood. I was there to enjoy the music just like everyone else.

And I looked up at the inexplicable Christmas tree that is perched for no apparent reason way up on a shelf to the right of the bandstand. It's been there for several years now—just a small unadorned green tree high up on a wall. Then I noticed to my right the strange long paintings of trees that transverse the windowless wall. These two paintings are covered in a smoky haze, and the willowy branches droop down and are made to look even more brackish because of the decades of dust and smoke. And I saw the great piano speakers up on the high shelves, speakers Myron picked out, above where the people dance, speakers that are rich and warm and have real punch.



And I saw the framed picture of Johnny Nitro on the wall underneath the main speaker. And I read the newspaper clipping taped to the wall next to Nitro's picture saying he

was "Beloved." It's true—Johnny Nitro was "beloved" and he was "The Ambassador of North Beach," and he helped us all—linked us up—hooked us up—gave us ideas—gave us an image—encouraged us. Nitro is still in the walls of The Saloon. I often see him enter from the front door when I am singing—see that grin.

And I began to think about all the players that have come through The Saloon to lay their souls down, letting the crowd, in turn, carry them into that dimension where music and people become one. On the rickety wooden plank of a stage (which is incidentally supported by two plastic crates), musicians like Boz Scaggs, Nick Gravenites (who wrote many of Janis Joplin's great songs and the famous "Born in Chicago," and who also played with the great Paul Butterfield), Mike Bloomfield, Luther Tucker, John Lee Hooker, John Cippolina (of Quicksilver Messenger Service), and Elvin Bishop have all laid it down at The Saloon.

And I began to think about the highlights of my singing career, where I felt the best in my life singing, where I felt my voice soar; it was always at The Saloon. How I used to sing in the beginning with Ben "King" Perkoff, saxophonist, on Sunday afternoons—"Soul Serenade"—and how it was like going back to the 1960s, every colorful character there. How the poet Jack Hirschman recited his work against the horn-splayed background of Chicago Blues Power; how Paul Kantner of Jefferson Airplane came in on weekends to sit and listen; how Ron Butkovich and Johnny Ace walked the bar and hammed it

up to the howling crowd. And still the cigarette girls come strolling in about midnight with their short skirts, their cleavage, and their colorful trays lit up with candles that frame their young faces. They make a most surreal spotlight in the dark.

Which brings me to another subject. Every house has its master. And the master creates the groove—or lack of one. In this case, the master is Myron Mu, and what a groove it is. Without Myron, there would be no Saloon, so I must give *him* the spotlight.

Myron is a jack of all trades and a master of every one.

On February 24, 1984, he reopened The Saloon doors with the help of Lisa Kindred. For 28 years, The Saloon has thrived under his stewardship. The business is so good that Myron does not need to advertise or even hire popular musicians on the weekends anymore because the word is out: it's the place to be for real blues. He, in fact, doesn't want a big name on the weekends because the place gets so packed that he worries about the 52-person limit mandated by the SF Fire Department.

And Myron Mu has steadily employed and supported, in more ways than one, what I consider to be the real great local blues players of San Francisco: Ben Perkoff, Ron Butkovich, Daniel Castro, Applejack Walroth, Lisa Kindred, Steve Freund, Ron Hacker, Jan Fanucchi, Brent Byers, Dave Workman, Wendy DeWitt, the young P.A. Slim, myself of course, and the irreplaceable Johnny Nitro, to name a few. All of these musicians would go completely insane unless they had a steady place to play. And these musicians all love Myron. And these musicians



will all be together marching down Grant Avenue at his funeral (hopefully a long, long time from now)—Mardi Gras-like—with the big brass band spilling clumsily

from the street onto the sidewalks. The musicians will be the mourners who show up and follow, crying our eyes out or silent, all stunned by the loss.

Priest, banker, savior, advisor, record producer, photographer, landlord, and employer.

Myron Mu *is* our priest. We confess things to him, tell him things that no other person knows about us; we don't know why we do this, but he listens and does not pass judgment. At 2:05 a.m., I am back there in that tiny

“office” behind the bar where only “family” are allowed, telling Myron things I can’t believe I am telling him. There, with the badly made counterfeit 20 dollar bills pinned to the wall as a warning; the notes taped to the tiny glass mirror, which is at the exact height of my eyes and read, “Please try and control the heavy pouring as it is costing us inventory and we all need to make a living here;” the flyers jumbled up behind a notebook; the pencils in the stray cup; the aspirin bottles; my makeup bag (which I will forget); and the bottles of call liquor behind us on shelves; this is where Myron and I have the most fun talking. He just listens and makes a comment of pointed intelligence now and again and we count the tips from the jar, the one dollar bills, and we place the bills in tiny rubber bands—stacks of 25—even though, after 28 years, he finally got a money counting machine, which amuses us both greatly, and we talk and make jokes. And I tell him what went wrong with the music and why. And I tell him what went right. And I tell him about the crowd and the characters and any trouble. And there is complete trust; I know Myron will do me right with the money. And Myron knows I will, in turn, do right by my band members. And we both know that it’s not about the money anyway.

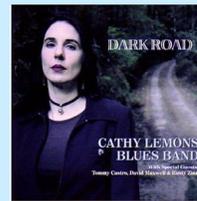
And Myron *is* our banker. Most of us musicians have no concept how to manage money and we are always broke. And he has loaned me money when I have been in dire straits on several occasions over the past 25 years. And I pay him back; sometimes it takes me a while. But I pay him back. And he has loaned money to others.

And Myron *is* our savior. Who did I call to pick me up at the hospital when I had a fractured ankle and I couldn’t afford a cab? Who do we *all* call? Myron Mu. Why? Because he cares: me, JoAnne (bartender of 24 years) Juce Garcia (before she got herself fired), Huck (another bartender of 25 years), Kristin (another bartender of many years), Lisa Kindred, and maybe even young P.A. Slim. We all call Myron. Why? Because he will come.

And Myron *is* our advisor. I always ask his opinion on band personnel. And he always has insight into the dynamics of personalities and how it all might play out on stage during a musical performance. And what is good for me, and what is bad for me. And he is inevitably right and it makes me mad every time.

And Myron *is* a record producer for many of us: 14 CDs to date on “The Saloon Recordings;” much of it done to perfection. And with a payoff: Ron Hacker ended up getting “Back Door Man” into a movie, “Twisted” with Andy Garcia, and Johnny Nitro ended up having one of his cuts used on a beer commercial.

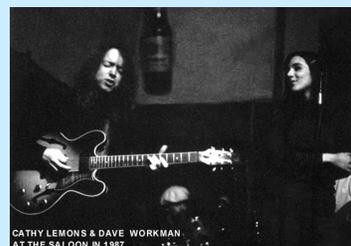
Over the years, Myron taught himself how to purchase and work digital recording equipment, 16 tracks to be precise, how to mic the drums and other instruments, how to make sure the drum cymbals are tuned, how to overdub voices, how to get a clean vocal sound that stands out, how to piece together the best vocal parts into one seamless song that sounds natural, how to correct pitch with sliders, how to create a long and perfect fade. And he learned how to create a synthesis with the musician so that the product becomes the vision of the artist. Not always the easiest thing to do; it requires a certain amount of respect on both sides.



And he *is* our photographer, and a fine one. Myron took all the photographs for my *Dark Road* CD; many of the shots are beautifully done and precise. I had a vision and he captured it after asking me about what I saw in my mind. I remember

drawing him a picture on a napkin and then boom, he got it. He went with it. He took the photographs for almost every CD project he has ever produced. And with great effect.

And he *is* our landlord, well not mine, but for many others over the years. There are six rooms above The Saloon and they are still being rented out. And for the most part, he rents to musicians: Johnny Nitro, Zanne Mack, P.A. Slim, and other characters, like the ex-stripper, Nancy Carroll, who lived above the Saloon until she died, or Rebel, the stubborn bartender/hustler who charmed us all and lived and died on her own terms. Rebel was most certainly protected and cared for by Myron after she became ill, like so many other musicians, tenants, and employees alike.



And he *is* our employer. I have been playing The Saloon since 1987. Every single month for 25 years, except once in 1997 when I went to see my father in Nebraska, I have had a

gig at this magical old bar. Every single month for 25 years! How many bar owners stand by their musicians like that? None except Myron Mu.

The Saloon is indeed our home away from home.

Photo Credits:

Page 15, top left: Outside the Saloon, photographer unknown, found on Yelp, courtesy of Cathy Lemons.

Page 15, bottom left: Lisa Kindred In Fresno alley outside the Saloon, 2010, by Ken Freeman.

Page 15, right: Myron Mu, photographer unknown, courtesy of Cathy Lemons.

Page 16, top left: December 2010 by Shaun Roberts.

Page 16, bottom left: At the Saloon, Steve Freund, Lisa Kindred, Juce Garcia, Wendy DeWitt, Myron Mu, Jan Fanucchi, Cathy Lemons, June 2007, from Cathy Lemons Archives.

Page 16, right: Outside the Saloon, with Johnny Nitro in the doorway; photographer unknown; courtesy of Cathy Lemons.

Page 17, left: Johnny Nitro, from www.sfblues.net.

Page 17, right: Ron Hacker, Daniel Castro, Jack Cohen, many others, at the Saloon, photographer unknown, courtesy of Cathy Lemons.

Page 18, bottom: Dave Workman and Cathy Lemons at The Saloon, 1987, by Scott Palmer.

REMEMBERING LOUISIANA RED (IVERSON MINTER)

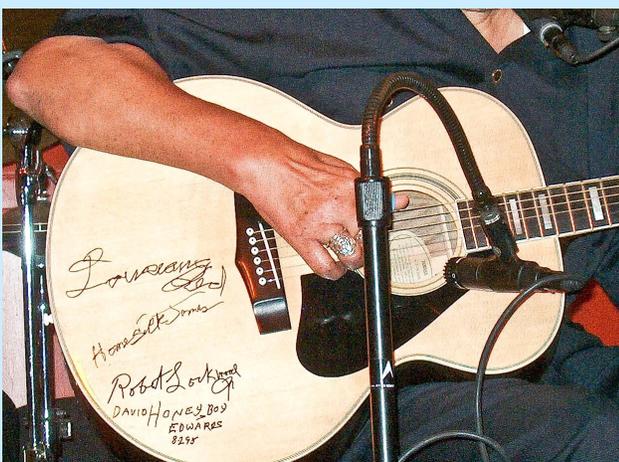
March 23, 1932 – February 25, 2012



At Biscuits and Blues, 2005, by Dorothy L. Hill



At The Little Fox, Redwood City, 2006, by Dorothy L. Hill



At Biscuits and Blues, 2005, by Dorothy L. Hill (check out the signatures!)



Louisiana Red and Rick Estrin, Alfred's, Memphis, Tennessee, May 2010, by Deb Lubin (that's Little Victor behind Red)

REMEMBERING JOHNNY OTIS

by David Mac, Blues Junction Productions (www.bluesjunctionproductions.com)

This article was originally printed in the online magazine, Blues Junction. It's the most complete summary of the life of Johnny Otis I've seen since he died on January 17, 2012 at the age of 90. He was such an important figure on the R&B scene in California, I thought you would enjoy this article.

Johnny Otis passed away on Tuesday, January 17, 2012, in the Los Angeles suburb of Altadena. He was 90 years old. To refer to Johnny Otis as a musician would be like calling Thomas Jefferson a politician. It would be like referring to Muhammad Ali simply as a prize fighter or Leonardo da Vinci as a painter. Thinking of Johnny Otis simply as a musician would be like thinking of Benjamin Franklin as a guy who flew a kite.

Johnny Otis was, in fact, an American Renaissance man. On the surface he would appear to be a bundle of



contradictions. He was a white man who became the embodiment of black culture. He was a big band leader who is considered a pioneer of rock & roll. He was a cutting edge musical innovator who hosted

his own "oldies" radio show. He was a blues man who was also a television star. He was a Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee who didn't much care for the genre. He was an urban hip cat who was also a country farmer.

He was also an accomplished chef, author, painter, sculptor, talent scout, and nightclub owner. He was a songwriter, arranger, and producer. He was a drummer, pianist, vibraphonist, and an occasional singer. He was a politician and a preacher. Oh yea.... the cat even sold his own brand of organic apple juice.

He was Johnny Otis and his is a story like no other. Born Ioannis Alexandros Veliotes to the parents of Greek immigrants in the northern California town of Vallejo, Otis grew up in nearby Berkeley. His parents ran a grocery store in a predominantly black neighborhood. At an early age, Otis embraced black culture.

"When I got near teen age, I was so happy with my friends and the African American culture that I couldn't imagine not being part of it," Otis told the *San Diego Union-Tribune* in 1991. Johnny Otis would live his entire life celebrating the soul of that culture.

In 1939, Otis heard the Count Basie Band at the San Francisco World's Fair. The impact of this experience was profound and Otis soon took up the drums. He went on to play blues with a local band in nearby west Oakland. Otis soon found himself playing in bands that traveled throughout the west. In 1941, he married his high school sweetheart, a black woman named Phyllis Walker. In 1943, Otis organized a group named after himself and partner Preston Love, called the Otis Love Band.

Still in his 20s, Otis started playing drums with big bands and jazz combos. He moved to Los Angeles to play in Harlan Leonard's Kansas City Rockets.

In 1945, Otis formed his first big band, a 16-piece ensemble that was the house band at the Los Angeles



nightclub, The Alabam, which was part of the burgeoning Central Avenue jazz and blues scene. "Man, you could go into one club and there'd be Lester Young jamming, go into another and you'd find

T- Bone Walker, and down the street Miles Davis would be blowing. Yeah, L.A. was happening." Otis told the *Los Angeles Times* in 1979.

Otis also worked as a studio drummer with a variety of artists. He actually played on sessions with the legendary tenor saxophonist Illinois Jaquet as well as Young. He played drums on the 1945 classic by Johnny Moore's Three Blazers, *Driftin' Blues*, sung by the group's pianist Charles Brown. Otis's big breakthrough under his own name was his take on Earle Hagen's *Harlem Nocturne*.

Driftin' Blues and Otis's take on *Harlem Nocturne* are both examples of a new sound that began to emerge in post-war America. This music would come to be known as rhythm and blues.

Johnny Otis was on the forefront of this new musical movement. The hybrid sound had the urgency of country blues and gospel combined with the sophistication of big band jazz music. It was played primarily in small combo

settings. This new sound could be heard blasting out of jukeboxes throughout black America. This music would influence the electric blues made in Chicago, St. Louis, Memphis, and elsewhere.

Big bands were, for the most part, no longer economically viable and country blues seemed a little out of step in the West Coast urban environment that had just entered the atomic age. The rhythm and blues that Johnny Otis championed was powerful, fun, sophisticated, and yet down to earth all at the same time. It would change the face of music forever, and then be all but forgotten.

In 1948, Otis and a partner opened the Barrelhouse Club in the Watts section of Los Angeles. Otis would pick players from open mic nights and through talent shows. Tenor saxophone great Big Jay McNeely was just such a find. McNeely told me last summer it was Johnny Otis that “discovered him” at an open mic night at the Barrelhouse Club and gave him his first big break.

He would also pick off musicians in traveling bands. Otis also used a staple of singers like Little Esther Phillips, Mel Walker, Devonia "Lady Dee" Williams, and others. Otis had formed the nucleus of the group that would eventually become one of the most popular barnstorming musical acts of the era.

Johnny Otis took the show on the road in what was called the California Rhythm and Blues Caravan. Otis and



his ensemble played his brand of music to large enthusiastic audiences both black and white from coast to coast. He was

also a hit in the studio, as he scored 15 top-40 hits on the rhythm and blues charts between 1950 and 1952.

His ability to find new talent and put them in the right musical situation was uncanny. He is credited with discovering songwriters Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller. He produced their song, *Hound Dog*, for Big Mama Thornton long before Elvis ever stepped foot in a Memphis recording studio.

In 1954, Johnny Otis met a 14-year old singing prodigy named Jamesetta Hawkins from Los Angeles. He took the young singer under his wing and recorded her first single *Wallflower*. He also gave her the stage name that was a variation of her first name. The legend of Etta James was born.



Otis quit touring in 1955 to spend more time with his family. He became a disc jockey with a popular radio

show that was broadcast out of Los Angeles for decades. The Johnny Otis Show was also syndicated in San Francisco. Otis also hosted his own local television show based in Los Angeles from 1954 to 1961 and started his own record label, continuing to record hits under his own brand, The Johnny Otis Show.

A talent scout for other labels, such as King/Federal out of Cincinnati and Don Robey’s Peacock Records based in Houston, his discoveries included Little Willie John, Hank Ballard, Jackie Wilson, and Johnny Ace. Otis even produced some of the earliest recordings by Little Richard.

In the late '50s, major labels recognized the market potential of rhythm and blues. Capitol Records courted Otis and eventually he succumbed to a lucrative offer and signed with the label. In the intervening years, he expressed the feeling that, by signing with Capitol, he felt like he was abandoning his black roots to make what he called “contrived rock and roll shit.”

In 1958, he wrote a song based on the Bo Diddley beat, “shave and a haircut...two bits.” The song *Willie and the Hand Jive* would be his only tune to “cross over” to the larger white market, even though he wrote and recorded the song as a vehicle to lampoon rock and roll. Audiences and radio programmers didn’t get the joke and the song was a hit.

It wasn’t too many years later that rhythm and blues was wiped off the airwaves and turntables by what was commonly referred to as the British invasion. As Otis told the *Los Angeles Times* in a 1994 interview: “The white boys from England came over with a recycled version of what we created. We were out of business, man.”

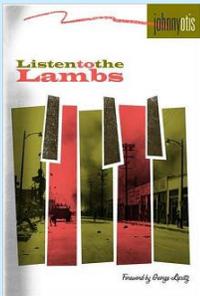
In 1969, he recorded an album for Kent Records under the pseudonym Snatch and the Poontangs. It was an adult blues album that contained sexually explicit lyrics. The three musicians on the record also used aliases, including a guitarist who went by the name of Prince Wunnerful.



Otis then cut two more blues albums for the Kent label with a more traditional lyrical content, *Cold Shot* in 1969 and *Cuttin' Up* in the '70s. Both records featured another young prodigy, teenage guitar sensation Johnny Otis, Jr., better known as Shuggie Otis. The young Otis was a true wunderkind and was, of course, Prince Wunnerful.

In 1970, the Johnny Otis Show knocked the audience off its feet at the Monterey Jazz Festival. The band leader and rhythm and blues impresario put together a program that included Big Joe Turner, Roy Milton, Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson, Esther Phillips, Pee Wee Crayton, Jimmy Rushing, Roy Brown, Ivory Joe Hunter, and others, including his son Shuggie. The *San Francisco Chronicle's* Senior Pop Music Correspondent Joel Selvin called that show, "One of the greatest musical performances I ever attended." For an afternoon anyway, the mostly white audience could see what had been taken away from them for the better part of the past decade. A few moments of this performance can be seen in the movie *Play Misty for Me*, the first film directed by Clint Eastwood. Eastwood incorporated the jazz festival in his shooting of the film, which also included footage of the Cannonball Adderly Quintet.

I think Selvin put it best when he said about Johnny Otis: "His music was like the man - direct, honest, playful, a little raunchy, hip and to the point. But his self-expression could not be contained by music alone."



In subsequent years, Otis expressed his creativity in other ways. In 1968, he wrote a book entitled *Listen to the Lambs*, which was by and large a reflection of race relations following the 1965 Watts riots. In addition to writing, he was a painter and sculptor.

For 10 years, Otis was the deputy chief of staff to a Democrat named Mervyn Dymally. During Otis's tenure with him, Dymally presided over the California State Legislature, became the State's first African-American Lieutenant Governor, and went on to serve in the U.S. Congress.

For a time, Otis turned his home in the West Adams District of Los Angeles into the nondenominational Landmark Church and became its pastor. He would often lead the choir, which at various times might include Etta James and Esther Phillips. Otis said that a lot of folks came out to see "Reverend Hand Jive," but the pastor took his work seriously and immersed himself in charitable work, which included feeding the homeless. The church would remain active until 1985.

Otis's next career move was borne out of his concern for the environment. He became an organic farmer in the rural northern California town of Sebastopol in Sonoma County. He also sold Johnny Otis Apple Juice at a roadside store, as well as produce grown at his nearby 5.5-acre farm. The store doubled as a nightclub where he could perform his music in front of sold out crowds on Friday and Saturday nights.

In the 1990s, Otis published three more books, *Upside Your Head! Rhythm and Blues on Central Avenue* (1993), *Colors and Chords* (1995), a collection of his paintings, cartoons, wood carvings, and sculptures, and *Red Beans & Rice and Other Rock 'n' Roll Recipes* (1997), a cookbook.

He continued to perform at blues and jazz festivals into the 21st century. The Johnny Otis Show still included Shuggie, as well as another son, Nick, who had been playing drums with his dad for years. Two grandsons, Lucky and Eric Otis, also played guitar with him.

In addition to his sons [which include a namesake, John Otis, also a drummer], he is survived by his wife of



70 years, Phyllis, two daughters, Janice and Laura Johnson, nine grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren, and a great-great-grandchild.

Call it West Coast blues, rhythm and blues, jump blues, or just great music. It is virtually impossible to imagine this music without Johnny Otis.

What people wanted to call his music, he said, was of no concern to him. "Society wants to categorize everything, but to me it's all African-American music," he told the *San Francisco Chronicle* in 1993. "The music isn't just the notes, it's the culture — the way Grandma cooked, the way Grandpa told stories, the way the kids walked and talked."

Johnny Otis also said, "I'm not suggesting our music is the only music, but I am suggesting that there are certain elements in America's culture that are so precious that it would be a shame for them to go down the drain."

I hope folks take the time and effort to celebrate the legacy of Johnny Otis with the same verve, dedication, and articulated intelligence that he had for this beautiful music. The Johnny Otis Show must go on.



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