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BRITISH BLUES

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BB review

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IT'S HAPPENING NOW!

TALKIN' BLUES

There is an increase in response to the blues in London at present. Presumably that is mirrored throughout the country. This observation doesn't lead to any particular belief that blues is going to become the next great fashionable cause of the trendy, nor of the media in general. Save us all from that! How well blues continues to be received depends on many variables, but to a certain extent, it should be possible to encourage support for the music through this magazine; certainly when combined with co-operation from all sides of the blues establishment.

If the scene could be better organised by way of a network that incorporates fans, journalists, promoters, agents, record companies, collectors and musicians, then the situation can only become healthier for the continuation of a sound blues following in this country.

There is a long history over here of support for blues; indeed it has been argued that British and European support, preceded and led to better support by

whites in America, with the resulting surge in recognition that black Americans had produced a great music. It certainly led to the chances we got, to see and hear live, performers of the stature of Muddy Waters, Howling Wolf, Little Walter, Sonny Boy Rice Miller Williamson, Arthur Crudup, Johnny Shines, Son House and so many others that were just names on record labels in the early days.

Such people we won't see again. The blues, though perhaps with stylistic changes, is still alive and successful. Let's ensure that it stays that way. This magazine is about the British Blues music scene, past and present, but will pay its proper respect to the reality that without the black Americans, there would be no blues scene anywhere. We shall need your support, so send in news of whatever is going on in your area, however infrequently it might happen. Bands, venues, promotions, local radio programmes, whatever it is, we'll include it in our efforts to consolidate the network of the blues.

BRITISH BLUES

*BB
review*

Editorial team:
Publisher:
Robert Bravington
Editor:
Graham Vickery
Art-Production Editor:
Angela Morse
Assistant Editors:
Tony Topham
Pete Moody
Advertising Manager:
Tom Nolan
Contributors:
Roger Pearce
Joe Louis
Peter Feenstra
Cilla Huggins
Front cover photo of Sam Kelly
by Angela Morse
Special thanks to all the bluesmen and women who've given their support to this project.
All enquiries to:
B.B. Review,
41, Bramley Road,
London, W10 6SZ
Advertising enquiries to:
Tom Nolan, Tel: 01-748 0579

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41, Bramley Road,
London W10 6SZ
Tel: 01-727 4053.

BOB'S EYE VIEW

Well, do you want serving then?

Bet you're expecting pertinent and intelligent comment on the current blues scene - (should that be 'Blues seen?') - as this publication appears to be run by a bunch of pun-drunk, sycophantic amateurs with a penchant for self-advancement and the development of their jaw muscles.

What's happenin' then? Sweet Fanny Adams - that's what! The British Blues Scene couldn't defend itself against an attack of wind. Guitar hero-worship continues... Clapton - well the cat's got furballs... yawn! Middle classes build a shrine to Belushi and let on Granddaddy was a field hand from the Delta. Megarock stars still attribute early success to blues (drugs, incest and horn-swallowing hypocrisy).

Blues is here people - Fay Maschler discovers Creole cooking - Praise the Lord, we're saved.

The British Blues Scene, with fewer affiliates than the Loan Sharks' Altruism League, defies oblivion by virtue of the cruddiness of the competition, not by its undoubted capacity to succeed. To play blues in Britain will ensure confinement to a lifetime of warm lager and poverty-stricken disenchantment.



Blues music, an anachronism based on cover versions of a musical era now defunct, is incomprehensible to the masses, while the knowledgeable teeter on the brink of self-indulgence. Why bother? Hip Hop, Rap, and associated crutt - that's why!

Show you care - buy a bluesman a drink, this week, and help preserve the species.

Last orders please!

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How many more years?

by Cilla Huggins

A few weeks ago I found some of my old school reports. A repeated comment was that I dreamed in class. I know exactly what I was dreaming about – music. Somewhere, somehow, I had heard the magic music which was, and still is, my obsession. Having been born into a musical and ‘collecting’ family I suppose it was inevitable that I should end up with those traits, but blues is hardly what my classically-minded parents had in mind.

Until 1961 I lived in a house next to a farm in the middle of Somerset. My earliest memories are of hearing music from the visiting fairs floating over the fields into my bedroom where I was supposed to be fast asleep... Little Richard, Fats Domino, Ray Charles... I didn't know who they were, but that was what I liked. Then there was the farmer's son who fancied himself as a rock 'n' roller and practised his singing and guitar playing in the dairy – a stone walled and floored room with a great echo – only yards from our house. I think this is when the basic blues form embedded itself into my head. I remember telling my piano teacher I wanted to play boogie woogie – the poor old dear told me to get on with my Mozart!

Radio also played an important part in my life – Saturday Club was great, and I occasionally managed to sneak out of bed to listen to Radio Luxembourg. I remember both Cliff Richard and Billy Fury announcing that something I liked was ‘an R&B number’. Still having no idea what ‘R&B’ stood for, I was uprooted in mid-'61 to Hertfordshire. It was a lot more hip, and taking a year or two to adjust to a more urban life, I sounded out sympathetic friends and the great blues adventure started in earnest. There were the early Blues LPs – Pye International – ‘The Blues Vol.1’ – ‘How Many More Years’ and ‘Smokestack Lightning’ by Howling Wolf. Heaven! This was *my* music. Whilst buying the first Little Richard London album in Musicland in Watford, another customer asked to hear a record. The sound knocked me out so much I waited for him to leave and then asked for the same record without having a clue what it was. It was ‘Shame, Shame, Shame’ by Jimmy Reed. I was hooked for life.



Cilla Huggins and Willie Johnson, Chicago, 1979 (Jim O'Neal)

The British boom was beginning. I saw the Stones a couple of times before their first LP was made, but my main stomping ground was the Big Beat Club in Harrow Weald where The Yardbirds and Kinks were the regulars. I remember Eric Clapton with a crew cut and slip-on-shoes – so different from the Beatle-cut and boots image prevalent at the time.

Then I graduated to the London scene. I wasn't allowed there at night so Colyers/Studio 51 in Great Newport Street on Sunday afternoons was it. The resident Downliners Sect really taught me a lot because they would always credit their songs to the original artists and I decided at that point to get as many original-version records as I could. I'm still pursuing that ideal now! The Downliners were really good guys – funny too – and always willing to talk about where they found their songs. L'Auberge in Richmond was a great cafe – they had blues EPs on the jukebox and that's where I first heard ‘Nursery Rhyme’ by Bo Diddley.

Bob Dylan and Joan Baez came on the scene. All my friends suddenly became folkies as I remained a dedicated blueser. I was at Colyers the afternoon Ray Sone, Downliners' harp player, announced he was leaving to play folk. I still haven't forgiven my friend who turned to me and said, ‘Ha ha’. End of friends – from now on I was definitely on my

own. I buried myself in the radio – Mike Raven was a godsend – and I continued to buy records – mainly by mail order. Two major things I remember from 1964 were first, *not* being allowed to go and see Sonny Boy Williamson because my parents just knew I'd never make the last bus home; and secondly, armed with my French exchange girl as company, escaping to the Marquee to see Little Walter!

The show had Rod Stewart, Long John Baldry and the Chris Barber band, followed by Walter who blew me away. Astoundingly Jimmy Witherspoon and Memphis Slim were in the audience and both did guest spots. How we made it from Wardour Street to Baker Street station in five minutes to catch the last train home I'll never know.

College years intervened – barren owing to total lack of money, but we used to get Fleetwood Mac at the dances and I remember having an involved discussion with Jeremy Spencer about Elmore James. I was still pretty much on my own musically but thanks to Mike Raven I did become a subscriber to **Blues Unlimited**, which opened up a much wider blues world to me.

A major turning point came when I found the Howling Wolf Crown LP – with only the front half of its cover – in a secondhand shop. There, on ‘Houserockin’ Boogie’, Wolf said, ‘Play that guitar Willie Johnson, till it smokes!’. That was the answer to

How many more years? — continued

my lingering question as to who was the phenomenal guitarist on 'How Many More Years'. Willie Johnson became my obsession.

The chronology of events around this time escapes me. I went to several of the original American Folk Blues Festivals. The legendary names abounded. What a pity young fans of today will never see the likes of T-Bone Walker, Bukka White,

go freelance in partnership with my husband Mick coincided most unfortunately with Mike Leadbitter's death in November 1974. By early 1975 I was typesetting and pasting-up **Blues Unlimited** and this lasted until the end of 1984.

Blues involvement was total. In May 1978 our first excursion to Chicago took place. Walking into a real, Chicago club was an experience



Billy Gayles, of Ike Turner's *Kings of Rhythm*, with Cilla in Holland, 1986 (André Hobus)

Hound Dog Taylor, Magic Sam... I saw Wolf a few times – most memorably at the Regent Street Polytechnic where he was backed by the John Dummer band featuring Dave Kelly. I was taken aback by Wolf's forthright, down-to-earth stage act. I came face to face with him later at the perennial Colyers at a Skip James benefit. His huge hulk was blocking the tiny exit from the ladies' loo and I had to tap him on the back, 'Excuse me, Mr Wolf'. I shook hands with him. I've never, ever, seen such enormous hands. He was most congenial but definitely didn't want to talk about his band members. Ironically in later years when Wolf himself was ailing, Bob Hall organised a benefit for him at the very same venue. I took some unissued tapes to play.

In 1971 I got to know Mike Leadbitter, editor of **Blues Unlimited**, when he moved to London. He spurred me into doing original research myself and I spent hours in the US Embassy reference library seeking out details of obscure but highly relevant blues radio stations, and writing letters. This was done in over-long lunch hours and as my blues research activities increased it pointed the way to leaving my full-time job at a printers. My decision to

I shall never forget. The music just seemed out of this world. The main purpose of the visit was to seek out Willie Johnson which, with a lot of help from Dick Shurman, we finally did. Willie was living in a dingy basement on the West Side, but, having overcome his shock at being invaded by two Europeans, he graciously gave me a very long interview, which to my shame, remains unpublished.

1979 saw us in the States again, and included a trip down South to St Louis, Memphis, West Memphis, Arkansas and Mississippi. It was at this point that it seemed a good idea to turn the obsession into a business and thus was formed Rooster Blues Records, with myself and Mick in partnership with Jim & Amy O'Neal, editors of Chicago's **Living Blues** magazine. The exchange rate was most favourable and there followed successful sessions by Eddy Clearwater ('The Chief', R2615), Larry Davis at Oliver Sain's studio in St Louis ('Funny Stuff', R2616) and in 1982 on our next trip Stateside, Carey & Lurrie Bell ('Son Of A Gun', R2617) and Magic Slim ('Grand Slam', R2618). In 1980 we brought Clearwater and Carey Bell to this country for a couple of gigs. They were fabulous shows, helped

by superb backing by The DeLuxe Blues Band. On the strength of the band's performance, they were signed to Virgin for their first LP (the first live digital recording!) which was made at the Half Moon, Putney. Rooster released assorted singles and EPs too, but with the falling £ it became too much of a burden to continue financing new sessions and battling as a tiny indie against a hostile, incestuous music business. So in 1985 we decided to put it on hold.

However, in the middle of that year fresh life was breathed into my blues world by the formation of a new magazine, ***Juke Blues**, of which I am co-editor with John Broven and Bez Turner. There were rumblings of a serious blues revival here with bands like The Big Town Playboys creating new interest in the wake of Dr Feelgood, The Q-Tips and The Inmates. The magazine devotes itself to the original, black American artists, who *still* do not receive their due credits elsewhere. After all, if it weren't for them there would never have been any British blues bands and consequent superstars!

The time is right for a whole new generation of fans to want to know about the originators. Look at the scene now! Just about every band playing the London pub/club scene is a blues or R&B band and if they merely mention the originators of their material, hopefully their audiences will be as inquisitive as I was. Only a few days ago I witnessed a very young band playing almost exactly the same repertoire as The Downliners Sect did 24 years ago! Wonderful.

Oh, by the way, if you're all dead nousey about how I, as a lady, got involved in what is principally a man's preserve, I don't know. I never even thought about it until it was pointed out to me. I was born with it I suppose, and that's something I can't help. To their credit, all the men I've worked with have accepted me as one of the gang.

That's a mere fraction of the whole story but as the first 'victim' of this new magazine I hope it gives an insight into another side of British blues life. I wish all at **BBR** every success with their venture.

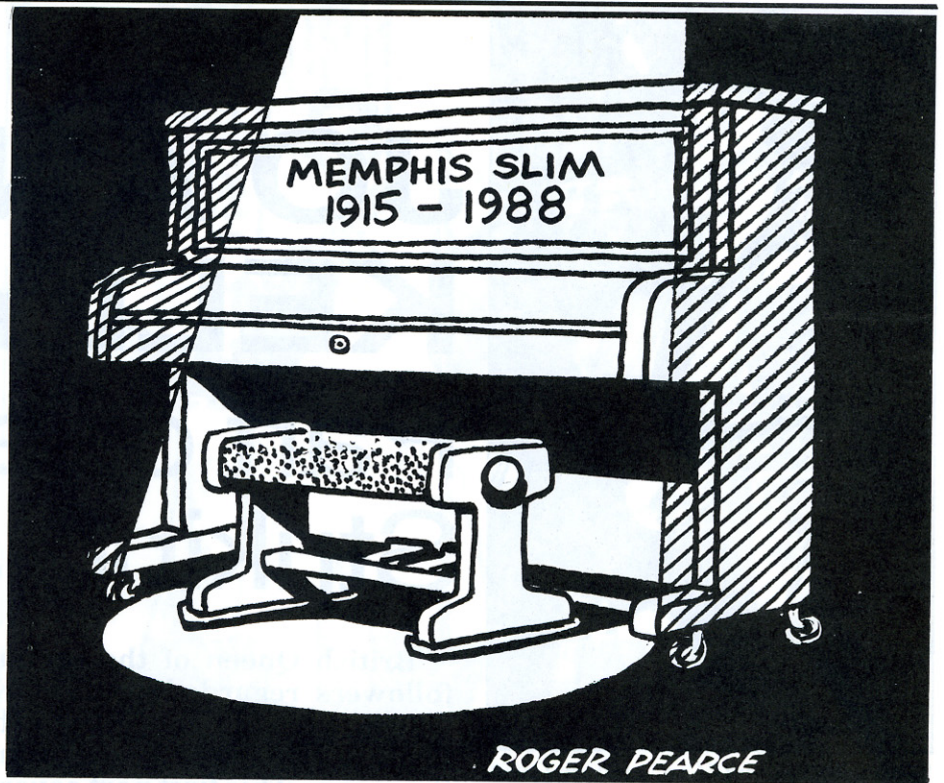
***Juke Blues** magazine is published quarterly and the current issue is no. 11. A sample copy costs £2.25 or a 4-issue, 1-year subscription costs £9.00, including postage. Write to P.O. Box 148, London W9 1DY.

Memphis Slim

The recent death in Paris, of Memphis Slim, occasioned a number of obituaries in the national press. Here was a man who'd worked with Big Bill Broonzy in the States and, like his partner, had tasted the pleasures of Europe. He returned promptly and seemingly liked things enough to take up permanent residency on this side of the Atlantic. His approach to audiences changed; whether the move forced the change or it would have happened anyway, we don't know. The point is that Slim made a successful transition and never seemed too inclined to go back to America permanently.

His contribution to the Blues scene here was easily forgotten at times, when his later performances became blasé, but we lost our last chance to catch his live set, when his scheduled appearance at London's 100 Club was cancelled through illness. We now know just how ill he was. We've lost yet another link with the era of classic Chicago Blues. I wonder who else we'll never get to see again? Perhaps we should do more to support the musicians who are still living and occasionally visit here.

The turnout at some gigs of older blues artists from the States, has been poor. People who have been here previously may not be as dynamic and fit as



they were, but they can still be inspiring at times, given strong support. We owe it to them to give more than a token response.

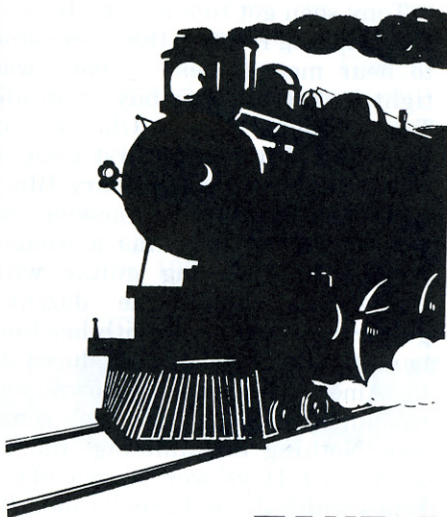
It's good to see that younger people are coming into the Blues and being successful, but trendiness doesn't last. The older, blues players can still provide an honest gut reaction – and do so when given the chance. They deserve as much support as the newer artists, if Blues is to continue. No-one enjoys the sight of

ROGER PEARCE

someone who should be able to retire, being dragged over here and patronised or exploited, but ignoring someone because they haven't reproduced their best recently, could lead to regret at the missed opportunities later.

What surprises me most of all though, is the sparsity of British Blues musicians in some of these audiences. Are they really too busy gigging, or do they think they've learned it all?

Graham Vickery

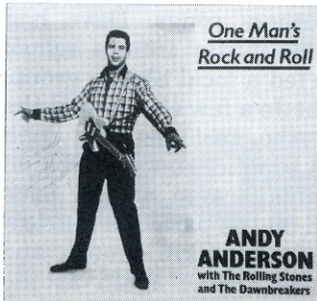


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'When will I Be Loved?' Corton Holiday Camp Concert, Summer 1959 (Jo Ann Kelly)

To set the scene, we need to go back to the turn of the century, by which time Skiffle-type bands had become part of American rural life. This exciting musical form was played mainly by southern negroes, who, determined to play Jazz but unable to afford proper instruments, made music with something less expensive, such as a washboard, kazoo, jug, home-made string bass, along with guitar, banjo and sometimes fiddle. It was Jazz of sorts, but labelled 'Hokum' – American Indian for 'imitation'. Skiffle was on its way.

By the early 'fifties, a Traditional Jazz scene had become established in Britain. Throughout the country a strong Jazz Club circuit regularly presented live performances. Some of these bands, such as Ken Colyer's Jazzmen and the Crane River Jazz Band, began 'experimenting', by presenting a Skiffle set within their repertoire. Another band pioneering this idea was the Chris Barber Jazz Band. The band added a mixture of traditional Skiffle and work song material to their Jazz sets. Lonnie Donegan, the band's banjo player, would switch to guitar and sing the vocals for this part of the programme. He'd be backed by Chris Barber on string bass and Beryl Bryden on washboard. Lonnie's subsequent rise to stardom became a musical inspiration for much of Britain's youth.

In the Kelly family home in Streatham, South London, where Jo Ann grew up along with her younger sister Susan and brother Dave, musical development had already

JO ANN KELLY

By Pete Moody

Part one: Striking a Chord

'British Queen of the Country Blues' is how British Blues followers regarded Jo Ann Kelly by the mid-'seventies. Involved with the music from the early 'sixties and continuing through two major Blues booms, Jo Ann Kelly is still wearing the crown. This first part covers her formative years.

started with Rock and Roll. Skiffle records were soon added to the environment.

One of Jo's influential musical memories was formed in the late 'fifties. Returning home from a Summer holiday camp the family stopped at a cafe. As Jo entered, she heard the sound of a juke box, around which was gathered a group of local 'Teddy' boys and girls. Fourteen-year-old Jo, intrigued by the sound, asked them about the music. It was 'Lucille' by Little Richard. After this, the record collecting began – Little Richard, Buddy Holly, early Elvis Presley and the Everly Brothers.

The following Summer, at the same holiday camp, the Kellys took the opportunity to perform in the talent competition, where they did Everly Brothers songs. Dave had learned some guitar from a school friend who led a local Skiffle group. Dave taught Jo a few chords and she picked up the rest herself. With their home practice and spurred on by the holiday camp action, each was started on the path of a musical career. Jo got into Skiffle music and next Summer, 1960, again at the holiday camp talent competition, they performed 'Rock Island Line'. Lonnie Donegan's brand of Skiffle had become a major influence. It had Blues roots. It had rhythm. It had the aura of stardom.

At the same time, Dave was learning trombone at school and, in search of Jazz records for his studies, found himself in Dave Carey's Swing Shop in Streatham. Specialising in imported American records,

the Swing Shop had established an enthusiastic clientele since the 'forties. At these record shop visits, Dave found the music for his studies – Jelly Roll Morton, Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith. Before long Jo and Dave were digging deeper into the more obscure records, unearthing Robert Johnson, Son House and Charley Patton – Delta Blues. Another regular visitor to the shop was Tony McPhee who was already playing guitar and collecting these same Blues records.

Tony soon got to know the Kellys. By swapping records, they were able to hear more Blues – money was tight – they couldn't buy them all. Tony bought 'Blues Classics by Memphis Minnie' (the first issue of Chris Strachwitz's legendary Blues label) and lent it to Jo knowing she would like it. Here was a woman singing and playing guitar with tremendous style. The dazzling guitar runs and duets with her husband, Little Son Joe, introduced Jo to America's foremost downhome woman of the Blues. Minnie's songs like 'Nothing In Rambling' and 'In My Girlish Days' were a style of the Blues which Jo could really identify with. Jo Ann's Blues singing and guitar playing, developed during these formative years, were to last her in good stead.

In 1962 Bob Glass, who worked in the Swing Shop, introduced Jo Ann to Bob Hall who was already an accomplished piano player. They were the ideal partners for an acoustic Blues duo. The Trad Jazz scene was continuing its 'fifties momentum, but Skiffle sets were

changing the music scene. The Interval Spots which previously the Jazz musicians themselves had performed, were now being taken over by other musicians; musicians who had taken Skiffle a stage further. Jo Ann and Bob Hall were two such performers and, with their combined talents, they reproduced the classic Blues songs of Bessie Smith and Rossetta Tharpe, with Bob on piano, and Jo on vocals.

By 1963 Trad Jazz clubs were tailing off. 'This Blues' had caught on. Rhythm and Blues clubs began to spring up, not only at established Jazz outlets, but also at specific R&B venues. The Kelly/Hall duo had become long-established Interval performers at one such Jazz club, the 'Star' public house in Croydon. This was one of the pubs which R&B promoter Giorgio Gomelsky was interested in as another possible venue for his 'Crawdaddy' club. By the Summer of 1963 the 'Star Crawdaddy' had opened. Giorgio had brought to Croydon his 'most blues-wailing Yardbirds', electric Chicago Blues.

The R&B scene hadn't developed from the Skiffle bands overnight. In fact Barber-Band-associates, Cyril Davis and Alexis Korner, were major catalysts and in playing their brand of Chicago Blues, had led the way for the next generation.

The Yardbirds' music at the Star was loud, hypnotic and authentic. Jo's reaction was that 'It was wonderful stuff'. The acoustic sets with Bob continued, but Jo's immediate ambition was to try an amplified performance with the Yardbirds. Manager Giorgio Gomelsky gave her the opportunity to sit in with them at their Star residency. Her singing was received enthusiastically by Keith Relf. Jo can vividly remember Giorgio taking her to a practice session with the Yardbirds in 1963 at the Richmond



'The Skiffle Group' Corton Holiday Camp 1960. Dave Kelly and Jo (at the microphone) with unknown holidaymaker accompaniment (Jo Ann Kelly)



Crawdaddy. The Yardbirds had done their rehearsal for the day but ran through 'Baby What You Want Me To Do', playing it the Jimmy Reed way, whilst Jo sang the Everly Brothers' arrangement. Eric Clapton, in a somewhat joking mood, was driven to mimic the Everly Brothers.

The Yardbirds were 'going places'. Jo too was on her way, but in another direction – towards the next stage of her Blues career.

Part two of 'Jo Ann Kelly', by Pete Moody, will appear in our next issue. Don't miss it!

'In My Girlish Days' (Jo Ann Kelly)

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I was asked to write this article on a fellow musician, now deceased, who was more like family than just a friend. We first met at the age of eleven, in a tent in a cold field somewhere in Surrey, both members of the same Sea-scout troop from Kingston-upon-Thames.

At that age, I was not to know that the young Tony 'Duster' Bennett would become a giant of the blues in England. His contribution to British blues has been greatly underestimated and I would agree with an article published some while ago, that Tony's music was 'criminally neglected' at that time. I have known any number of musicians who are regarded by some people today as being on a divine level. However, if Tony had lived, I feel that his contribution and inspiration to music would have led him to heights far in excess of some who have survived.

The blues enhanced Tony's life in his early teens. We both attended Saturday morning art school in Kingston from the age of thirteen (1961) and became close friends. He became fascinated by the music I was playing and listening to. I was surprised to find that not only could he play piano, but could also play Bach fugues on the chromatic harmonica. Of course it did not take him long to pick up the styles of Hammie Nixon, Sonny Terry and Jesse Fuller. Soon, to our amazement, he was rattling out 'them' blues on piano, guitar, mandolin and an old banjo from the still-life cupboard at art school. Most of all, his voice was a 'natural' and he sang blues with an unparalleled feeling for that time.

Duster Bennett

REMINISCENCES OF TONY 'TOP' TOPHAM

A permanent conflict in Tony's life was the battle with his evangelical upbringing. Although it caused such conflict, I still feel that his strong belief made him a person of great sincerity and generosity.

FIRST TASTE OF POWER

However, his conscience could be put aside and we would sneak into pubs to jam. I can remember a seething public bar on a Saturday night brought to a halt, spellbound by his solo version of 'Fox Chase'. On tasting this power, he was hooked.

In 1963 we entered Epsom School of Art on a full-time basis and in 1965, Guildford. Life at art school was based around the important matters – the latest blues releases; what records to bid for in American auction lists; had we won the Doctor Clayton or the Lonnie Johnson, etc?

Will Shade, The Memphis Jug Band, Tampa Red's Hokum Band and, probably dearest of all to Tony, Gus Cannon and Blind Willie Johnson, were forming part of the every-

day ('I have the blues') life. We used to argue – Was Buddy Guy better than B.B.King? (A note from 'Duster' in 1968 reads: 'When I first heard B.B.King, I thought Buddy Guy was better, then the other day I started to sing... "I want to write a letter..."'), but for all this, playing was the most important thing. You could not turn him off.

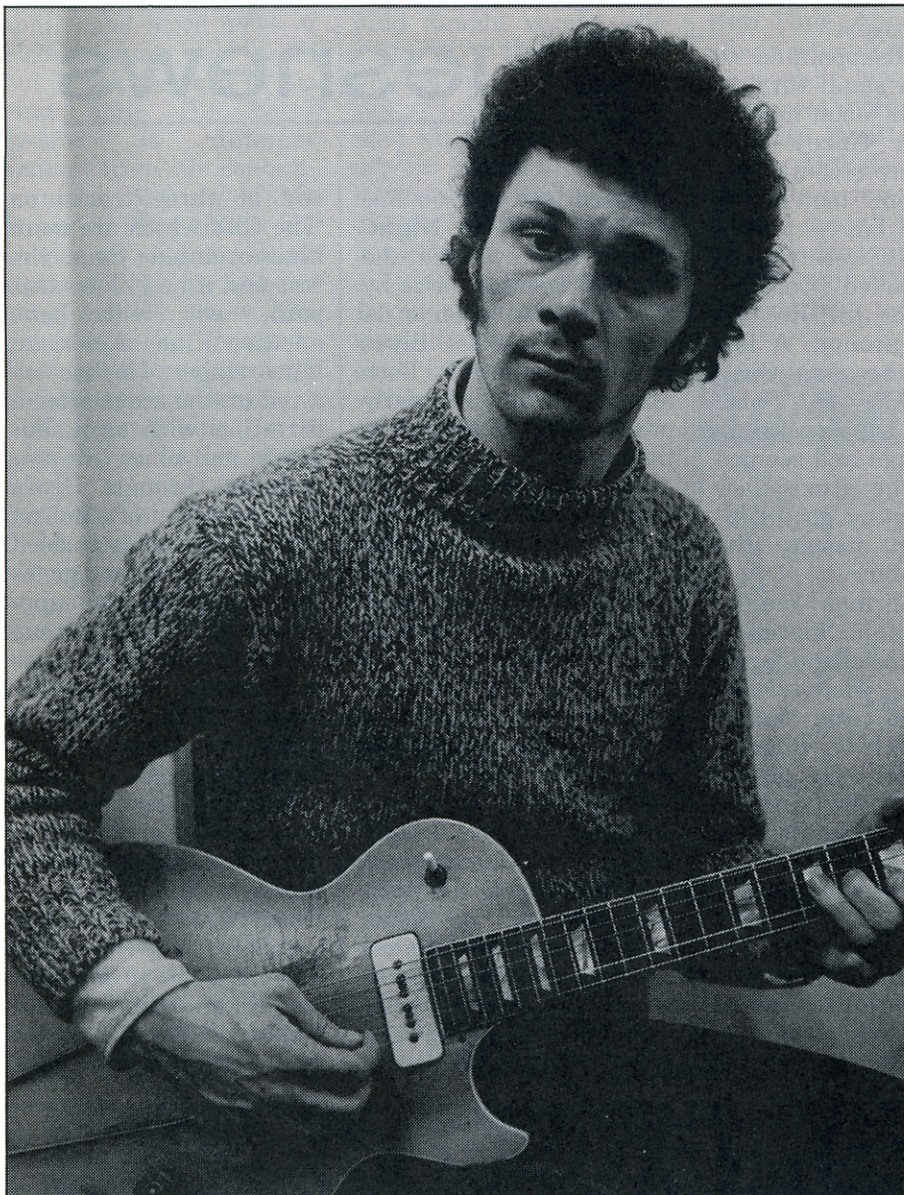
He bought a Russian seven-string-guitar for thirty-five shillings (£1.75) and played that guitar night and day, on the bus, in class... everywhere. Kingston bus station waiting room was a regular venue at 4pm weekdays. In fact even his eating habits, especially the devouring of apples and pies, resembled nothing so much as the playing of his chromatic harmonica! I used to arrange blues bands for dances at both Epsom and Guildford, and Tony began to go 'electric'. Jimmy Page came and sat in one night. The strains of Muddy and Earl Hooker could be heard all over Epsom with Jimmy's excellent slide playing on 'Little Brown Bird'.

ONE-MAN BAND

The first serious venture on his own was 'The Jericho Jug Band', and it was under this name that he made his first recording. It was an excellent group and played at many venues, including Soho's 'Les Cousins'. The next venture was a one-man band, a concept derived after listening to Joe Hill Louis, Juke Boy Bonner, Jimmy Reed and Slim Harpo. The solo appearances were often augmented with Tony Williams on bass, Duster's wife Stella on vocals and sometimes myself on guitar.

We were privileged to be joined by Peter Green on Fender six-string bass and recorded the album 'Bright Lights' (from which also came the single 'Bright Lights, Big City') live at Godalming in Surrey. Tony was signed to Blue Horizon records by the Vernon brothers and became





Photos from author's collection.

(Jon Frost)

close to Peter Green, who had great respect for him. Peter always said that he felt evil when Tony was around; presumably because Tony emanated a saintly quality – for the blues at least. Tony's albums for Blue Horizon were 'Smiling when I'm Happy', 'Bright Lights' and '12 Dbs.' plus many singles including the brilliant 'I'm going to wind up ending up, going to end up winding up with you'.

One of my favourite memories is of Tony and I going very early in the morning to Heathrow airport, sometime in 1969, to welcome our idol, B.B.King, to Europe for the first time. With records clutched under arms, we looked the part...traditional blues teenyboppers. 'B' was charming, generous – and somewhat surprised. He invited us to his rehearsal at the Albert Hall that afternoon. What a thrill as we were actually allowed in – he'd remembered!

It seemed as if everybody was at that concert in the evening. Janis Joplin was just two seats away,

dancing throughout. Not only did we have tears in our eyes that night, so too did the 'King'. He was overawed by the response. This must have been one of the most moving experiences of our lives.

AMERICAN TOUR

For Tony, things began to move. He was asked to tour with John Mayall in America and recorded an excellent single, 'Just Like A Fish' (Junior Parker) and 'Why I Chose To Sing The Blues' (Ray Charles) with expert New York soul session men. He also met a pianist who had been with B.B.King.

When Duster returned home, we planned to achieve our ultimate blues band together with these guys, however I became seriously ill, an illness which lasted two years. In hospital, I had to say no to the project. Tony went on to other things and this is where my involvement ceased for a time, as we did not see each other for another eighteen months. He went to Australia with

Bad Company and was about to launch a project with Jimmy Page. He recorded with Martha Valez, Eric Clapton, Peter Frampton and the Yardbirds and toured with B.B.King. That however, is another story.

I will conclude with the fact that on the night of 26th March, 1976, after a gig in the Midlands with Memphis Slim, Tony, driving his Transit alone, fell asleep at the wheel and was tragically killed. He left a widow, Stella, and three small children, with a fourth on the way. This catastrophe has left his family and friends deeply numbed to this day.

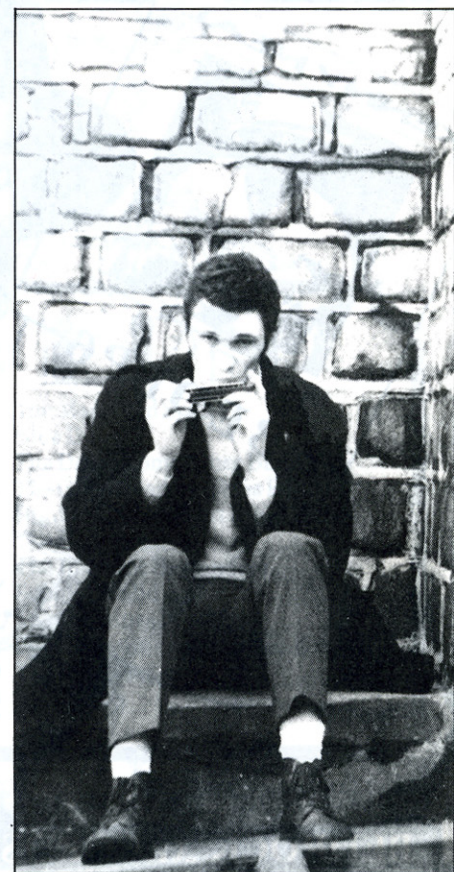
I will also add that I fail to understand why his widow has never received royalties for his music (which is available in shops still) and if royalties are due, it's never too late to release them. I'm sure that those responsible will enlighten us. However, we do have his blues and the life within it. Enjoy it, for this is the best way to remember Tony. His lust for life and the innocent quality portrayed in his records, are a true portrait of the man.

TONY TOPHAM

'When I first heard B.B.King I thought Buddy Guy was better, then the other day I started to sing "...I want to write a letter..."'

Tony (Duster) Bennett '68

(Inscription on back of photo, to Tony Topham)



Big Joe Duskin is nearing the end of his current tour, after doing twenty gigs. I saw him in the 100 Club in London at the beginning of his stint and enjoyed his show more than I had the first time he was over here. It seemed to me that he'd thought about his last tour and revised some of his approach to his sets.

I remember in particular, one moment in the middle of his rendition of 'Key to the Highway', when he suddenly powered through on vocal, and took the whole number up another notch in an apparently effortless manner. He certainly demonstrated that he's got something to offer, given the chance.

The audience had increased compared to his previous 100 Club appearance, due no doubt to the Arena Television programme a while back. The crowd certainly seemed to be enjoying themselves but I wonder how many of them would have been there without

the TV exposure?

I was disappointed to see such a small turnout at the Half Moon in Putney when **Carey Bell** played there recently. He didn't seem too happy himself but played reasonably well, given that he looked tired. He recorded for JSP Records this time around. A few days later, he was at Gaz's club in Gossips, Soho, backed by the **Joe Louis Blues Kings** and seemed to enjoy the atmosphere better, playing good Chicago Harp, despite the occasional hiccup.

Which brings me to another slight hiccup – the problems of similarity in names – such as **Joe Louis** and **Joe Louis Walker**. This led to some confusion for a few people but by now they will be aware that Joe Louis Walker is the American over here at present, doing a promotion tour for his second Ace album.

The album is 'The Gift' and was recorded in Los Angeles, following Joe Louis Walker's first LP

Bluesnews

released last year on Ace – 'Cold Is The Night' which was awarded the Big Bill Broonzy Prize by the French Academie du Jazz for the Best Blues recording of 1987. Both albums were originally produced for Hightone in the States.

I'm sure that the latest album will already be selling as a result of the second tour. The Memphis horns are in attendance, which doesn't exactly thrill me, but will please some people. I find that these sort of line-ups tend to get in the way of the songs.

This apart, there is enough variation on the album to demonstrate that Joe can do the business and will be something to hear live. He has been here before so will have worked out what suits European and British audiences. There are

two or three tracks on 'The Gift' which are more blues-oriented than the rest and if he follows this path, we will have another fine American blues singer. He has arrived on the scene after a flirtation with rock, but gospel and blues are now winning through. Given the success of Robert Cray, it is a difficult decision to make: do you go for the contemporary approach, or do you pursue your own path in the hope that your uniqueness becomes fashionable? I think Joe Louis Walker deserves success.

Finally, I must mention another performer who is going to have no problem. **Kenny Neal**, son of **Rafal Neal** the Louisiana harpman, will be over here in June to promote his album 'Bio on the Bayou' released here on **Bedrock Records**. We

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shall have more news of Kenny in our next issue, but I look forward to his visit here. His background is different enough from his contemporaries, because of his father's long-time involvement with the music scene. I think he has decided exactly where he's going to make his mark. He's certainly got enough ability and experience.

Kenny's album is a powerful indication of his talent. It was recorded just after his father had finished his own recent album, in Baton Rouge and shows Kenny's influences with a variety of songs, many of them autobiographical. He had played rock, but the blues won out again. Apart from a work-song reconstruction in the studio with a friend, there is a downhome number with references to **Slim Harpo, Jimmy Reed and Lazy Lester**. Most of the other tracks are in a more up-to-date vein, but blues-based throughout. The backing drives along be-

hind tough vocals, the guitar gives the necessary tension and keyboards, sax and drums drive like mad when necessary. The album includes modern harmonica work, with effects, as well as the downhome style. He should be a great live act. In one of his numbers, he sings that he woke up to find himself alone. He won't be for long, if he sticks to this style of performance.

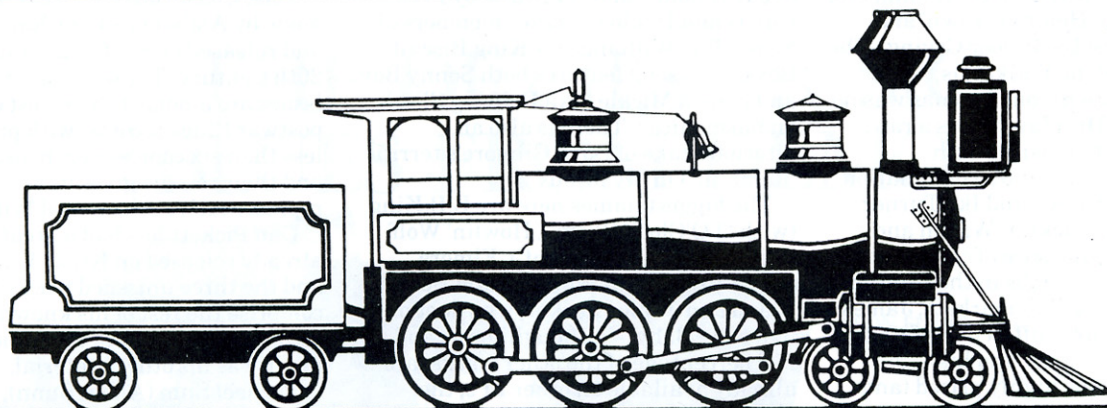
Incidentally, his label Bedrock Records, is a new company, small at present but building up a catalogue. They are interested in working British bands too, so check their advert (opposite page) for the address. Their releases so far include **Root Boy Slim, The Midnight Creepers, Noble 'Thin Man' Watts, Canned Heat** live in Australia and now, **Kenny Neal**.

Charlie Musselwhite has an album out on 25th on Blue Horizon. BLU H005, recorded live at Cambridge Folk Festival with **Dave Peabody** and

Bob Hall. Another harp album which has been out for a while now is **Andy J. Forest's 'Harp on a Hot Tin Roof'** on Appaloosa, AP056. Although this has a big horn section, it doesn't get in the way of some top harp.

Joe Louis Walker continues his tour: April

12th, Sheffield Take Two Club; 13th, Manchester Band On The Wall; 14th, Hull Spring Street Theatre; 15th, Wickham, Hants. Old Boars Head; 16th, London Town & Country Club; 17th, Exeter, Tiffany's.



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- 18 The Jivers
- 21 The Bluescasters
- 22 The Big Road Blues Band
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- 24 The A.M. Blues Band
- 25 The Bop Brothers Blues Band
- 28 The Giles Headley Blues Band

29 Blue Stew

30 Big Joe Louis and his Blues Kings

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- 8 Michigan Avenue
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- 12 The Jivers
- 13 The Big Road Blues Band
- 14 Big Joe Louis and his Blues Kings

15 The Mean Red Spiders

- 16 Blue Duke
- 19 The Down Home Blues Band
- 20 The Giles Headley Blues Band
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RECORD ROUNDUP

with Joe Louis

Welcome to the first in a series of articles in which some current Blues record releases will be discussed, starting with the latest offerings from Ace Records. Ace have, over the past five years, been putting out some of the best records around, and 1988 finds them continuing in similar fashion.

'BAY AREA BLUES BLASTERS' - Various Artists (Ace CHD 224)

The Bay Area of San Francisco and Oakland was the base for a number of great singers during the 1940s and 50s - men like James Reed, Jimmy Wilson, Johnny Fuller and Jimmy McCracklin, who recorded some of the finest of all postwar Blues records, with Wilson's classic 'Tin Pan Alley' being the prime example of the Oakland style. While Blues recordings from almost everywhere else in the USA have been reissued steadily since the 1960s, this area has been inexplicably neglected, and, therefore, the release of this LP, compiled from the vaults of Modern Records, has to be one of the Blues events of the year.

One of the major figures of the Oakland scene was Lafayette Thomas, who was much in demand for his distinctive and exciting guitar playing. He opens Side 1 with two vocal numbers, 'Jumpin' At The Heart Of Town' and 'Standing In The Back Door Crying'. The influence of T-Bone Walker, is, predictably, present, but Thomas was no mere imitator. His playing has a raw, attacking edge to it, with much stringbending - imagine a combination of 'Gatemouth' Brown and Ike Turner.

Although McCracklin, Wilson and Fuller all saw a measure of commercial success in the late 1950s in the Rhythm & Blues or Rock & Roll markets, James Reed seems to have suffered the fate of so many Blues singers, and his recordings are now highly prized (and priced!) collector's items. He possessed an outstanding voice, which makes his slow Blues, like 'Dr. Brown' and 'This Is The End', the highlights of this LP for me. As an added bonus, there are two takes of the latter song, one appearing for the first time.

Roy Hawkins was another of the West Coast's best artists, and his four selections here include the previously unissued 'It's Hard' and his tremendous original version of 'The Thrill Is Gone', later a big hit for B.B.King.

Jimmy McCracklin's band, the Blues Blasters, make their contribution with the instrumental 'Blues Blasters Boogie' and two members of the band, Johnny Parker and Pee Wee Parham, each have two vocal tracks.

Ace have plans to reissue more material in a similar vein, with LPs by Johnny Fuller and Jimmy McCracklin (who has just had some of his Peacock

recordings issued on the Ace LP 'Blast 'Em Dead' [CHD 219]), and these are sure to carry on the high standard of this issue.

'THE FIFTIES JUKE JOINT BLUES'

- Various Artists (Ace CHA 216)

This compilation is a twenty track selection, again licensed from Modern, although here, the range in styles is much more pronounced. We have more Oakland Blues - Johnny Fuller's fantastic 'Prowling Blues', Walter Robertson's bizarre 'Sputtering Blues' (sung in a stutter!), the Texas Blues of Lightnin' Hopkins and Mercy Dee, and some fine California Rhythm & Blues from the likes of Floyd Dixon and Jimmy Nelson. Over half of the cuts on this LP are from the Memphis and Delta area and include the previously unissued tracks 'Good Morning Little Angel' by Joe Hill Louis, and '44 Blues' by Peck Curtis and Dudlow Taylor, members of Sonny Boy Williamson's King Biscuit Boys. This song features both Sonny Boy and Elmon Mickle (aka Drifting Slim) on harmonicas. There is also an alternate take of Boyd Gilmore's terrific 'Ramblin' On My Mind'.

The biggest names here are B.B.King (with '3 O'Clock Blues'), Howlin' Wolf ('Ridin' In The Moonlight'), Elmore James ('Long Tall Woman') and Bobby Land and Junior Parker, who duet on 'Love My Baby' - although these, and a fair percentage of the other tracks, are already available on other LPs, the remainder are well worth the price of the record, and with the superior presentation, sound, and value for money, this is an almost essential purchase.

Ace will also be reissuing several LPs, originally released by Bluesville/Prestige in the 1960s, starting off with 'THE BLUES NEVER DIE' by Otis Spann (CH 231), backed by a band including James Cotton, Pee Wee Madison and Muddy Waters. This will be followed by a 1960 set 'Mouth Harp Blues', from the Chicago harmonica player Shakey Jake Harris, on CH 236.

Other records to watch out for:

'THE GIFT'

- Joe Louis Walker (Ace CH 241)

Highly praised on his first UK visit in November 1987, (and due here again in

April) this is Walker's second LP. He looks set to be more than just another Cray clone.

'ALLEY SPECIAL'

- Various Artists (Krazy Kat KK 820)

'EAST COAST BLUES'

- Various Artists (Krazy Kat KK 822)

Flyright's leasing of recordings from Gotham Records, one of the major postwar independent record companies, continues to bear fruit with the release of two LPs of quality downhome Blues.

'Alley Special' is one of three recordings made in 1947 by the Texan Wright Holmes. He had a guitar style which is quite stunning, with its intensity superbly complementing his singing. His lyrics, particularly those of 'Alley Special', are quite wonderful. The major record here is, undoubtedly, Muddy Waters' first Chicago recording, available on LP for the first time. It was recorded in 1946, released under the name James 'Sweet Lucy' Carter (who performed the other side), and forgotten by Muddy until it was played to him again, over 30 years later! The track ('Mean Red Spider') has backing from a saxophone-led band, totally unlike the version he made for Aristocrat in 1948. 'Baby Boy' Warren, Eddie Burns, David Pete McKinley, 'Sonny Boy' Johnson, and 'Stick Horse' Hammond are the other artists on this LP, and while some of these people may be unfamiliar to many, their recordings are of such a standard as to make this LP one which can be thoroughly recommended.

'East Coast Blues' collects six sides made by Alabama singer Ralph Willis, and released on the Gotham subsidiary, 20th Century. The original 78 rpm issues are amongst the rarest of all postwar Blues records, with probably less than six copies of each disc known, and their reissue gives us a representative selection of Willis's work.

Dan Pickett has had a great LP already released on Krazy Kat (KK 811), and the three unissued tracks here comprise the rest of his known recordings, and are of the same high quality as his other-material.

Tarheel Slim (Alden Bunn), at one time or another, sang Gospel, Rhythm and Blues (with the Larks) and Blues, but is probably best remembered for his 'Too Much Competition' and 'Number 9 Train'. The two tracks on this LP are very much in the East Coast mould, and are issued for the first time.

'SHAKE BABY SHAKE'

- Champion Jack Dupree (Detour 33.007)

22 (!) tracks recorded for RCA in 1956/7, featuring the guitar of Larry Dale (see below).

Juke Blues Magazine is releasing two new 45s by New York based guitarists Larry Dale and Jimmy 'Wildman' Spruill. The first, by Dale, is 'I Got A Brand New Mojo'/'Penny Pincher' (LD 3229), and the Spruill tracks should surface soon.

Joe Louis



NIGEL SMARMAN, THE A&R MAN

Arista, Charles ... no really, what are these idiots up to? They've got no chance of getting a deal, I mean, why do they do it? Dolly thought they were quite nice, but you know what she's like. Anyway, she's only a secretary.

I was up in Glasgow last Thursday, by-the-by, on quite a different tack. Okay, no guesses who we're after, open secret, everyone was there. Scarlet Buckets, of course. There's a lot of work to do, but I think we can point them in the right direction. I've sent Ronnie and Cy up to talk to them about clothes and hair. Great backing tracks, and Gloria's voice is amazing. Difficult to describe, really, sort of a cross between Madonna and Nina Simone; you know the sort of thing. She's so good at miming, it's incredible. Mind you, she could do with losing some weight...no I didn't fancy her much.

Anyway we all ended up at Crumbs, Cy had some coke and...oh cheers, yeah right, Saturday okay?... anyhow I don't know if we'll sign them. Robbo thinks we should sign her and elbow the spotty bloody backing group...Do what? Last night? That lot? I can't remember, I think they were called the Somebody Blues Outfit, Someone and the Somethings, you know the sort of rubbish. Low life, not a

decent pair of shoes amongst them.

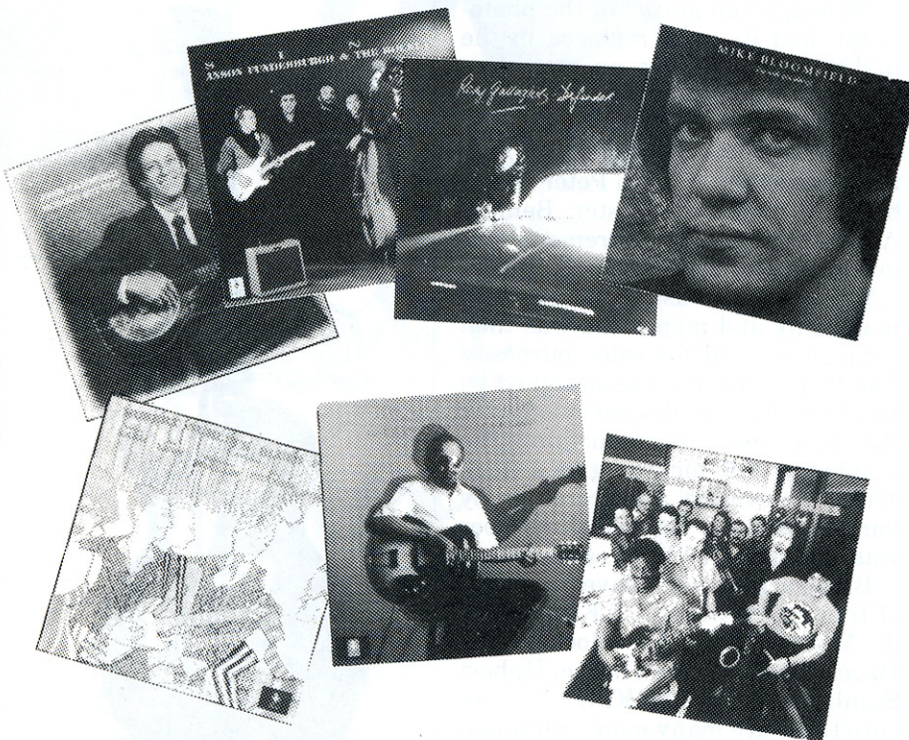
'Christ! Don't look round! Clapton's just walked in. Who's that with him? Well bugger me, it's that Gloria What's-her-face from Scarlet Buckets. Oh my God, she's only got that scruffy bloody geezer, who was playing guitar last night, in tow. Look out, they're coming this way...Hello Eric, I don't suppose you'll remember me, but we... well bugger me he's walked off, how do you like that? And I bought his first record, 'Layla'. Well actually Chrissie got it me for Christmas. Look at them, all hanging round him, bloody typical of that crowd and look at her - oh gawd - right, bang go her chances, then. Wonder what she sees in a middle-aged, three-chord merchant.

Robbo's younger brother likes blues, would you believe? Drives poor old Robbo mad. The kid's only fourteen, got all these old records, all old stuff. Robbo's well pissed off; he got him a synth for his twelfth birthday and the little sod went and sold it last month and bought a Strat. What's the use eh? I told him he's got no chance playing that blues rubbish - it's just not commercial.

'Cheers!
TOM NOLAN.

It's just not commercial, I mean, I saw a band last night - I don't know why they do it. Well, what's the point? Why do these blokes carry on? The drummer, well he was wearing a T-shirt and - I don't remember - I think it was yellow... Oh cheers Chrissie, white wine and soda with plenty of ice, please darling... and the guitarist, well, I don't know, I just don't understand these people, sometimes I wonder if they ever read the music papers. He still had long hair, I ask you? He looked about ninety and his guitar must have come out of the Ark. Can you bloody well believe it, people still walking around in denims?... Hi! Good luck at

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EARL KING & ROOMFUL OF BLUES
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It seems apt, given the birth of this magazine, to highlight some of the characters who have, over a period of time longer than they may care to remember, either played, contributed to, or in one way or another, just lived the blues.

The following appreciation is neither exhaustive nor objective but is, in the main, based on the batch of faithful names that, through thick and thin, have been flying the flag throughout the country.

To many a visiting European music fan, it has long been one of London's mysteries that they can seemingly walk into every other hostelry and be confronted by some demon slide-guitarist, 'Little Walter' clone with wailing harp, or perhaps the proverbially confident front-man mixing a fearsome growl of a voice with a line in comic repertoire that would put many a stand-up merchant in the shade. The missing link between the impressed punter's initial surprise and the finely-honed set, is a period of about fifteen to twenty years. During this time, many of the artists concerned would have experienced just about every aspect of a sometimes fickle business, including dodgy promoters, empty gigs, poor listing representation and very often little reward. The fact that some of these characters are still around doing

THE BLUES:

their stuff, is surely a cause for admiration, perhaps even celebration and a major *raison d'être* for the appearance of this magazine.

At the outset however, a word of caution is needed, regarding the dubious practice of continuing to use a band's name when the band has long since ceased to represent either the original music or musicians. Whilst celebrated examples such as **Fleetwood Mac** or **Groundhogs** have long been held up as examples of this, the practice still persists on the pub circuit, in an attempt to attract more feet to a declining market. However, it is pleasing to note that the name '**Doctor K's Blues Band**' has not given way to a change in style or attitude.

Twenty years have now elapsed since the band cut their debut album on the commendable Spark label, though only **Mike Haase** remains from the original band. Rumour has it that the original Doctor K (**Richard Kay**) whiles away the hours on a Georgian farm. The present band however, remain firmly in love with Chicago Blues. Drummer **Chick Kattenhome** might not have

been in the band at the outset, but his playing stretches back to the days of **Jimmy Powell** and the **Fifth Dimension**. The Doctor K band represent, along with the other characters to be mentioned, the backbone of what might be rather ironically termed the 'Independent' or 'Alternative British Blues Scene'. The sense of irony is compounded by the fact that, while many took the money and ran, these guys are still around playing the music they love.

Had you been looking at the music press around September, 1969, you would no doubt have noticed an advert for the 'National Blues Convention' at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1. Aside from the visiting stars, a cursory glance at the billing now, reveals a still very active number of blues personnel who continue to pull an appreciative crowd, especially in the Capital.

'**Shakey Vick**' actually cut his debut album in 1969, for Pye, and continues to apply his considerable range of playing the blues harp with his band that recently had original Yardbird '**Top**' **Topham** guesting on rhythm guitar. A later album on

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Gibson 1952 Les Paul

Photo by Melvyn Warren-Smith

Although the guitar in the photograph had its neck replaced in the mid-seventies, it has an attractive history. The guitar had belonged variously to B.B.King and Muddy Waters, and was given to Eric Clapton who passed it on to Peter Green before it reached Duster Bennet. After a twelve year retirement, this guitar is playing the blues again.

The guitar was constructed of mahogany and maple and was then sprayed in gold for sales purposes! The trapeze bridge was designed by Les Paul, but was discontinued after the first year of production. The soapbar or P90 pickups give a thick sound, so evident on recordings by various artists. No serial number was placed on the first-year models.

Blues artists who played a guitar of this model were: B.B.King, Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker, Pat Hare, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Hubert Sumlin and Freddy King. We are sure there are many more and would welcome correspondence on the subject.

'Top' Topham



an enduring British problem

Appaloosa records, called 'On The Ball' released in 1980, still found the band in fine form and 'Shakey' as ever belting out the blues in his unique Chicago nasal whine. A recent appearance at the 100 Club in front of a packed house was a highlight of the '87 British blues scene.

Also on that 1969 bill was the ubiquitous **Jo Ann Kelly** (see page 4,) her brother, **Dave Kelly** who's still out there working hard with his band, and the less frequently seen talent of Country Blues player **Gordon Smith**.

No serious connoisseur of the British scene could have failed to pop along to one of the major highlights of every weekend at Camden's Carnaervon Castle. **Wolfie Witcher's** lunchtime residency there has become legendary in places as far afield as Australia and South America. The jammed house always comprises a host of nationalities. Quite what they make of Wolfie's unique brand of cockney verbals is anyone's

guess. His harp playing however is superb, and together with long term Radical Sheik associate **Gary Thomas** and an ever-growing seven piece band, the Wolfie Carnaervon dynasty is set to run and run – deservedly so.

The '**Radical Sheiks**' are always worth a visit at the same venue as they continue to pound their Friday night spot there. Fine harp playing by **Alan Glen** is backed by the ever-reliable **Pete Miles** on drums. Their six-track EP hardly did the live sound of the band justice. However, if you get the chance, check them out.

The North/South divide has applied to London as much as to anywhere else and without the fine playing of **Little Stevie Smith**, **Steve Waller** and **Mick Clarke**, along with the undoubted talents of Rocket 88's **Jimmy Roche**, the London blues scene would be a lot worse off.

Stevie Smith currently fronts the

powerful '**Ruthless Blues**' and **Steve Waller's** '**Overload**' has been used by visiting bluesmen like **Eddie C. Campbell**. **Mick Clarke** has been spreading the British blues reputation in California, where he recorded an album with **Robert Cray's** band.

The above are but a few names on a roster that will be explored in future editions. This overview will go on to look at some of the long-standing talent outside the Capital, ranging from Leicester's **DT's**, through Manchester's **Victor Brox**, to Wales' **Blues Bunch** (the only blues co-op in the country) and Southampton's **Bob Pearce**.

Given the amount of good stuff out there, there should be much to write about.

Pete Feenstra

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Bluesnews

The news from High Wycombe is that Brewer's Droop has reformed with the original line-up, consisting of Ron Watts, vocals – John McKay, guitar/bass/vocals – Steve Darrington, harmonica/accordion / piano/vocals – Spike Jones, guitar/bass – and Bob Walker, drums. Anarchy starts here!

Bob Hall has been headlining a number of Festivals in Europe, with the big band – Otis Grand and the Dance Kings and will be solo at the Rotterdam

Boogie Woogie Festival, and returns there later with Dave Peabody. He'll also be with Dave, Jo Ann Kelly and Steve Phillips at 100 Club in June.

In Brighton on Friday nights, the Crayfish Club under the Churchill Hotel has great Blues and R&B records, and goes on until early in the morning.

The Station Tavern, in London, W10 has blues from Thursdays to Mondays inclusive. Resident Saturday Night band is Joe Louis and the Blues

Kings. At the Carnaevon Castle in Camden, resident Blues/R&B bands are – Friday night: Radical Sheiks; Saturday: lunch-time, Wolfie Witcher; evening, Poorboys; and Sunday nights, Shakey Vick's Blues Band.

British Blues Review, in conjunction with Bob's Goodtime Blues are promoting special blues nights at 100 Club, Oxford Street, W1. – On 12th April: Mick Clarke Band + Blue Duke + Boogaloo Blues. On 17th May: Shakey Vick's Blues

Band + Michael Messer + Bop Brothers Blues Band.

Ex-Rory Gallagher drummer Wilgar Campbell has joined the Bluescasters, completing a line-up with ex-Supertramp bassist Frank Farrell and Tom Nolan on guitar and vocals.

The three-piece is set to play a fortnightly residency on Monday nights at the Grey Horse in Kingston, Surrey.

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