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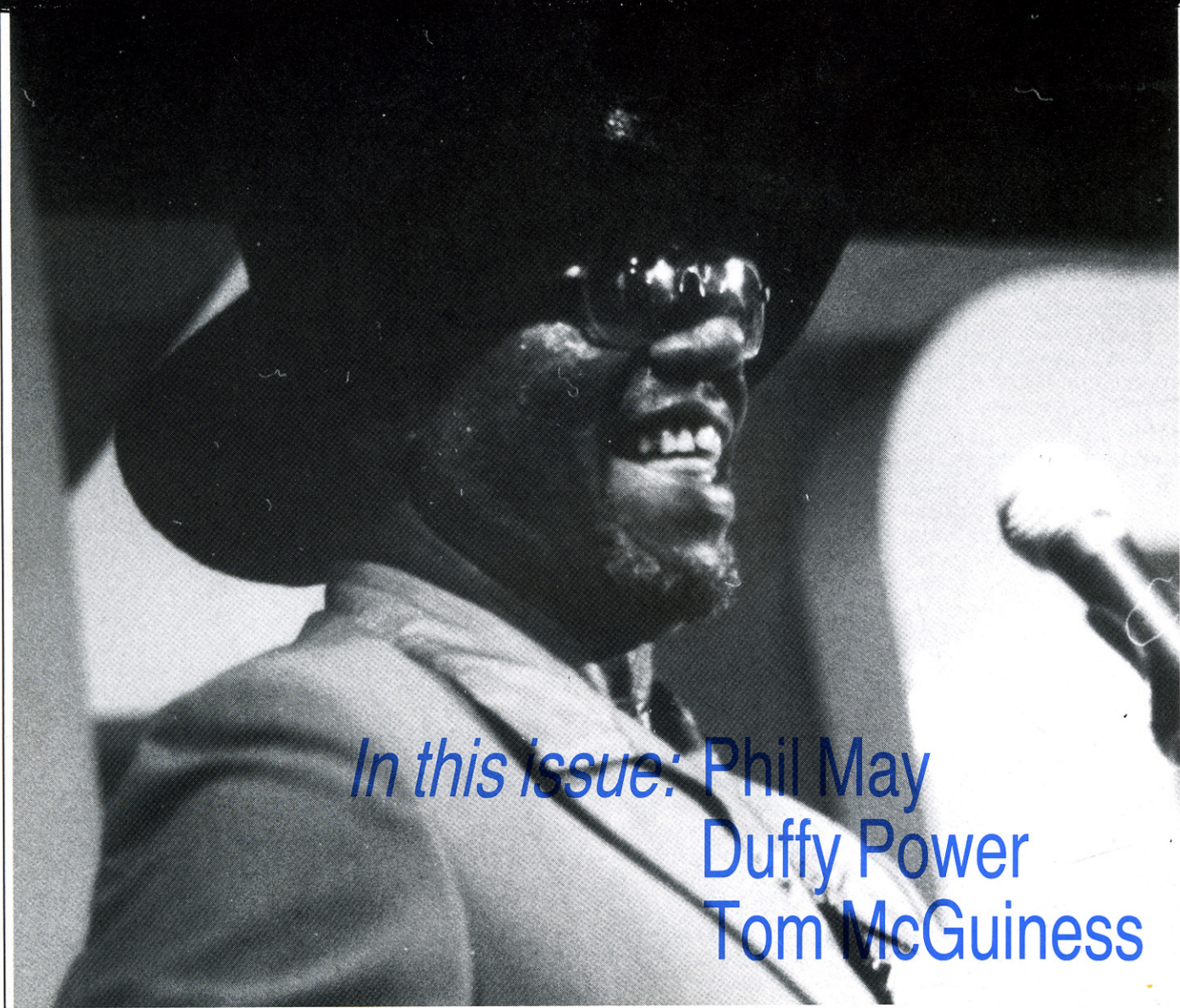
BRITISH BLUES

APRIL 1989

BB review

£1.20

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH BLUES NETWORK



In this Issue: Phil May
Duffy Power
Tom McGuinness

TALKIN' BLUES

This is the first issue of the second year of the magazine and it could be time to take stock of our efforts. One of the aims of the venture at the outset was to link up people with an interest in blues – live blues especially, but not exclusively – using this magazine as the basis for a network.

The response has been mixed. The enthusiasts for the music, musicians and fans alike, have welcomed our enterprise, yet the response of the large promoters and record companies, with some exceptions, has been minimal. Well, there's nothing new in that, indeed it was predicted. That doesn't mean we are actively trying to discourage them – far from it – but their interests are obviously guided by their *raison d'être*, which is to make money from their businesses. One more magazine, which might have disappeared after two or three issues, was hardly likely to attract much support, let alone enthusiasm.

We've managed to survive their disinterest, but we won't get too excited as that wasn't what we were after anyway. Because we are rooting for the music doesn't mean that anyone else is expected to. It is too naive to insist that our involvement should be taken up by larger commercial concerns.

Which leaves us with the readers – yes we know you're out there, even if we don't always get around to answering your letters. Don't stop sending them in, even the polite ones, just because they don't all get quick responses. We do note what you say and will get around to the articles and interviews suggested. The other point about letters is that it is a forum for people to express their views – we don't have to agree with them. The fact is that we don't even agree among ourselves, as the discerning reader may have already noted.

So to the articles and interviews. Different contributors will have their own perceptions and biases, and will

continue to make their claims for the superiority, or otherwise, of the particular person being interviewed. The danger here, is that subjective opinions will come to be regarded as gospel – it ain't so! The reader is requested to take everything with a large pinch of salt.

Finally, to the music. Without claiming to be the sole catalyst, we can report that the blues scene is in a healthy state at present, in Europe at least. Healthy, that is, by comparison with what it has been in the recent past.

The term Blues is used with increasing largesse by the media. . . well we can't expect them to be right all the time, can we? Newspapers and magazines are more ready to include the term in their listings, though not (yet) as a separate entry. Radio and TV seem more prepared to cater for us.

There seem to be more bands and musicians around, than there were, though the solo performer seems no more in evidence. True, we haven't covered that side of the scene very much, but then we're only reflecting what we see and hear, not actually instigating things.

Now for the musicians. They really are coming from under the floorboards, aren't they? Well, that was predicted as well, but the great thing is that there are so many new people getting into the music, in addition to the old codgers (well, some of you are!) who've rediscovered the blues. These new people, musicians and supporters alike, are what will ensure the continuing story of the Blues. Without them, the scene will never be firmly established in a way that is free from fad and fashion. That, of course, was one of our other objectives.

Now where do we go from here? We have to keep trying, and trying harder, to establish and pursue our crusade. We've only just started! To put it another way. . . Don't forget to renew your subscriptions!

BRITISH BLUES



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Letters

Dear Editor,
So the first 'glamour-puss' to make the cover of BBR is an American. Bloody marvelous, I'm sure!

Try Dana Gillespie next time. Forty in March and still looking great. In fact, why not do a serious feature? Jo Ann Kelly is excellent but British female Blues doesn't start and end with her, you know!

Yours sincerely,
Dave Burggy,
Canterbury, Kent.

(Thanks, Dave. I had a feeling that front cover was going to get up a few noses. Marsha Raven wasn't used as front cover material because of her 'glamour-puss' image but because we try to keep to our original philosophy of portraying 'what's happening now' in the UK. And you're right about Dana, but it's still her music we're interested in, not her body. Well – not me personally.
Angie, Art Editor.)

Hello British blues Review, I am selling most of my collection of 10,000 records (45s, LPs, 78s) and since I don't have a catalogue I shall be working from people's Want Lists. If you or your readers have any artists Wants, PLEASE send them along and I will most definitely look through my collection for you.

(I pay all air postage costs.)

Also, would be willing to trade for any interesting items by Suzanne Vega, Kate Bush, Ellen Foley, Ronnie Spector, Southside Johnny.

With sincere best wishes,
David Osepowicz,
41, Lincoln Avenue,
Northampton, Ma, 01060
USA

Dear BBR,
I have just returned from a visit to the Southern hemisphere and brought back, amongst other things, some copies of "Crazy Music", the magazine of the now defunct Australian Blues Society of which my

brother Nick was an active committee member.

As well as visiting the Rose, Shamrock and Thistle Hotel at Roselle, Sydney, to hear Rory McLeod, a harmonica player from the UK and Texas harmonica champion, we also visited Julian Gilchrist who presents a monthly blues programme on a Sydney radio station.

Both Julian and Nick are experts in blues discography and I understand they receive enquiries from all over Australia and I was able to add to their knowledge with recent recordings of The Blues Burglars and The Mighty Fliers.

Phillip Solly,
Luton, Beds.

Dear BBR,

Two years ago, when I was playing in a jazz/blues club in St Petersburg, Florida, a guy with an English accent came in a few times to hear the music. I could tell he was a true enthusiast because he had made a point of seeking out all the local blues acts and even recording some of them.

But since that time, band names and members have changed and my group has been playing just about every club from Key West to the Cardinas, occasionally fronting the big name acts. Musicians are always exchanging addresses and numbers, but mostly they just pass in the night. So it was a special welcome for me when, bleary eyed from a the flight to London, I found Top Topham playing at the Station Tavern on my first night in town.

Top was playing his regular Wednesday night gig there with Jim McCarty, Andy Cleveland (bass), and Detroit John, and they were being accompanied by Shakey Vick.

Yes, British blues was alive and kicking after all! (I'd been disappointed not to find much of it available back in 1985 when my band passed through on its way back from a tour of

Scandinavia.)

Yes! The same resurgence of interest in blues is taking place here, just as in the States. It seems these two countries do a lot of things in tandem – from trends in politics and economics to having musicians and audiences who appreciate something as popularly obscure as the blues.

The sound that Wednesday night at the Station Tavern was somewhat reminiscent of Fleetwood Mac recordings from about twenty years ago – the kind of stuff that was instrumental in re-awakening Americans to some of their own music at the time. (Back to that ever-present reflection of ideas between Britain and the States.) Top, John, Andy, Jim and Vick were doing some great renditions of tunes by some of my favourite artists but, better yet, they had some truly unique and authentic sounding tunes of their own.

What a great way to start my holiday!

In the nights that followed, I was able to catch an ample variety of other local acts; the big sound of Otis Grand and The Dance Kings, the Texas tone of T-Model Slim, Marsha Raven's big city blues style, and the early electric, semi-delta approach that Big Joe Louis and His Blues Kings use.

But the big fun came through getting to jam with Shakey Vick, Top Topham, John Whitehead, Rod Demick, Sam Kelly and Paul Lamb last Sunday afternoon at the Station Tavern.

Until next time. . .

Sarasota Slim,
St Petersburg,
Florida, USA

Dear Graham Vickery,
Please find enclosed some information that might be of interest to British Blues Review. It concerns a local club and venue just beginning to get off the ground called "Signals Jazz and Blues Club", and a local Blues Band called "Off the Wall".

"Signals" is the only

consistent venue for Blues in the Potteries. Its intention is to support and promote the best of the local scene primarily, but is beginning to be able to run to some outside bookings.

"Off The Wall" have been picking up their following locally (colleges, pubs, etc.), improving their act, and are now starting to look wider afield to other audiences and venues receptive to the blues. (Your magazine has been valuable in that respect.) They got a great reception at the OLD VIC in Nottingham earlier this week. As usual the effort of telephone calls, tapes, can be a bit disproportionate to the gigging, but they're really keen and like what they're doing.

Finally, on behalf of friends in OFF THE WALL and friends at SIGNALS a wholehearted support for British Blues Review. Anything we can do, don't hesitate to make contact.

Yours sincerely,
Viv Edwards
Stoke on Trent

Dear Graham

It was with great delight that I read the enclosed article about my old band (Doctor K's Blues Band) and I can report that I am back from my Georgia Farm (it was actually North Carolina) and living near Cambridge. My brother John, who also subscribes to your magazine, was probably how the rumour started!

I am still playing boogie piano and would love to get to meet with the old band again. I wonder if there is any way you could put me in contact with Mick Haase so that maybe one night we can have a reunion.

Sincerely
Richard Kay
a.k.a. Doctor K.

PS I only have a very beat up copy of our album and I wonder if any of your readers might know where I could locate a clean copy.

Letters

Dear Graham,
This really is a long overdue letter but I feel stung into action by the comments of Fred Ruddyfuckoffsky – or whatever he's called – in the December issue. Slagging off Tabby Thomas et al indeed. . . who is this nerd? By his bleat for a thing on JSP Records obviously a Steadman employee. . . hmmmh. (not to my knowledge – Ed)

Anyway, enough of that. Just really to let you know that we hope to be swinging into action in July this year with a tour by 'Mojo' Buford. Some dates will be with Junkyard Angels – some not. Also in September we will be bringing back Tabby Thomas – King of the Swamp blues. Most people – Rudwatsit excluded – did enjoy him and want to see him again.

Also this year will see the revamp of the Blues South West record label. We intend to reissue our album 'Straight Shoot' recorded with Carey and Lurrie Bell which came second in the 1987 W. C. Handy awards for the best foreign produced record. There will also be an album by Silas Hogan. Entitled 'The Godfather', this was recorded whilst I was in Baton Rouge and apart from myself on rhythm

guitar, features all local musicians including Silas's son Sam on drums. Lastly March will see the release of Junkyard's own album 'Dirty Work at the crossroads'. Fed up with people thinking we can only play rhythm, we thought that it was time we did something about it!

The band will also be touring the southern part of the U.S. later this year.

Anyway Graham, hope all is well with y'all. We're always looking for people to put on in our neck of the woods so please give that a shout.

All the best,
Julian Piper
Blues South-West
Devon



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£5.50 (P&P)

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Rochdale

Telephone:
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CONTRIBUTORS PLEASE NOTE:

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Artwork should be in by 9th May

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**Please call
792 9419**

BRITISH BLUES

BB
review

at 100 CLUB

100, OXFORD STREET, LONDON W1

Blues & Jump Jive sessions

Apr. 25th Shakey Vick & His Combination
Boogie with special guests,
Newcastle's: The Skywalkers

May 9th Shakey Vick & His Combination
Boogie with special guests,
Birmingham's: King Pleasure & The
Biscuit Boys

Tom McGuinness

Part one: STARTING OUT

by Pete Moody

Since the 1960's Tom McGuinness has always been a well-respected member of the British Blues scene. As a "Manfred", he helped take Rhythm and Blues into the Hit Parade. Before then he was one of a small number of dedicated South London Bluesers who persevered with the music they loved. Today, he is still ambassador for the Blues as guitar player in the Blues Band. I spent a most enjoyable morning with Tom listening to his story. In the first part, Tom recalls his early musical influences, his first attempts at forming groups, playing with Eric Clapton in the Roosters and joining Manfred Mann.

Pete Moody

Tom with Manfred Mann, March 1964 (Tom McGuinness)



In the mid 1950's my life was totally changed by rock and roll. The older I get the clearer I see that. Without rock and roll I would have done something totally different. Not just Black Rock and Roll; records by Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis, Elvis Presley as well as Fats Domino, Little Richard and Chuck Berry, got me interested in this music rather than the saccharine top twenty that we had until rock and roll came along. Slowly, through rock and roll I started to realise there was more – it took me in two directions. I got quite interested in Country music through people like Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins and Johnny Cash, but far more enduring was an interest in what (I didn't know then) was called Rhythm & Blues. Hearing things like the occasional Chuck Berry track, or the 'B' side of an occasional single that turned up on the air which was obviously not quite rock and roll, it was impossible for me to say at the time why it was different. It was more 'Rootsy' than current music.

I had started to learn to play guitar as a result of Skiffle and Lonnie Donegan. Skiffle, like Punk did 20 years later, enabled you to pick up an instrument and with three chords make music with other people. Skiffle soon became rather boring – not boring – it wasn't 'enough' for me. I was far more excited by Rock & Roll. We didn't have a record player, so I was hearing records at friends' houses or on the radio. The one record that I remember clearly totally knocking me out, was not a 'down home record', it was Chuck Berry's 'Johnny B Goode'. So hackneyed now – but if you hear the original, having heard all those cover versions, it still swings like the clappers. When I first heard it, I mean, I just couldn't believe that guitar intro' coming out of the radio. The first Down Home record I heard – again I didn't know it was Rhythm & Blues – was Howling Wolf's 'Smokestack Lightning'. It was on an ITV Programme "Cool for Cats" introduced by Kent Walton. (Most people don't ever recall this programme when reminiscing. They remember 'Oh Boy' and 'Six Five Special'. Kent Walton used to play some pretty 'funny' records. I can remember "Buzz Buzz" by the Hollywood Flames.) Smokestack was a knock-out record.

If you were into Folk Blues of people like Blind Lemon Jefferson, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, there were few records around, but there were even fewer City Rhythm & Blues records – the music which had got to me. I remember trekking miles to look at a John Lee Hooker Album cover in a shop window late at night. The shop was shut – I went with friends and we just looked at this cover. There was very little to hear. It was not until 1961 and 1962 that records started appearing. The Vee Jay Label started having hits with John Lee Hooker and Jimmy Reed and they were getting played on popular radio (AFN & Radio Luxembourg – not the BBC). It

was Rock and Roll and Skiffle up to 1961/62 when I started hearing the music I really liked.

I'd been in various groups around Wimbledon. In all sorts of bands playing Cliff Richard, Shadows and Johnny Burnette numbers. We would occasionally

something together with Brian Jones in Oxford and I think Ben had been in that and they weren't getting anywhere. We tried to get a Band together. We played once, and that was a mistake. We used to

at me with a 'What's that' expression. He suggested 'Kansas City', so I said great. 'Kansas City' for me was Wilbert Harrison first and Little Richards' version second. So he said 'Kansas City' is E Flat. E Flat! – I thought E Flat, E would be great but E Flat! That's the eleventh fret! I didn't know you could play it at anywhere else. He counted it in. A one, a two, a one two three and I started to play the Wilbert Harrison, Jimmy Reed feel and they're playing this loping 'Kansas City' feel, which I loathed at the time. I like it now. I stumbled through the number, trying to play a solo in E Flat when it was my turn. When it finished I unplugged and began putting my guitar away. He said "What's the matter, let's do another number." I came off thinking I'll never be in an R&B band. I was with Jenny and she introduced me to this bloke from Kingston, who played guitar. It was Eric Clapton. We agreed to try to get a band together. I rang up Ben Palmer. We got a friend of mine in called Terry Brennan, we'd been at Primary School together. Terry loved all sorts of things like Freddy King, Martha and the Vandellas and James Brown. He could do a good Little Richard imitation. We learned six or eight songs; we got a drummer – through an ad – called Robin Mason. Ben was living in Oxford, Eric down in Ripley. We used to rehearse in New Malden. We had hardly any equipment. We found this room above a pub, another band used to rehearse in there and leave all their gear. It was great – we used to plug in. One night they turned up while we were rehearsing!

We'd play at the Ricky Tick, Windsor, the Wooden Bridge at Guildford. In the summer of 1963 we played Bonnies Chinese Jazz Club in Brighton. Brighton in summertime is full of French students who come over to attend English Language Classes. We came on – they saw our amplifiers and were decidedly hostile – the upshot was with them sort of booing, throwing things and shouting, it ended up with Terry jumping off stage and starting a fight with them. We never went back to Bonnies again!

Terry Brennan went on to be in the Mule Skinnners, they recorded 'Back Door Man' on Fontana. I haven't seen Terry for 10-15 years. The Roosters went from around March 1963 to about July 1963. It fell apart because no one could run the band. We never got a bass player, there were two guitars, piano and drums. We had minimal equipment but lots of enthusiasm. We played a strange selection of songs, Freddy King, Larry Williams and Fats Domino, we probably did 'Kansas City' for all I recall! We did a T Bone Walker instrumental called "T Bone Blues". Ben Palmer, I think, had the first T Bone Walker Atlantic Album. We'd get up and play that instrumental for half an hour – it didn't matter what the audiences thought. Trying to get gigs was so hard, with no one really taking that side of it on. It got to the summer and the gigs petered out. Eric and I then wasted a couple of months of our lives with Casey

MARQUEE CLUB

JULY 1964 NEWSLETTER

NATIONAL JAZZ FEDERATION, 18, CARLISLE STREET, LONDON, W.1 GER 8923

Monday, July 6th
MANFRED MANN
Mark Lee-man Five

R&B AT THE MARQUEE

The Manfreds will continue their Monday evening sessions in July excepting the 13th when the exciting T-Bones R & B group return for a one night stand.

The Yardbirds in company with the Authentics continue their most blueswailing Friday night sessions. Long John Baldry's Hoochie Coochie Men hold court on Thursdays, July 2nd, 9th, and 16th prior to their holidays. During their absence the T-Bones take over on the 23rd and Chris Barber will present "An evening of R & B" on the 30th with his own Blues Band and Otilie Patterson.

We also welcome the Big Blues Sound of Dick Charlesworth on Tuesdays which we feel will prove extremely popular with Marquee-type people.

Monday, July 27th
MANFRED MANN
and supporting group

MANN-FANS

For all fans of Manfred Mann the official Club invites your enquiries.

For Full Details write to:
MANN-FANS
35 Curzon Street,
London, W.1.

slip in an obscure number but it wouldn't be R&B. A Jerry Lee Lewis 'B' side or a Carl Perkins album track. This got boring – I said to the band, who were all friends from school "I'm going to give this up – I'm going to play R&B!" They all said "You're mad, no one wants to hear that! What people want is the latest Cliff, or Johnny Tillotson number. You'll never get anywhere playing R&B". I remember thinking 'you're probably right'. I never had any idea of commercial success. To me it was like Jazz. Musicians play Jazz because they play what they loved and that's why people play R&B.

The thing with so few records about, there also seemed so few people about. I didn't know anyone in Wimbledon. I had one school friend who didn't play, but was keen. We used to buy Billboard and read it cover to cover. We'd look at the charts to see what was breaking in Cincinnati, Detroit and all that. We saw an ad that Alexis Korner was playing in Cheam. We went out there for a few nights. The first night, I was so knocked out to hear anyone playing this music, but by the 3rd or 4th week I was less enchanted. It was too jazzy. When Cyril Davis left Alexis to form his band – which was basically Lord Sutch's band the Savages – that, I thought, was great. Really tough and city, loud and distorted; that's what I loved rather than the jazzy stuff. Since then I've really got into the jazzy side of Blues – Joe Turner, Jimmy Witherspoon – but then I *didn't* like it.

I read an ad in Melody Maker. Roughly it said: 'musicians wanted. R&B Band forming playing Elmore James and Sonny Boy Williamson numbers'. I answered. It was a fellow called Ben Palmer. I met Ben and he introduced me to Paul Jones. They had been trying to get a band together. Paul had done

rehearse in a pub in Colliers Wood, still trying to find a drummer and a bass player, maybe another guitar. We were having this rehearsal upstairs and the manager came in and said "My band has not arrived to play, will you come down and play?" We said we didn't think your punters would like it, he replying said it didn't matter. We jammed our way through 12 bars and the occasional Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley. The audience just weren't interested. That band fell apart. That was mid 1962, we didn't even have a name. By this time clubs were opening; you'd hear about the Spencer Davis Group in Birmingham, The Animals in Newcastle, and suddenly you'd realise it wasn't just in London, not just you and three other people. I was just playing at home and going out with Jenny who was at Kingston College of Art. I used to religiously read all the ads in Melody Maker. I rang one ad up. The bloke said "what do you play?", I said "Guitar" and he asked what I liked, replying Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, Larry Williams, Muddy Waters, he said "just great, just what we're looking for. Come to the Station Hotel, Richmond on Sunday and have a blow." Just as he was ringing off I said "by the way, what do you play?" he said "I'm a trombonist". I realised this was not going to be the band for me, but I went. I was desperate – trekked over there – on the train with amp and guitar, walked into the Station Hotel. On stage was the String Bass player, piano player and the drummer with three trombonists! It was Dave Hunt's Confederate Jazz Band – Hunt, who, with people like Mike Cotton, were trying to make the transition to R&B and, as far as I was concerned, were failing miserably. I was trying to melt into the wall knowing this was not the place for me. He spotted me so I plugged in. What shall we play, he said. I said anything you like and suggested something like 'I'm a Man', he sort of looked

Jones & The Engineers. We thought it was quite romantic. We were professional musicians. Casey had made a record, *One Way Ticket*, on Columbia. We weren't on it. He'd got a record deal at the time when A&R men were getting off the train at Liverpool and walking up to people saying 'Here's your record deal –

with their bass player Dave Richmond. Not because he wasn't talented but because if anything, too talented. Dave was, and is, a very good string and electric bass player, but really he was a jazzier at heart and he found doing a Bo Diddley riff, five minutes with a rave up in the middle, not taxing him. As a



The Talismen, circa 1960. Tom (2nd right) with the Hofner Club guitar

you come from Liverpool'. He was quite a personality, a sort of Freddie and the Dreamers or a Herman type. He had no other abilities apart from being a good frontman. We did quite a few gigs with him. He had a manager and an agent. We really thought 'this is it'. We'd go off to places like Macclesfield. When we arrived there, there was a girl called Polly Perkins – she was a singer. She walked in and handed us her sheet music. She said we were the accompanying group for her as well. She's handing us these things like 'Who's Sorry Now' – they've got lots of chords! We did five numbers with her. Eric, myself, a bass player and a drummer. Eric and I weren't too hot on these chords! Thankfully, the band collapsed. I turned up to do a gig in Soho and Eric wasn't there. I did this gig and after I went round – to Guy Stevens' place and he said he'd seen Eric and he'd said he'd had enough.

The Roosters played support to Manfred Mann at the Marquee. I can remember having this discussion after two nights, I think, with Manfred backstage, saying "this is no good, we're only getting £5 for the night. Eric has to come up from Ripley, Ben from Oxford". I can remember Manfred saying "You're mad! People are killing to get these support spots. They don't do it for the money". It wasn't unpleasant or a disagreement – in three months I ended up joining Manfred.

Eric went off pretty soon after Casey Jones and was in the Yardbirds. I went and sat in with them a couple of times at the Star in Croydon. I wasn't doing anything. I got itchy fingers not playing. Paul Jones had said they were unhappy

result he'd go off on his own flight of fantasy, more akin to, say, Jack Bruce in Cream two years later. Knowing all this, I lied to Paul and said I'm really unhappy not playing. I'm playing a bit of bass these days as well as guitar! He said he'd give me a call. I got the message to be at the St. Johns Ambulance Hall, Chigwell one Friday night in December 1963. I was working in Bentalls, didn't have any money. I was living at St. Margarets at Twickenham. I took the tube from Richmond to Chigwell which is like one end of the tube to the other. I arrived at the Hall and was sneaked into the back. I think Paul Jones and Mike Vickers had Dave Richmond in one Dressing Room and Manfred and Mike Hugg had me in another and was given like the verbal audition. It was alright for me to be there because I was a friend of Paul's. The basic question was 'do you promise to play simply' – I had no hesitation in saying yes, as I hadn't touched a bass in my life. Getting home I felt it was a waste of time. I said to my girlfriend, they'll never come to a decision. By this time they had made 2 records, in fact 3. Released 2 and a 3rd one recorded. They'd released 'Why should we not' and 'Cock a hoop' a sort of Bo Diddleyish thing that Paul had written.

They were doing great. They did the Marquee every Monday night and always sold out. They had three gigs along the South Coast; Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursdays at Southampton, Portsmouth and Bournemouth plus The Ealing Club on Saturday and the Twisted Wheel in Manchester. R&B had started to do the Ballroom circuit, it had ceased to be a cult and had become probably the

predominant music of London. At the time of the verbal audition they were happening in a very big way. They hadn't had a hit record. That's what the Stones, the Animals and Manfred were going for. Anyway, I go to work the next day and get a phone call at about 10 o'clock from my girlfriend, she was Ben Palmer's sister-in-law. She said "did you see the note when you left this morning?" I hadn't, she read it to me over the phone. I can't remember if it said I'd got the job, but it said be at the Ealing Club tonight – we start at 7.30.

5.30 I went home and went with my girlfriend to see one of her friends. I'm sitting there chatting and looking at my watch. Later, looking at my watch again – it said the same time. My watch had stopped! It's like 20 past 7 and I'm due in Ealing in 10 minutes. We get a cab – really splashing money – get to Ealing and there's this sort of 'Glad you could get here', handed me the bass and counted the band's number in. That was it – I'd never played bass in my life. The funny upshot of that was that for the next 3 or 4 nights, I'd turn up at the gigs just before we were due on stage, there was the amp and the bass. I didn't understand the etiquette about these things – Paul took me aside and said 'Would you mind, would it be alright if you got here a little early to give us a hand in setting up the equipment?'. I thought it happened by a magical process! When I joined it was a schizophrenic band. Mike Hugg, Mike Vickers and Manfred were jazzers who liked things like Charlie Mingus, and Ray Charles, say, would be the nearest thing to Rhythm and Blues that they liked. Paul also liked jazz, but his tastes were right through to Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee and all points in between. Not Rock and Roll so much but Muddy Waters, Little Walter and Sonny Boy Williamson. The band reflected these tastes, maybe Paul's to a greater extent. There would still be jazzy blows in the middle of a Bo Diddley number. I joined Manfred Mann in December 1963 and 5.4.3.2.1 came out the following month, so they'd done all this slog for 18 months; I walk in and they've got a hit record!

Part Two, in our next issue, takes Tom through the Seventies and into the eighties with the Blues Band.

Big Joe Louis: Digging Way Back

Interviewed by Tony Topham

TT: *Joe, I would like to start by going back to the beginning; tell us about some early influences, perhaps where you were brought up and how you first came to hear the blues.*

JL: I was born and brought up in Jamaica in the Caribbean. The kind of music we used to hear was ska and reggae, and things like that. I never heard any pop music. I can't say I ever really heard the Beatles until I came to this country in the 1970's. I used to buy singles by people like Byron Lee and Ernie Smith and some of the earlier guys there but it wasn't until I came to this country that I heard about the Beatles or any of those people and it didn't really mean that much to me. I can't say that during the earlier years of my life music meant anything very much to me. I don't think I owned a record in this country until I was about sixteen or seventeen and then somebody played me Dr Feel-good and they were singing a song "Checkin' on my Baby". I really enjoyed that and when I saw that a guy called Sonny Boy Williamson had written it I started checking back on Sonny Boy Williamson and just went back all the way from there really.

TT: *That obviously was your first introduction to the blues. However, I must say I'm amazed by the collection that you have, 78's and 45's and a whole stack of albums and certainly your knowledge as a blues man is second to none. Can you tell us about how you started to collect records and where were you able to acquire all this knowledge from?*

JL: I guess the thing was, it was something that I never really heard before or knew anything about. It just happened that I heard something and I had to hear more about it. I can never understand those people that used to say they liked blues and all they ever heard were a few people: Muddy Waters, B B King. . . Those people are fine but there are so many people out there who don't get the recognition. So I'd just dig a little deeper and I'd see that Jimmy Rogers played guitar with Muddy and I'd listen to Jimmy Roger's records and I'd see that Henry Gray might play piano with Muddy Waters or whoever and all these people – you just dig way back and buy all the records and all the people that made a couple of records but never ever got any success – and they're all the people that interested me just as much as all those that made a lot of money, or made a big success and career out of it; so I fell in with some of the collector people here who, at first, though it was a bit strange – a twenty-year old wanting to buy Walter Davis records and things like that, when everyone else was listening to the pop and rock stuff – but



gradually you get more into it and it's like a habit. . . you just keep buying the records, listening and listening, and getting more and more into it.

TT: *Obviously from starting to collect these records there must have been a point when you felt you really wanted to have a go and start playing this type of music. Did you actually play the guitar before your interest in the blues; or was that something that came along afterwards?*

JL: No I had never played an instrument before I heard blues. I can't really remember who was the first person that made me think that I would like to play the guitar but I can remember listening to people like Eddie Taylor, Jimmy Rogers and Howlin' Wolf records – he had some great guitarists when he was playing down there in Memphis. I just picked up a guitar one day and started fiddling around with a few things and I just got into doing it. I never had any lessons – I was just listening to the records and trying to pick things out; and it was just listening to records that made me think I would play along to this.

TT: *I'd like to talk now about the formation of the Blues Kings. Can you tell us when and how that actually happened. I believe that it was quite an organic band in the way that it started off from yourself and gradually grew into what has now become an extremely popular and exciting band in London?*

JL: I first started playing down in Kent around Canterbury and Herne Bay with a friend of mine (and I must say I reckon he's the best blues player in this coun-

try) called David Purdy and I have to give him credit. We used to play duos at parties, restaurants, clubs and pubs then I moved up to London and a friend of mine introduced me to some people who were playing blues, so I got in with them and gradually. . . you pick up a harp player here and a drummer there – I was lucky to get my bass player Tony, from Howlin' Wolf's band; he's been with me ever since – and you just pick up people as you go along, rather than trying to audition people. You meet people and you talk to them and you find that they're into the same things as you – that's the way it grew. You don't really change people so much over the years, you keep the same people.

TT: *I understand that you have just made an album – would you like to give us some details about this and how it occurred?*

JL: That was quite a surprise really. I'd never thought much of making records for other people. I always had the idea that one day I would get some money together and put out a couple of singles but the idea of making a record for a record company never really interested me that much. One day we were playing a show down at the 100 Club and we were introduced to Mike Vernon, whom I'd heard of, but I didn't know too much about. He came up to us after the show and said he liked the stuff, so we talked about doing this record. We cut it in a couple of days in a studio and we were really pleased with it. Mike was a great guy to work with – I think you yourself have worked with him in the past – and it went fine and we were very pleased with it.

TT: *Can we get back to the blues that actually comes from America – which I term as the black blues – what are your feelings about this, in comparison to yourself singing and playing the music.*

JL: That's quite a difficult question to answer. I find that the only people I can really enjoy with any great degree are the people in America, the great people that made records and are still making records to this day. It's true that a lot of the people who are playing it now – here and in the States. . . the white people – have done a lot for the music. They have got some people who were forgotten or unknown. There's a guy called Sammy Myers over in America, who is a great harp player and was forgotten about until this young Anson man came along and made a couple of records with him and now he's a big star in the States. So they do a lot of good, but I think a lot of people don't feel it and they think that it's really easy to play blues and all you have to do is repeat the same notes over and over and turn your guitar up and



Left to right: Little Paul, Tony Hilton, Big Joe Louis, Martin Deegan. (Photo: Dave Peabody)

play fast and very loud. They don't think anything about the singing – they just shout a few words into the microphone and think that's all that blues is about – it makes me a bit sad really, they just don't seem to get the hang of it. There are a few people here who I rate very highly – very good people.

TT: *I am interested to know who some of your favourite blues artists are, because when we hear somebody like yourself, we are listening to, in some ways, a wealth of influences, the best influences, and I wonder if you could tell our readers of some people they have not heard about, whom you could recommend, and then maybe they could actually find the records and start to enjoy the music more deeply?*

JL: What a job! You've got to like all the really well-known people. Howlin' Wolf is a great favourite of mine and obviously people like Muddy and Robert Night-hawk, but there are so many people out there that never get a chance to be really heard and there are good record companies – and I'm pleased to say that mine is one of them – that put out records by these people who are now finally getting a chance to be heard. There are people all over the West Coast – you had people like Jimmy Wilson, James Reed, Johnny Fuller, Roy Hawkins; you had the people from Texas – you had the well-known ones like Lightning Hopkins but there are also the ones that weren't very well-known like Zuzu Bollom or Goree Carter or Dr Hepcat –

there's people all over the place, strange people down in Mississippi, like Willie Love, Boyd Gilmore or Charlie Booker, Joe Hill Louis and some of the great pre-war people like Roosevelt Sykes, Walter Davis. . . Walter Davis is a very great favourite of mine, he was one of the biggest selling record stars before the war. His records are so beautiful, I can't tell people how wonderful this man is but he's worth hunting out. . . and then all the way up to Chicago where you had some great people like Little Willie Foster, who only ever made two records. People like Harvey Hill in Detroit, Bo Bo Jenkins also from Detroit, Baby Boy Warren, Snooky Prior. . . they're all wonderful people and nowadays I guess, everyone's lucky enough to be able to hear these records quite easily and it's a shame if they just stick to reissues of Freddie King records and don't go and investigate some of the people that are a bit more obscure, but every bit as good – and, in some cases, a lot better.

TT: *It seems to me, from some of the artists that you have mentioned, and my having seen the band, that yours is a very honest band, that's the feeling I get from the music, it's just honest-to-goodness, well-played, music that people never fail to enjoy, from my observation. Can you give us some idea of what you would like to do in the future – how do you see the future for the band and for yourself?*

JL: It would be really nice if that was a

question that was easy to answer. The idea is what everyone's idea is – just keep on doing what you're doing. It would be nice if the type of music that we play gets more people coming to listen to it and not just people listening to us especially. But there are lots of other bands that seem to be doing something new and different and I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that guitar players seem to be less important now in blues. I'm not a guitar player; I like to think of myself mainly as a singer. Too often, I think, blues is linked with people playing 25 minutes guitar solos at very loud volume and it just makes people bored (apart from the musicians themselves). Musicians love blues because it's just a good excuse to show off, but I think the People like bands with good singers and they like to hear nice songs, well put over, with good words – there are loads of new bands playing around, like Shout Sister Shout and some friends of ours Roma Pierre and the Back Door Men (who are calling it a day soon) – but it's all about putting over a good song with nice singing. Also. . . if it helps, by getting this type of music a bit more widely known, then it's going to be well worth it.

TT: *Do you see yourself touring extensively in the future, would you like to do this?*

JL: It would be very nice but I have to work during the day – something that I have always realised that you are going to have to keep doing. If you are going to do blues – and do blues the way you want to do it – it's going to be very difficult, if you have a family, to do it as a full-time job without having to make any compromises. If the record takes off and if the people offer us some work overseas them, yes, sure we'd do it. The more chances to play, the better, and we love playing – wherever people want us to play, we try and get to it.

TT: *Thank you very much for giving us this interview and I wish you every bit of luck in the future with the album and I am sure many of us will be looking forward to its release.*

JL: Thank you very much.

Joe's album, Big Joe Louis and his Blues Kings, is out at the end of April, on Blue Horizon.

DUFFY POWER:

The Rockin' Bluesman

Interviewed by Spencer Leigh

Many people laughed at British rock 'n' roll and assumed that it couldn't match its American counterparts. Although that was largely true, there were some exceptional British performers, whose talent sometimes didn't manifest itself until later.

Duffy Power is a case in point. He was part of the Larry Parnes stable of stars and appeared on package shows with Marty Wilde, Billy Fury and Dickie Pride. He was on rock 'n' roll records for Fontana in the late 50s, but when he switched to Parlophone, he began exploring his talent. His version of 'It Ain't Necessarily So' remains one of the great British R&B classics.

Since then, Duffy Power has made several blues albums, and his superb 1970 album 'Innovations' with John McLaughlin, Jack Bruce, Danny Thompson, Terry Cox and Phil Seamen, was reissued under the title of 'Mary Open the Door' on Rock Machine (MACH 5) in 1986. As well as being a powerful singer, he is one of the best harmonica players the UK has produced, and it's not just for the blues as he can be heard on the soundtrack of the film, 'The Italian Job'.

As nothing much has been heard about Duffy Power in recent years, I was very pleased to interview him for my BBC radio Merseyside programme 'On the Beat' on 17th December 1988. What follows is a transcript of the interview.

SL: Were you discovered by Larry Parnes?

DUFFY: There was someone who discovered me before Larry Parnes and he took me to Regent Sound in Denmark Street and we cut Buddy Holly's 'Think It Over'. Then, about a year later, I was booked to appear at a Saturday Club at the Shepherd's Bush Gaumont. I used to dance and practice movements in my front room to Chuck Berry's records and I'd take the shade off the lampstand and use it as a microphone and I'd leave the curtains open, so the people could see. A girl who lived in the street used to watch me and, when I was at the Gaumont the Saturday before I was due to appear, she pulled me up for a dance competition and we danced to a Gene Vincent record, and we won. Larry was there, watching another act that he was interested in, but he saw my movements and my dancing and he asked the manager of the Gaumont about me. He said, He'll be down here next week to sing. So I spoke to Larry and he said I should do well. So the next week when I did well, Larry then whisked me off to see Tommy Steele, from whence I got the name Duffy Power, although I was known as Duffy before then.

SL: Did he decide that Ray Howard wasn't a name that would sell records?

DUFFY: There was a film star called Howard Duff and his name was on one of the little billboards with the latest films on. One of the guys in the street decided to call me Duff, so I was called Duffy for a few years before Larry met me. It was him and Tommy Steele that decided. Tyrone Power had died that week, so they thought 'Duffy Power'. Larry was like that, he believed in omens and portents.

SL: Why did you pick Ritchie Valens' 'That's My Little Suzie'?

DUFFY: We were very much in the hands of the A&R men but Jack Baverstock came up with a few good ones. The other side was 'Dream Lover' which did very well. I didn't have a lot of luck but I had four singles with Fontana. In all, I've made 6 albums and 17 singles.

SL: And you went to Scotland with the Big Three.

DUFFY: They were wicked boys. They were known as Cass and the Cassanovas. They used to do the first set and one night they did my whole act for a laugh. I didn't know whether to phone Larry or not. I went on and did them again, and I went down alright anyway.

SL: Kenny Lynch was the first person to cover a Beatles' song with 'Misery', and you were the second with 'I Saw Her Standing There'.

DUFFY: I got to record for Ron Richards, who was George Martin's right-hand man. He told me that the Beatles had called me the best R&B singer in the business and they had a song for me, 'I Saw Her Standing There'. I did it with the Graham Bond Quartet who were very avant-garde in the sense of rhythm, but that first session was cancelled because I didn't stick to the tune. I had a silly idea in those days that I should steer away from the tune, but I was wrong because it was a rock 'n' roll song with a very definite melody. I had to do it again, but John McLaughlin, who had been on the original session, was ill and Big Jim Sullivan came in instead.

SL: Why did you choose 'It Ain't Necessarily So'?

DUFFY: I'm a musicologist. I listen to everything and even in those days I was listening to Paul Robeson. I heard the

song on a Paul Robeson album, and as it was easy to play, I used to sing it at parties. When I was asked what I'd like to record, I said I would like electronic organs and guitars on a version of 'It Ain't Necessarily So'. It was at Abbey Road and we had speakers put up in the studio and we did it live, and it was lovely to do. I really enjoyed it.

SL: What happened after that?

DUFFY: I became ill through drugs, but it was basically me underneath it all, it wasn't what I was taking. I dropped out in 1968 although it was after that time that I made the albums. I never regained the impetus after having a year off like that, but I was still recording in 1980. Fully active, my career lasted for 14 years.

SL: You played harmonica on an Ian Matthews track, 'Man in the Station'.

DUFFY: To be honest, he had booked Paul Jones but Paul Jones didn't want to do it and he recommended me. I loved it. Sometime later I was browsing through a charity shop looking for books and this track came on the radio. I heard the harmonica player and I thought, Crikey, the harmonica players are coming on, they're really getting good, and then I realised it was me. I was working for the Department of Health and Social Security as a messenger and I went back and told my friends, but people don't see what that means.

SL: Who are the best harmonica players?

DUFFY: Little Walter who actually played my harp. He heard me doing 'Lawdy Miss Clawdy' and he took my harp and he played the tune. It sounded more like an accordion as he used his tongue as rhythm, it really swung. He and Sonny Boy Williamson were the best. You can't beat Sonny Boy for good quality.

SL: You made an album of blues standards for the Spark label.

DUFFY: That album should never have come out. I got involved with the folk scene and it led me to Peter Eden who was recording folk artists for Southern Music, and I was told that they would produce a decent album. I started laying down a few tracks just with a guitar, just developing ideas. We were going to use a prominent jazz musician to do some arrangements, but I went and found another record company. They had enough tracks to put out and though it isn't me at my best, I don't mind them being out.

SL: And what are you doing now?

DUFFY: I'm inclined to say what I should be doing now, which is writing and getting a group together, but it is very hard to find a good rhythm and blues group these days and I never was a prolific writer. To be honest, I don't know what the future is.

SL: Duffy Power, I wish you a lot of luck.

DUFFY: Thank you.

Review

B B KING *At Hammersmith Odeon*

I don't know what the support band was like but the bar was packed about six deep, which didn't start the evening too well, so far as I'm concerned. Still, drink isn't everything, though I found it hard to accept that until I'd finally got served. That was just about my only real complaint of the evening, though I thought the foyer was doubling as a rubbish tip.

Yet all this became trivial once I was finally seated, just in time to watch B B King get on stage. It may not have been the Regal, but the act was as professional, as slick, as tight as anyone could wish, though I'm disinterested in the "oriental", bowing-and-scraping, offering up of instruments, and though dancing is the name of the game, "boogieing around the world" - when it's as forced as this - leaves a lot to be desired.

That apart, B B seems as determined as ever to show that you don't need a vast repertoire to sell the Blues, just vast

experience of timing and performance. The talent is undiminished and B B is well on his way to realising his dream of making the blues acceptable in any concert hall in the world.

Let there be no doubt about it, the band is there for one purpose - to enhance B B's cajoling of the audience. The great sense of space within the songs is a result of the use of dynamics and an almost analytical precision. It really doesn't matter what he chooses to sing or play, there will be that sudden cut, and then B B will release the tension with a vocal or instrumental phrase, or even a body movement, that almost becomes a cliché, and would be, from someone of lesser ability.

Anyone who hasn't appreciated the man's brand of humour, frankly doesn't have the first clue of what blues is all about. It certainly isn't about being "blue" in the miserable sense, which is something a lot of people seem to believe to be an essential part of the blues

performance. In fact, with B B King, performance is all - you've got to catch him at least once in your life. There were a lot of people doing that with gusto. Long may they do so. . . .

ELISHA BLUE and The Thunder Band
The Half Moon, Putney, London SW15
20th January 1989

I had heard conflicting reports about Elisha Blue, the latest addition to the small list of Black American Bluesmen who have taken up residence here at one time or other, so I took the opportunity to sample his music for myself at this gig, two days before Blue's thirtieth birthday. I'm glad I made the effort.

Elisha plays loud ("that's how I like it"), and admits to such influences as Hendrix, Clapton and Jeff Beck alongside more 'traditional' players such as Albert and B. B. King, so there is a strong 'rock' element which alienates many Blues purists. However, the repertoire for this evening

was mostly conventional Blues: "Crosscut Saw", "Sweet Home Chicago", "Sweet Little Angel" etc., all delivered in a warm and bluesy voice. There were several guitar instrumentals, extended workouts demonstrating that Elisha is both accomplished and daring. His experimentation may not always have been completely successful, but the man deserves credit for trying to forge his own style rather than just re-cycling the past glories of others.

The Thunder Band provide good backing, particularly the second guitarist who was called on quite a few times to fill in as Elisha was having a lot of trouble with his amplifier - eventually deciding to play his guitar through the house p.a. Still, that didn't mar an enjoyable evening. If you enjoy contemporary Blues, and don't mind listening to it at full volume, I urge you to check out Elisha Blue.

Norman Darwen

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THE PRETTY THINGS:

Back to the Blues

Phil May

Interviewed by Pete Feenstra

THE PRETTY THINGS mean many things to different people. Their colourful career has seen them playing the role of *Enfant Terribles* of the mid 60's, drugged up *Psychedelic* concept rockers of the early seventies, would be *American FM* radio stars of the mid 70's and reborn *r&b*'ers in the early 80's. The current *Pretty Things*, the eleventh or so line-up, finds the band happily mixing their early 60's hits with some current self penned material. The set is finely tuned and well balanced, the treble guitar solos still come from one time *Rolling Stone* associate Dick Taylor and the ridiculously young and healthy looking frontman remains Phil May. And while the band have undergone several climactic changes in a near quarter century of their existence, Phil May is at great pains to tell you that it is the blues that has kept him and his merry men going through all the dodgy headlines, hype and some 11 albums.

It's Feb 1989 and I've just witnessed the latest incarnation of the *Pretties* treat an unbelievably varied and enthusiastic audience to a smouldering set of *r&b*, mixed with slow blues and topped with the essential *Bo Diddley*/*Jimmy Reed* ingredient that gave the early band a great impetus. I thought I'd start with the present and ask Phil about the current line-up and plans.

"The present band has been touring Europe mainly for the last 4 years. In fact that's about the length of time since we last played in Britain. It's a very fluid situation, myself, Dick Taylor and Joe Shaw live in London, and Roelf Ter Veld and drummer Hans Waterman are based in Amsterdam. Our current management is also based there but we tend to meet up all over the place, depending on where our latest run of dates starts. Berlin seems to be a popular place at the moment, and we are in the lovely position of being able to come together after a period of time and just drop into the groove. It's a natural thing because we are still based around the common denominator of the blues."

Phil's already on to his favourite subject and he expanded on how the current lineup came together.

"Basically last time we were working in London, I tried to set up a couple of blues clubs, one in Leicester Square and one in Little Venice. The idea was to have the band playing regularly at the venues and invite people we liked, respected, or just wanted to play with. In fact it was looser than that because of the huge response we had. Everyone turned up from Paul Jones to Kiki Dee and old mates of mine from way-back-when, like John L. Watson. The band at the time was the one that cut the *Live At The Heartbreak Hotel* album, and con-

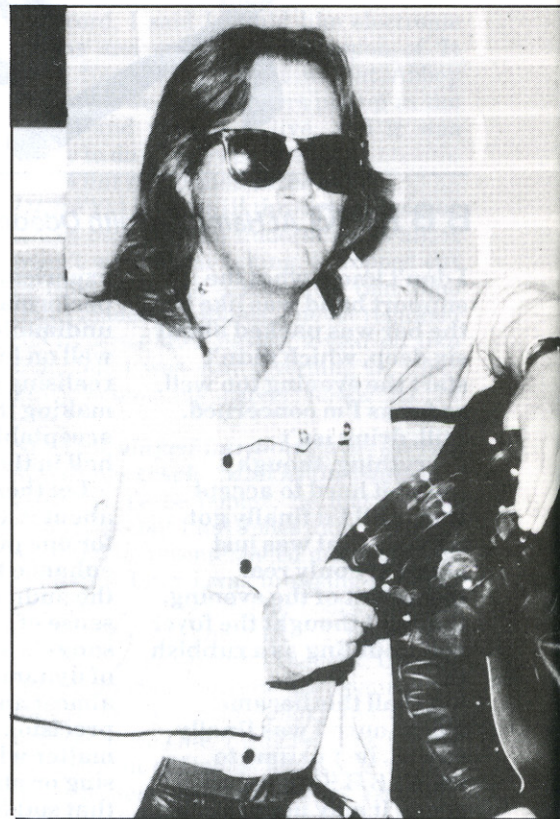
sisted of myself, Dick, Jo, John Clarke on drums, Kevin Flanagan on sax (now blowing with Tommy Chase), Dave Wilki on keys, and Dave Wintour on bass."

The *Pretty Things*, circa 1984, moved back to their roots both stylistically and geographically. Why then I wondered did the project not last longer? "Well, we were together for some years, and the problem arose that both Dick and myself found ourselves in so many jam situations that the band was finding itself in the strange situation of almost doing covers of our own material. I mean it's OK for a bunch of musicians to add their pyrotechnics and jazz inflections to material you like playing, but I felt the thing was moving too far away from the original.

"Dick and myself took off to Europe, and started to sit in with various people. There is a great scene there where musicians are accommodated in that way. The situation can only really work however, if the musicians have some kind of intuitive approach to their playing, and that's basically how everyone involved came back to the blues. We've got so much material as *The Pretty Things* that it just wouldn't be feasible to rehearse everyone into different songs and phases of our past.

"The Amsterdam thing was where we met Hans and Roelf, they sat in with us a couple of times and it grew from there. I knew Hans from a fine Dutch band called *Solution* and he introduced us to Roelf, and the project took off from there. Jo Shaw was available and he had played with us for some years and suddenly the whole thing fell in place."

The *Pretty Things* 1989 haven't hung around, they've already cut one of the first CD's ever to be recorded directly onto video tape, "*Out of the Island*", and perhaps the real innovation here is the



diminished role of the producer, as Phil explains;

"It's a very live situation with no real room for mistakes, unless you want to start all over again. It's a very exciting way to record, particularly if you are blues influenced. It's music from the soul that relies on feeling and not the dubious art of technology. The role of the producer is more that of organising things before you start playing and solely that. The rest is up to the band. We're very happy with the results."

So how does Phil May, the blues essentialist and technological minimalist, square his present return to the fundamentals of music with the high tech period of the early 70's?

"Well the *Pretty Things* have been many different things, and it's all been a natural progression. S. F. Sorrow was innovatory at the time and was valid at the time. I mean, it's still enjoying healthy CD sales. In fact with a lot of our stuff I was always assured by different people that we were doing well, and yet if so many people bought our stuff how come we didn't enjoy greater success? Keeping a band together is tough enough without all the problems of sorting out what's really happening with the records. But to get back to the point, you do what's valid at the time, but if you have caught any of our stuff over the last couple of decades there's always been a blues element. The main thing at the moment is to try and recapture the



Left to right Phil May, Jo, Dick, Roelf, Hans

feel thing, and bring music back into the forefront by stripping it down to its essence. I think people are getting fed up with the technological overkill. My kids are singing things like 'Poison Ivy' as much as anything else and I think that's great."

Looking around at the cross-generation audience at the Pretties' last gig it's not difficult to believe the popularity of the present lineup and the, perhaps somewhat unlikely, popularity of the music.

"People like Jimmy Reed, Sleepy John Estes, Bo Diddley and Chuck Berry are always being discovered by new generations and it's possibly true to say that kids are finding the link between the past and present through bands like ours. The audiences we've been getting tends to be 60/40 tending towards the young in Europe, and possibly a little more conservative in the UK."

Turning the clock back for a moment we talked about the rigours of touring, and Phil wryly observed that things haven't changed a huge amount in the last 20 years in the UK.

"It's incredible really; the difference between the UK and Europe, let alone the States, is still vast. For example, last week we were in Cologne and stayed at the Chelsea hotel. Basically it's a rock'n roll hotel catering for bands that have to come and go at 3 or 4 in the morning with no problems. Being back in England definitely takes me back. The same

sort of almost amateurism exists. Hoteliers are still wary and don't fully understand the demands of a working band and road crew.

"We were invited to do some dates on this tour in Scotland, but short of flying the whole crew up it would have proved both logistically and financially impossible."

What about all the headlines years ago in the pre-Keith Moon days when the Pretties were the nation's outlaws?

"The strange thing is that the problems that contributed to some of those stories still exist.

"There was a lot of newspaper hype, but basically what was happening was that firstly you'd turn up at a club booked months before a record took off to find that half the neighbourhood couldn't get in. That was a problem enough, before confronting the dubious prospect of three sets a night. Then you'd return to your hotel at 2 in the morning to find the manager had changed his mind about wanting you. So you're dripping wet, exhausted, in the middle of the night in Leeds, with nowhere to go. Ridiculous. We used to dive into a phone box and try to get into somewhere else - have the booking accepted, only to be turned away when they saw us.

"Attitudes have changed of course, but the actual underlying structures haven't."

Pursuing the days gone by, I asked Phil about the early band and what he

remembered about those days?

"A lot of it is a blur, it all happened so quickly. We were on cloud nine. Can you imagine making a living and suddenly having hits with what was previously a minority music. 'Don't Bring Me Down', 'Honey I Need', 'Midnight To Six', 'Rosalyn'; they were all part of the set and suddenly they were hits. It all happened so quickly that when Psychedelia happened we were not so much caught up in it at the time as trying to keep up. One of the funny aspects of the whole thing was the audiences. I remember once being booked into a gig in Tottenham and opening with a Bo Diddley tune in front of about 2,000 skinheads who were expecting a soul band with wailing saxophones and shades etc. . . really wild."

Some 20 years later the band are still thrilling an audience with "Judgement Day", "Midnight To Six", "Big Boss Man" and a clutch of new songs that remain firmly rooted in the blues idiom. The remarkable thing is that May's erstwhile partner Taylor appears to have added little to his original guitar style, and every note is eked out in the very same way as they were all those years ago.

What about Phil himself, how does he reconcile being a frontman of a band in his mid-forties?

"Well obviously you're not going to see me leaping around as in the Ready Steady Go days, but as long as there's an audience for our music we will be there. We've tended to have a strong audience in Europe from Scandinavia through Holland and Belgium all the way to Italy. But it can change. The Freeway Madness album actually established us in the States for a while. That was unexpected at the time and I guess where we are now has surprised a few people."

With a short 10 date tour just completed, and possible plans for a return to the UK in the summer, THE PRETTY THINGS look as if they are going to remain a credible outfit for some years to come.

With Phil and Dick again in harness, and with a new batch of material that quietly but confidently reflected the r&b and blues undertow of the band both past and present, THE PRETTY THINGS look set to make yet fresh musical headlines in the 90's. I for one can't wait to catch them.

Peter Feenstra

Continuing Steve Jennings' interview

JOHNNY MARS:

Straight from the harp



Part two

S: Do you see any particular value in the sorts of bands that are around who are doing an awful lot of fairly straight covers and writing some of their own stuff and so on and so forth and who are sort of toddling around the Pubs and who are getting their sessions on the Paul Jones show and all the rest of it. Obviously as bands they're getting something out of it and audiences are getting something out of it, but is it actually terribly constructive, I mean that's the question that I end up asking myself.

J: It's really hard to answer that question, really. I might ask myself that *but* I think it's completely down to them. We all have to find our directions in our own way. It might not seem the right way to some people but we have to have that freedom, some of that freedom, we need that freedom to be able to go in whatever direction we want to go in.

S: There used to be a lot of talk about sort of musicians paying their dues and all the rest of it, and what you had to do was to go out and you had to be in a little Blues band, flogging round the pubs and then suddenly started writing your own material and then you had a number one single, whereas these days there seems to be a lot of Hey Kid, wanna be a star? -type

stuff going on. If Stock, Aitken & Waterman came round and knocked on your door tomorrow morning and said Hey Kid, wanna be a star?, what would you say?

J: I'd say I *am* already a star. Do you wanna make me a *bigger* star? Put your money where your mouth is. Nah, it's shit! It's great though. It's really really good. You have to... em, I think every band pays their own dues. My advice to any young kids that's coming up playing music and they wanna get into modern-day music, my advice *would* be to learn to play some Blues because it's the basic formula for all the modern-day music, that's my opinion, personal opinion. Somebody's else's opinion probably might be completely different. But I *do* see, one day in the near future, there will be a harmonica player – you've heard me say this many times – that will have the musical training and loads of different types of music and he will play and he will be the hottest thing that ever hit the scene. Like you take Stevie Ray Vaughan for instance. I really like S.R.V. I always watch him on the television and go "Fuck it can that guy play"! But I think he went to school or college for a music... I think he's muscially-

trained. (Before you put that in I think we'd better check and find out if he did). A college for music – what's wrong with that? I think I heard somebody knock him for that.

S: Yeah, but you see that's the other thing, I mean you're teaching yourself to read and all the rest of it but I know that, I mean, guys I've worked with in the past have said that 'I won't learn how to read music because it will get in the way; knowing all that stuff will prevent you from coming across the happy accident but you know you get maybe 5 happy accidents a year up against 500 easily-solved problems because you know what you're talking about (when you can read).

J: Mmm. People like that... when people say things like that I think what it immediately makes me think if I put myself in that position, that I would not have complete control of myself. How could you have complete control of yourself, if it's gonna make you 'different'? You know, I wish I'd learnt to read in the beginning. I mean, if you really want to do something, you'll do it. I mean, I wanted to... people think I probably grew up with a harmonica in my mouth, Blues man you know in the cottonfields and I knew how to play just like that. It was hard to learn how to play, and there was some things I couldn't do. I thought about it – I didn't have control of myself in those days "I *can't* do it because LW or J C or whoever I was listening to do it", well you know he just did it because he *did* it – it's stupid! And once I'd learnt how to play some of the things then I thought oh, wait a minute. I can do that. And I *am* playing what he's playing and it's damn close to what he's doing, then I got it closer. "Hold on a minute, you can do anything you *wanna* do", you know. Whether you learn how to read first and you got people say "Well, I wish I'd learnt how to play by ear first," I think really what it is is those people don't have control of themselves and they're probably as lazy as hell and they just don't *work* hard enough at it. "I can only play by reading the dots". "I can't play by just improvising". I don't *believe* that's true – I just don't *think* so.

S: Well I mean that's just as bad in its own way as going the other way around. I mean, my opinion is that anybody who wants to call themselves a musician ought to be able to do both.

J: Yes of course. If they feel they can't then they don't have control of themselves.

S: Well, it's not that even, it's just that they don't perceive – I mean, it's like your classical players don't perceive improvisation as being any use to them and the

same with a lot of the Blues players – I mean a lot of them work out what the chords are.

J: I mean, look at Stephan Grappelli, I mean he reads. None of the classical players look at him and think “Cor, listen to what he’s playing.” I’m sure he can read as well, you know. And look at a player like that, look what he can do! I mean a guy like that, I mean Stevie R. Vaughan probably reads flyshit on the wall. But look at what he can play though. That flexibility! That’s what I’m saying about the harmonica one day will come out. Most harmonica players that I’ve known in the past, couldn’t read and play in line. The trouble I have had learning how to play simple things because I didn’t know how to read. A little bit of education.. of going into and how you do it you know helps so much, absolutely helps so much. I mean...

S: Do you have problems in the studio as far as that’s concerned?

J: Oh yeah, of course I had. Loads of problems in the studio. I mean several things like learning how to play on 3 and, and that’s basic training for people learning how to read music in the beginning. You know, just counting, that’s all it is and if you’ve never learnt how to do those kinda things... I know lots of musicians in that way. You get lot of old Blues guys play, you know... never had any training and basic music training, will play like that and people think it’s completely unique – it’s because the guy never had any training – it’s not that he can’t do it, just never had that training. It’s a whole different way of thinking, em, but so simple. Of course I’ve had a lot of trouble in the studio but I have very little trouble in the studio now. I mean, I used not to know what a B flat was to a C to whatever, and playing in between them notes, and thinking “Hold on a minute. They must be out of tune, my harps are out of tune”, I wasn’t playing the bends right you know... and looking at everybody else you know. A person can do anything they really wanna do. Absolutely anything...

S: Getting back to history, you did the two Polydor albums then you did the JSP album, then you disappeared.

J: Then I disappeared. I just didn’t play for a while – I didn’t disappear off the face of the earth – I went back to Mars for a while to see what the other Mars people are doing up there!. Em, yeah, I just didn’t play for a while, that’s about it really. I didn’t go anywhere, I didn’t got back to the cottonfields, I didn’t do anything like that to see what it was like but I’m about to go back to the cottonfields soon, go see my father in Florida, go back to South Carolina... Maybe I’ll see a few cottonfields... To see a few things that I never really remembered well when I was a kid in South Carolina, I don’t remember that very well, I remember a little bit about it, not much.

S: So then what happened then? Ray Fenwick came along and so you joined with Ruthless. Seventh Son was next, was it?

J: Yeah, Johnny Mars Seventh Son – that was with Brian Miles, guitar, Harry Parker on keyboard, em... we had various drummers then, em, Wayne Elliott on bass, em John White on drums, that was the first 7th Son. Then the band varied a bit and I then had Andy Cunningham on guitar – Johnny Mars Band, Joe Ileson on bass. I had Tim Dibley on keyboard, and Jim McCarty was on drums at one time. Then I had Jerome on drums, that was Johnny Mars’ band. And then Ray Fenwick and I, we teamed up.

S: He saw you playing with Ruthless, didn’t he, or something like that?

J: Yeah, I used to play with Ruthless for a while...

S: ...was the story I heard.

J: That he saw me playing with Ruthless? No, he saw me playing with the Johnny Mars Band. Then Ray and I we teamed up, which is still playing together. We had a band, called the Mars Fenwick Band, for a while, but I decided to change it back to the Johnny Mars Band. Em, I was with Ruthless for a while – that was a great band. That was a great experience, that band. We used to draw like crazy, and the real heavy blues freaks probably wouldn’t like that very much, it’s a bit too heavy. I guess it’s really one of my oldest...

S: It’s Hendrix-influenced, wasn’t it.

J: Yeah.

S: It was very, very Hendrix-influenced. John Knightsbridge’s guitar styles were very Hendrix-influenced.

J: Yeah. I used to have a secret desire to form a really heavy Blues rock band... I guess I should really carry out that dream, always had that dream...

S: With harmonica taking the place of...

J: That’s right. Exactly harmonica doing that. Also I need a guitar to do the things that I can’t do but I wouldn’t want to have a battle with the guitar. I really have to find the right guitar player for that.

S: Well, yeah, you’re really talking rock-solid rhythm section...

J: Right. Guys that can play rock and play Blues and so we’ll do Blues as well but the harmonica would take the bar and the guitarist that I’d have would play completely different from me because I’d be doing things that a guitar would normally be doing, and when the guitar would solo he’d take a completely different solo so that we would match and you have to find the right guitar player for that because every guitar player that I’ve ever worked with along those lines, you start playing a thing like that and they show you that they can do it so much better than you. You

know, I don’t need to be in competition with anybody in my band. If I’m playing on the bill with somebody that’s a different story, but I don’t need to pay anybody and be in competition with them as well. But that would be good. I think I probably will form that kind of band one day. I think the time is ripe for a kind of band like that, absolutely.

S: We seem to have a lot of Blues booms in this country which come about usually when there isn’t that much else going on which seems to indicate that the time is ripe right now for that sort of thing to come about, but do you think that if it does it will be the same sort of thing all over again as has happened in the past where a Band has come through or a couple of Bands have come through who – some of them make it really big like the Stones have made it really big, but others disappear back towards obscurity like the Feelgoods or the Groundhogs, Chicken Shack or any of those guys.

J: Yeah, well, I think what happens when new bands come out – well, there’s a Blues boom and the music scene get into a terrible mess and people go back to the roots to hear what it sound like and people are turning on to Blues, that’s what’s happening now, that’s what’s going to happen for a few years, actually. What happens is... is that the bands that do make it they go on and they change and they go on and change into modern music. With the music scene first of all, any musicians or any bands that are serious about being successful in the music business; if you start out as a Blues Band or a rock & roll band or whatever, think of it as a business. If you’re being serious, think of it as a business and not just something to have fun with because if you don’t change and go on with the times, you get left behind and you’ll be sitting around moaning and groaning and talking about Oh, well the music scene changed they’ve got this rubbish or whatever. That’s what the Stones – they started out playing Blues and they were playing Blues but they were playing it their way, they were trying to do the same thing as they heard all the blues guys but they played it their way, which was good. And they changed their music just a little bit more – a lot of bands started out as that – Santana used to be a Blues band years and years ago. Then we go back to that thing of musicians being creative, you know, to be able to widen their music flexibility if they want to, or they can stay where they want to, but if any band is wanting to be successful and they start out as a Blues band and they think the music scene’s not gonna change for them, then they’ve got a sad story – it’s gonna be a sad story for them because the music scene will change.

S: Do you think Blues actually works in those big stadium-type situations?

J: Oh, it works, yes. I think it does work. But the punters are the true judges and they’re the ones putting their hand in their pocket, gonna buy your records and pay to come in, and there’s no sense in

moaning if the music scene changes which the music scene *will* change soon, as there's quite a few Blues bands around now and will they go on *if they want* to go on? That's the question. If they don't, that's just fine. Oh the scene is ripe, yeah. Pick up my guitar and start playing again, so know. A guy's aint played for a while and there's new people coming on, you know. But if they wanna make it a business, there's no sense in... don't... a lot of people do, I hear a lot of musicians moaning after the music scene changed – You know, “Oh well we were doing alright and the blues scene was loud and the record companies controlled everything.” “They've changed the music scene now.” If you call yourself a musician and you feel talented enough, if you wanna change then you change. If you don't, you don't. That's freedom. But the music scene will change and there won't be places like the Tavern any more. As it is it's popular now. Because people will drift on to something new. Younger kids coming up that are like, 12, now, when they're 16, 17 & 18 they might not be into blues so the blues won't be popular then and as musicians if they really wanna be successful, will have to think about changing, and following the music scene. So there *will* still be a Tavern, or a bigger Tavern, or whatever. Otherwise they won't have no place to play.

S: *I suppose one of the inevitable questions that sort of comes up a lot or has been asked a lot over the years is “can a Blue man sing the whites” and all that sorta stuff and also, presumably being a black American has been not a disadvantage from your point of view in working in this country, in the view of that sort of... the respect or the aura whatever those guys, the early guys, are held in. Do you think that's true?*

J: Can a white man sing the blues – can a black man sing?... well something like that. Vice versa!

S: *There's two questions in there. The first one is you know “how do you feel about em, sort of white South Londoners, you know from the Balham Delta going down doing all that stuff?”*

J: Well, the way I feel about that is that, I am a musician and blues music is music so I should think that should probably answer the question completely. If cats... if anybody wants to play blues that's fine. If you can train, Christ, if I had two cats I could train 'em to play blues, if they wanna play blues they're musicians, man, musicians! Well, you know, whites are musicians. If they wanna play blues they play blues. If they wanna play rock they play rock. If they wanna play classical they play classical. Back to that old thing of...

S: *Well people get sort of into very heavy dissertations about, you know, we can emulate, but we can never...*

J: Yeah, well that's their privilege to feel that way.

S: *It's to do with guilt rather than anything.*

J: Yeah, well, two good examples. Rock

for instance. No, let's take blues first because blues was the one... Johnny Winters – great blues musician that was white – he was really white too – Great musician. Great guitarist. Great singer. I *like* his singing. If he can sing like a black man what the hell! Two different people, Er Rock... or you can take Steve R. Vaughan for instance, it's along the lines of Johnny Winters. Rock – *Hendrix*. How many times Hendrix beat the white musicians at their own game. Why? There you go. Music is music and I think where you really get that terrible distinction between the two is because people like to put labels on things and you get some people that'll say, you know, the white man can't sing the blues you know, Black trio can't play rock.

S: *So does it sort of piss you off then, all this stuff about Johnny Mars and South Carolina and being the black and American, must make you feel ten times better than anybody else before you start, as far as playing the Blues in this country is concerned?*

J: Well, I try not to let things like that bother me. Because if you let things like that bother you, how the hell are you gonna be able to concentrate on your music and play? I just feel a bit sorry for those people that think that way. You go onto the fact of teaching people how to play harmonica. You get some people come who from the beginning think “God, I'll never be able to play like that,” and I get them straight straight away. Break down the barriers and say “Look” you know “If you wanna be as good a player as whoever – I say who's your favourite player?” and they say “Little Walter, I'd like to be able to play like that, or James Cotton or it might be a player like you”: I say “Right” you can be better than me” and the looks you get of “but!...” “You can be *better* than Little Walter” “But..!” “You can be better than...” the look, the expression... “But those guys are Gods – I can *never* be that good.” Maybe that person can *never* be that good. Maybe they can be a thousand times *better*. Maybe they will only be just as good. But who the hell's gonna be the judge and determine who's gonna be better? You take two people, you put them together and you say, “Who's the best?” – there's gonna be different opinions. Music is music and people are people.

S: *So is “best” most “familiar”? Because if you go down that line from sort of Walter to Cotton to you, you can sort of take those records and hear the way that Cotton took stuff off both of them and all that, so does better mean different but not*

so far away from... to be better than John Mars do you have to be the same as John Mars but just a little bit different.

J: I don't know!

S: *To be better than James Cotton is to be able to play just like James C., do you then put some of your own stuff on top of that, so that I can hear it sounds just like James Cotton but Christ! It's better!*

J: When you start comparing, it's... I think it's terrible to compare but I think we're so conditioned in life to compare all the time, we do do it all the time, comparing one to the next one, it's... a lot of it's snobbery which is a real shame really but I think the better musicians don't get caught up in snobbery like that because you don't really get anywhere by doing it. Everybody's got an opinion and everybody should be able to have that opinion. If somebody believes the white man can't sing the Blues, well, that's his opinion you know, that's his problem! Maybe he doesn't look at it as a problem. I look at it as a bit of a problem. Em, maybe he doesn't have a problem, maybe he just thinks that and that's that. Maybe there isn't a problem – just his opinion. That's fine. I don't mind. If he wants to think like that, that's great'. But I don't think like that. I mean, I know I get a lot of criticism because people think “Oh, Johnny Mars doesn't play the Blues any more and he's done.” OK fine, some people wanna think like that, I really don't mind. I'm gonna play what I wanna play. If nobody come to see me, well, maybe I'll start thinking about changing my playing because I gotta eat! This is how I make my living. And it's a business as I said before. I think the Blues can be just as popular as the latest pop stuff. It all depends whether the record company can make any money out of it or not you know. It is a business. If a record company doesn't look at music as a business they won't survive, they just won't.

S: *But do you think, therefore, that the whole sort of... the survival of the Blues thing is, therefore, based on small labels like John Stedman doing small pressings of albums in their 2, 3, 4 or 5000's rather than 100s of thousands because that's the only way that you get to record?*

J: No, not really. Robert Cray's a perfect example, but a lot of people would say that Cray's not really playing Blues.

S: *Yeah but I mean he started out on that basis anyway.*

J: Yeah he started out on that basis but he's still playing blues, but *today's* blues. I think a lot of people are living in the *past*. They listen to a Little Walter record and that's it! That's the Blues or Muddy, and that's the blues. That's the blues today... of course it's the blues today if you play it. But a lot of those things, a lot of those sounds, *are* from the past. Robert Cray's sound is of today Cray didn't grow up in a cottonfield. How can he go around looking... I mean if he wanted to it's his choice. I think he works in LA (where's R. Cray, in NY or whatever) and Christ it'd be crazy wouldn't it? Of course you're black and

you play a guitar and play blues on a harmonica or whatever, sax or drums or piano, you know, you get labelled, well "you're supposed to be playing Blues?" and if I'd first come over here playing rock 'n roll, would some people still think the same? I wonder. They'd say "where you from? South Carolina? Nah, you should be playing the Blues, You're a Blues man!" That's probably what'd happen. "You're from S. Carolina - you don't play rock 'n roll." "Hold on a moment, I've never played blues in my life." Yeah, but you're from S. Carolina, you gotta be a bluesman. You know, it's crazy!

S: *So when you gonna make another album then?*

J: I'm not sure - I'm gonna sort out a new recording deal, do some more song-writing, I wanna do some covers, though, I *wanna* do some covers, because I feel it's very important to do some covers and of course write my own stuff as well. Ray and I, we write together and I'll write some things on my own but I wanna do some covers as well. The music scene is good at the moment, pretty pretty good. As a matter of fact, I've been asked to play City of London Festival, Broadgate one week in September in that complex, because the Blues really took off.

S: *So you're gonna do five nights up there?*

J: No, lunchtimes for this year and then next year I might do something more permanent. It could change but I think it'll probably change that we'll do those lunchtimes and that'll be the start of a regular thing there or whenever I'm around, you know, but they want it for September. It's outdoors. Gonna be a covered-over stage. It's like an arena, it's great. Lots of Blues bands. I'm looking forward to that actually. Just make sure the guys (are) around. Just before I get ready to go to the States, go back to see my old Blues man then I'm 45 now. I guess I'm old enough to be a *real* Bluesman. I was too young before when I came over. 29. I was just turned 30 in that December.

S: *What made you leave America in the first place?*

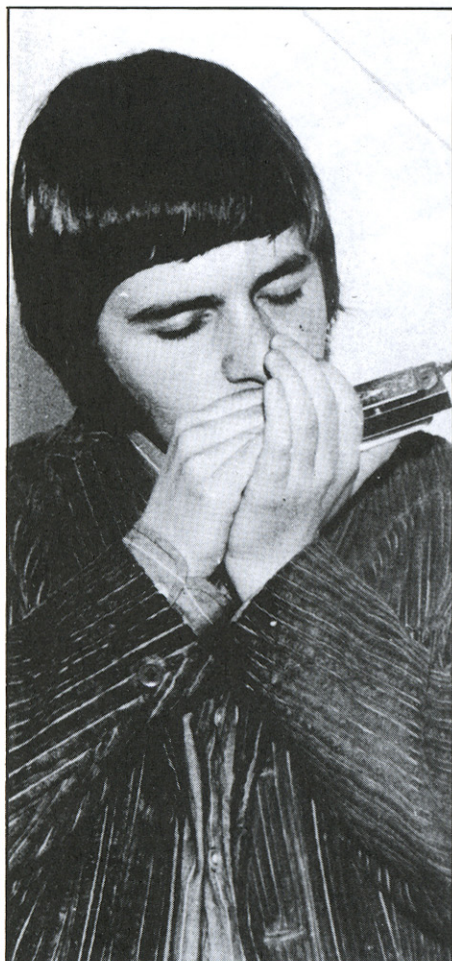
J: Just curiosity. Just curious. One of my dreams was always to come over here and take a Band back. I knew what I was doing. It wasn't just as though I just fell in or something. I had my whole life planned, rather. But to take a band back to America. I think this Band are a good Band. I have the right band now. And Susie's working on a tour for the Band. The States, yeah. We definitely *will* be going next year with my band. Susie got a booking for something new that's going on in the States. They're booking bands coming from here and I think from Germany as well, so I'll be *one* of those. And I got some Agent guy who runs a Festival in South Carolina who's interested, not the Monterey pop festival, but it's called Monterey Festival South Carolina for next year. But I'm touring America with the Band. That's a really



good band. It's really hot now. It's even better as a three piece but that'd be good. You know that's one of the reasons I came over because I wanted to see what it was like up this way and to take a band back to the states. It's been a long time coming but the time hasn't been right, you know. I haven't been right. You gotta go back and not to slouch, go back right. Because I've been back since I've been over here, I've been back quite a few times but to go back and take a band back... it's gotta be right. I'm not going back to fall on my face. When I go home it's gotta be right. But that's a dream I have, maybe I shouldn't really follow that. The kind of band I've got now is that kinda band. It's Blues

S: *So you're going back to the States and coming back to book Wembley Stadium for a week is that right?*

J: Well, that would be nice, that would really be nice. I can do that if I want to. I'm working very hard on my career now. As you know I'm also a Nijuri Shoja Buddhist and I practice Buddhism. Same as Tina Turner, Sandy Shaw. I find it a very good form of discipline. A lot of self-control. It helps me... does wonders for my music. I don't think there's anything that I can't do if I really give it some practice. But it keeps me out of trouble, unlike somebody else I know!!



Steve Rye, 1968

Steve Rye:

“TALKIN’ HARMONICA BLUES”

by Pete Moody

I spent most of a day reminiscing with Steve Rye, one of the stalwarts of the mid-sixties blues scene and an authority on his music, especially the Blues of the South Eastern States, which produced Blues-masters Gary Davis, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, who all became Steve’s close friends.

Performing with Simon Prager, as Country Blues Duo Simon and Steve, also harmonica frontman for the Groundhogs in their Liberty recording days in addition to a period with the Dummer band and a musical partnership with Bob Hall, Steve Rye, in the traditions of the Bluesmen he knew, has a story to tell.

P.M. I’d like to cover your story Steve, for the magazine, from when you started. Firstly, how did you discover the blues?

S.R. I can tell you how I started. I was about 16 years old, I’m 42 now, and I used to have a dachshund and I used to walk down the road with him and I was playing – learning to play harmonica. I went past Jo Ann Kelly’s house. I didn’t even know her or where she lived. I was trying to play Fox Chase or something.

P.M. Where had you heard that from?

S.R. From Sonny Terry.

P.M. From a record?

S.R. Yeah. That’s how I started and Jo called out of the window and said, “Good God I haven’t ever heard blues harmonica like that in Streatham” and so I went in and she made me an omelette. She was an absolute darling. She asked me to play at Bunjies. I met Jesse Fuller there.

P.M. When you were trying to play Fox Chase how had you heard the record?

S.R. I got it from a ten-inch L.P. on Topic of Sonny Terry and there was ‘Lost John’ on the same L.P.

P.M. A pretty obscure record to get hold of.

S.R. I’d bought it ages ago, I didn’t come through to blues through Rock and Roll or Skiffle. I came through just from the music on the L.P. and one of the very first L.P.’s I ever bought was “Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee in London”

on a Pye Nixa record recorded in 1958. There was ‘Southern Train’ on that. Oh, that’s how I really heard that harp. Do you know, the first record I ever heard – the first blues record I ever heard was, believe it or not, on Uncle Mac’s Childrens Programme. It was Sonny Terry playing ‘Talkin’ Harmonica Blues’. That was the very first harp record I really listened to.

P.M. There were one or two 78’s available of them then.

S.R. There were one or two, yeah.

P.M. Do you remember how you found the album – the ten-inch album, did you know it was available?

S.R. No I didn’t. I used to go to the old Dobells record shop and I saw it there – I had to buy it.

P.M. You obviously got into the Swing Shop here in Streatham.

S.R. Of course, Dave Carey’s. I used to go into Dave Carey’s and he, you know he’s still going. He lives in Purley. I spoke to him the other day and he was quite interesting because he said I used to go into his shop and he’d say “Steve”, there was a horrible cafe next door and he’d say “Steve’ would you mind going and getting me a custard” and he’d say “just stick it down will you” and it was on top of this great pile of E.P.’s and things!

P.M. Did he introduce you to blues styles you had not heard of?

S.R. Very much so. I always remember one occasion he had an old Testament album of Peg Leg Howell which I’ve still

got and I said “Can I hear a bit of it” – he couldn’t stand it. He said “No. No way am I going to play that!” He couldn’t bear that music and I said “Well, I got about a couple of quid on me” and he said “Take it! I don’t want to hear it”. I asked him why he didn’t like Peg Leg Howell. He said “Well, he’s lost just about everything and there’s a song on the record called ‘Honey Let Me Play with Your Yo Yo’. I’m just surprised he’s still got one left”. Dave would be in his mid seventies now.

P.M. Is he still interested in music?

S.R. Oh yeah – he’s a great vibes player and drummer.

P.M. Your first performance would have been with Jo Ann then.

S.R. That’s right – at Bunjies.

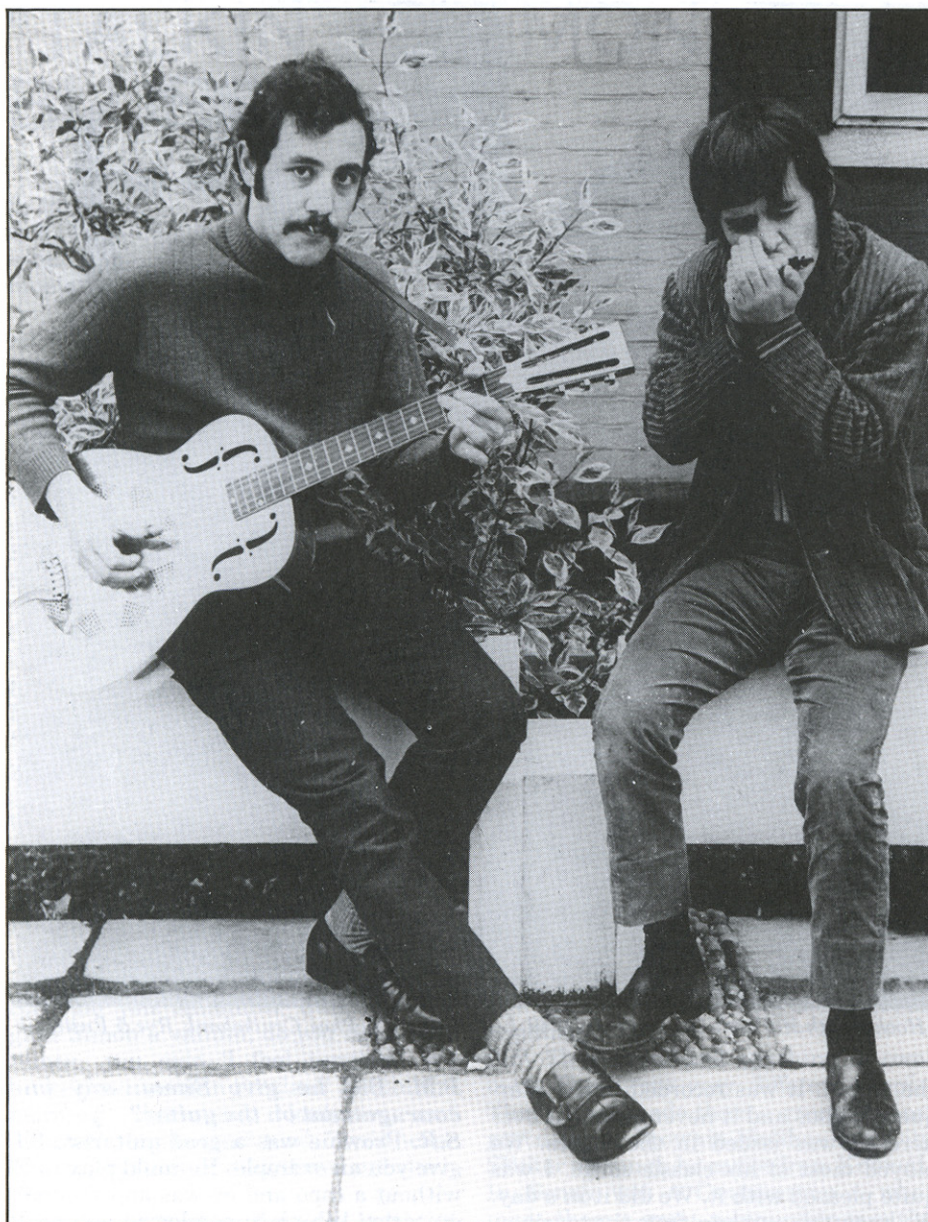
P.M. How did you meet Simon Prager?

S.R. I met Simon at a party. It was at a friend’s. He was great. Simon always says we met at this party on opposite sides of the table. Simon on top, me underneath! We got chatting. We’d both been to one of the Folk Blues Festivals and we’d seen Gary Davis and Simon was knocked out by him and I had records on him so Simon came back here to listen to them.

P.M. Was he playing guitar when you met him?

S.R. Yeah. He later bought a beautiful Gibson J200 guitar, just like the one Gary Davis used to play.

P.M. Had you met Blind Gary by then?



Simon and Steve

S.R. Yeah, I had met Gary at the New Victoria Cinema in 1964 or 5.

P.M. What music was Simon into then?

S.R. He was playing sort of American Folk type stuff – but he'd never heard Gary Davis.

P.M. Had he heard Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee?

S.R. Yeah, very much so – he knew their music.

P.M. After playing at Bunjies did it give you the feel of wanting to perform more?

S.R. Yes, very much so – I then played with a group called Cross Ties and it was with Dave Peverett.

P.M. Lonesome Dave!

S.R. Yeah Lonesome Dave Peverett. He played with Savoy Brown.

P.M. Who else was in the band?

S.R. Dave Peverett, his brother played 6 string electric bass. We had a drummer, but I can't remember his name. I then went with the Ground Hogs, with McPhee, Pete Cruikshank on bass and the Polish guy. . .

P.M. Ken Pustelnik

S.R. Yeah.

P.M. Did you play with the original John Lee GroundHogs?

S.R. No. They were named after Hooker and they had a black trumpeter with them.

P.M. I can remember them backing Jimmy Reed. You'd have joined the GroundHogs in. . .?

S.R. 1969.

P.M. After playing with Lonesome Dave, what came after that?

S.R. We always played round the Folk Clubs as Simon and Steve. I never stopped playing round the Folk Clubs. In playing with the GroundHogs we did a long player for Liberty which was titled 'Scratching the Surface'. It was the first they made with the renewed GroundHogs. That was done at the Marquee Studios with Mike Vernon. The technician was Mike Batt, later to become the "Wombles Man".

P.M. That was 1969. The Album you're on for Matchbox in Bristol called "Me & the Devil" was about the same time – lots of recording.

S.R. I did a lot of session work. I played harp on – we did a cover version with Brian Bennett of the Shadows – of

"Groovin with Mr. Bloe". He was a really nice drummer. It was called Bubble Drum. I still have a copy. I also played jews harp on it. I also played on Colour Purple. That was a film soundtrack in the early 1980's.

P.M. As well as the Simon and Steve duo, you also performed as a trio, Prager, Rye and Hall with Bob Hall on piano and Mandolin.

S.R. Simon and myself played for years, I'm talking about 10-15 years, we got Bob on piano in between. We'd done things together, the odd gig, and then we wanted to do some bigger gigs other than Folk Clubs. We wanted to do some Art Centres. We wanted something bigger than a duo, so we got together with Bob and called ourselves 'The All Star Medicine Show'. We could do a whole evening. No support act, we got quite a lot of work, later we added John Pilgrim on washboard. He was the only washboard player who could swing. He had a solid washboard, made a much better sound.

On the Red Rag record we had a bass player, Dave Green, he was such a charming bloke. He now works for Humphrey Lyttleton. We used to do quite a few things for Alexis Korner on the B.B.C. Overseas programme station. He used to call us the 'prickly pair'. He was a charmer. He did so much for the British Blues scene. He really was the equivalent to Eddie Condon, who organised all those jazz groups with Pee Wee Russell and people like that. . . .

P.M. Did you go to Alexis' funeral?

S.R. Yes I did.

P.M. How successful was the Red Rag L.P.?

S.R. Peabody organised that and that was in 1976. I know exactly when it happened because it was the time my mother died. We recorded it in Soho somewhere. We had a run through before somewhere in Barnes. It was funny actually – it was recorded underneath some Chinese dentist. It was an absolutely awful recording room. It was a proper studio room, but it was absolutely ghastly. There was water dripping through the ceiling from the bloody dentists! Oh dear! We sold it round the Folk Clubs quite a lot – you know, hand them out and flog them. Dobells had them.

P.M. Tell me about the Dummer period, Steve.

S.R. I wasn't on any of the records. The line up was Kelly, Thumper on electric bass, Dummer.

P.M. Was Putty in the band?

S.R. He came from Bristol – yes he was. Do you remember Jo Ann's record on C.B.S.?

P.M. Yes.



John Lee Hooker with McPhee's Groundhogs, 1969. L-R, Hooker, McPhee, Cruikshank, Rye & Pustelnik

S.R. Oh, Fingerprint Blues is my favourite. I think it's a classic. The other one is Moon Going Down.

P.M. Tell us about John Lee Hooker Steve.

S.R. I met John with the GroundHogs. Hooker had played in 1969 and he was a most charming man. I liked him a lot. Tony McPhee arranged it all. Tony asked me to play harmonica with them so that's how it started.

P.M. How did you find Hooker, working with him as a musician?

S.R. Very difficult. He was very different to accompany because he only played in two keys. He played in A and D. So in other words, in one sense it was simpler because all I had to do was take two harmonicas but he'd played sort of 8 bars and he was very difficult – totally erratic. He'd say "blow it baby" – you'd find yourself halfway through a solo and then he'd come in again!

P.M. After hours, what was he like?

S.R. He was a very quiet man. He wasn't a heavy drinker. I found him a charming man.

P.M. Did he talk about his early days?

S.R. Oh yeah. He'd talk about where he was brought up, Clarksdale, Mississippi. He was a fascinating man – he certainly wouldn't drink heavily. He'd just have a Lager or two.

P.M. Did you record with him?

S.R. Yes. Funnily, I haven't got a copy of

the record. It was recorded in the Marquee Studios and it never came out over here. It was issued in the States. We played most of his classic songs. I was quite pleased with it. We did it in a day. We knew the numbers from the touring.

P.M. Was that the last time you saw him?

S.R. No, I met him with my girlfriend at the Odeon, Hammersmith.

P.M. Tell us about Gary Davis, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee.

S.R. I played with Gary lots of times. He was a really kind man. I learnt pretty well my whole style of harmonica playing by listening to Sonny Terry. When Sonny used to play with Woodie Guthrie he'd go in a really fast style of playing and I learnt to play that from him. He was one of the great musicians. Brownie and Sonny they didn't get on.

P.M. I imagine Brownie McGhee being a pretty shrewd guy they were able to look after their affairs O.K. – because it's so sad many didn't or couldn't.

S.R. McGhee was a business man, he knew how to handle the act and Sonny also knew how to manage things, being blind – he had a lot of trouble. He wasn't entirely blind, he could see a little bit out of his left eye. He had a white stick and all that.

P.M. I expect Brownie McGhee had a few stories to tell.

S.R. Good God, you're not kidding.

P.M. Did he give Simon any encouragement on the guitar?

S.R. Brownie was a good guitarist, I'll give you an example. He could play in F without a capo and he was an excellent guitarist. I think Simon learnt a fair bit from Brownie, but you'd have to ask Simon. It was interesting because McGhee could play in F and Gary also did that. He'd use F shapes you know, most guitarists would put the capo on and play in E shapes.

P.M. You mentioned earlier you'd played jews harp, how did you pick up that instrument and that style of playing. Any tutorship from anybody?

S.R. Not really. The only way I learnt to play – Sonny had made a record called "Sonny's New Sound" on Folkways and I learnt to play from that.

P.M. What's the origin of the instrument?

S.R. It's quite interesting. It originally was Chinese, known as a jaw harp. I don't know how it got called a Jewsharp. I used to buy them in the Swing Shop. Dave Carey.

P.M. Dave Carey. He's got a lot to answer for!

S.R. Oh he's great, he was a real friend of ours.

P.M. Tony McPhee lived locally to you in the early days.

S.R. Tooting.

P.M. And Bob Glass, he used to work

"TALKIN' HARMONICA BLUES"

in the shop.

S.R. Yeah. Bob lived with Jo Ann for a long time – quite an authority on the music.

At this stage Simon Prager joined us, breaking for coffee. Steve and I recaptured the conversation we had up to then with Simon who enthusiastically joined in the stories...

S.P. As Simon and Steve it must be 10 years ago at least when we split up.

S.R. We never actually split up.

S.P. We did a gig 18 months ago, a smashing gig.

S.R. That was at The Enterprise, a pub in North London with Bob Hall.

S.P. It took a lot of rehearsing, a whole Bank Holiday of rehearsing.

S.R. You sounded every bit as good as you did. Your voice gets deeper as you get older. We'd both be singing better today.

P.M. *Is the time not right for you to reform the duo?*

S.R. I'd be more than happy.

S.P. If we were playing now I'm not sure we would have the enthusiasm for driving 450 miles to sleep after a gig.

S.R. Do you remember Gateshead?! I gave Simon a valium, do you remember Simon, you said 'I feel terrible'. We broke down once in Scotland at 3 in the morning between Montrose and Arbroath, on the coast road. You'd never known anything so cold, it was unbelievable.

S.P. We downed a complete bottle of whisky just trying to keep warm. It was a flat tyre. The spare was flat too! We switched on the heater every half hour to keep warm. I wouldn't do that again!

P.M. *When was the first Simon and Steve performance?*

S.R. It was at Chelsea College.

S.P. That's where I was at College – just after I'd left. I think it was 1966.

S.R. We played with the Bonzo Dog Band.

S.P. I was thrashing this old cello guitar with a plectrum. I bought the Gibson later in 1966/67. It was one of Marty Wilde's old Gibsons. I got it in Selmers in Charing Cross Road for £165. I got it because that's what Gary played. Then I went to Tony Zematis and he made me a better guitar so I sold that Gibson. It was not really a good guitar for that style. Gary Davis would have been much better if he'd played a different guitar. When he came over and he stayed with me at my parents house, he played my Zematis guitar to try it and he sounded much better.

S.R. Do you remember he also had a 12 string guitar, which he had custom built?

S.P. Yes, and he also played a Martin 12

string. He really liked those old Gibsons.

P.M. *Simon, how did you get into Blues?*

S.P. I started off when I was very young playing skiffle – Lonnie Donegan, my first big hero with Elvis Presley and I had a friend who played Louis Armstrong and Leadbelly records and I had other friends who played Blind Boy Fuller stuff, and I was playing Bob Dylan stuff before I was ever playing blues. I knew every song on the L.P. 'The Times They Are A Changing' and then I met Steve at this party in 1965; also Steve took me to see Jo Ann Kelly. Before I met Steve I used to play in Folk Clubs – do floor spots.

S.R. You played with Dennis Waterman.

P.M. *We never really discussed Sonny and Brownie earlier, Steve. Do you have any tales to tell?*

S.R. I got to know Sonny when I was with the Groundhogs. We were playing at the Toby Jug in Tolworth and we were doing the support.

We got to know Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee pretty well. McGhee is 75 now and he made a record in Paris a couple of weeks ago. Sonny's been dead now about two years. They didn't get on together.

S.P. They never had anything in common. They were very different people. That's what made them a great musical partnership. Brownie McGhee is a City Slicker although he comes from Knoxville, Sonny was a Countryman – what made them a great partnership was the fantastic blend. They had Brownie's smoothness, which was a stabilizing influence on Sonny's wildness. It was great while it worked. One day, I was told, when Sonny had stopped drinking they just stopped getting along. Brownie couldn't stand harmonica players.

S.R. He had a thing about harmonica players.

S.P. I remember Steve getting at him on night and saying "Why are you so nasty to that great man, he's a great musician and you should respect him" and Brownie said..."I'm tired of this, I'm going to tell you"... He said "Have you got any records of us" he said "Put on the record of us playing with Chris Barber when we were over here. 'Custard Pie'. Put it on – Now, what are you gonna hear. The first chorus is played by Chris Barber on the trombone, what are you gonna hear. You gonna hear Sonny Terry wailing over the top of it. The next chorus is my vocal, and you're gonna hear Sonny Terry wailing on top of me, then you gonna hear Sonny Terry and he sings, so the harmonica stops 'cos he can't play and sing at the same time. Then you gonna hear my vocal, again you gonna hear Sonny Terry, then you gonna hear Mon-



ty Sunshine's clarinet solo and the harmonica over the top" and finally about the fifth time he said, "If I had my way, I'd take all the harmonica players in the world and send them to the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean. I wouldn't let them come up until one of them finds the whistle of the Titanic and plays Nearer my God to Thee on it".

S.R. That's absolutely true.

At this point we concluded our session together. The tape switched off, I finished with me emphasising that the Simon and Steve act would be well received in the clubs again. Hopefully today's newcomers to the British Blues Scene will be fortunate enough to see and enjoy the 'Prickly Pair'.

BLUESNEWS

With the European festival season getting into top gear, it is interesting to note the emergence of another "first" – West Germany is the location for the first **RHEINBERG BLUES PARTY**, which will take place from 30th June until 2nd July and is organised by Kulturinitiative "SCHWARZER ADLER". Rheinberg is thirty kilometres from Dusseldorf, under half an hour's drive from Venlo, near the Dutch border and about two and a quarter hours travel from Amsterdam.

On the Friday and Saturday evenings, there will be concerts in the TOWN HALL, with after-hours sessions planned at the "SCHWARZER ADLER" club, 96 Baerler Strasse, and also at the club on Sunday

there will be a "good Morning Concert" with a matinee performance later in the day. The town hall concerts will feature four bands each night. There will be open air concerts in the market place on Saturday, in addition to two workshops at the "Schwarzer Adler" club on the same day. One is for guitar and the other, run by Johnny Mars, will be for harmonica.

Groups booked so far are: Otis Grand & The Dancekings, Vienna's Mojo Blues Band and a local group, Tonight's R&B Service. It is also likely that there will be an All Star Band comprised of European-based American musicians.

In addition to the music, there will be a photo exhibition in the Town Hall,

with a Blues-Info-Corner, as well as record stalls, etc.

Further details and booking reservations can be obtained from:

**Kulturinitiative
Schwarzer Adler, c/o
Klaus B. Paul, An der
Schneckkull 7 D, D-4130
Moers 3.**

Closer to home, **Banks's Brewery**, centred in the Midlands, is organising a competition to find the best new blues talent of 1989, with qualifying heats at various pubs where Banks's Mild Ale is sold. First prize is a week in a recording studio, with prizes of musical instruments going to the runners-up. The heats arranged are as follows:

Manchester, Prince Albert, on 12/4, 27/4 and 11/5.

Loughborough, Cotes Mill, 18/4 and 4/5.

Stoke on Trent, Man

O'Clay, Ubbertley Road, Bentilee, 12/4 and 3/5.

Oxon, Byfield, The Cross Tree, dates of three heats to be confirmed.

Derby, The Grandstand, Nottingham Rd.

Bromsgrove, The Boat and Railway, 20/4 and 9/5.

Bristol, The Bristol Bridge Inn, 11/4, 24/4 and 9/5.

Winslow, Bucks., The George, 13/4, 26/4 and 11/5.

Leamington Spa, The Gristmill, 13/4, 27/4 and 9/5.

Nottingham, The Milestone, 20/4 and 4/5.

Worcester, Hylton Club, Tybridge Street, 25/4.

Hereford, Old Harp, 20/4.

Kingswinford, British Oak, 19/4 and 10/5.

Nuneaton, Crow's Nest, 2/5.
Telford, The Cuckoo Oak, 18/4.

Wolverhampton, The Claregate, 13/4, 27/4 and 11/5.

Dudley, Saracen's Head, 18 Store Street, 27/4.



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Kay Guitars were officially founded under that name in 1931, although its origins reach back to 1890. Production in the late 40's reached 300 instruments a day. A quote made by a Kay executive stated: "Harmony make Fords, we make Buicks and Gibson make Cadillacs" – a very good description of the instruments at that time.

Kays peaked in the late 50's and early 60's. Later, the name was used extensively in the far east. These guitars were not comaprable with the American ones, so beware if you find one in a junk shop. Look for Made in USA. Also check out the late 40's – early 50's electric as used by Jimmy Reed.





North Wales outfit, **The Jukes**. Stick with it, John.

The Marauders continue to raid: April 11th, Wychwood, Ashton; 14th, Duck & Firkin, Bolton; 16th, George, Stockport; 20th, Bury's Derby Hall (with Zoot & The Roots); 21st, Station Tavern, London, W10; 22nd (lunchtime), Cartoon, Croydon and (evening) Verdi's, Weymouth; 23rd, Bell Inn, Ash; 24th, Farnham, Maltings; 29th, Band On The Wall, Manchester; May 4th, Kirkstyle, Oldham; 5th, Queen's, Chorley; 10th, White Lion, Huddersfield; 12th, Town Mouse, Burnley; 18th, Withington Ale House, Manchester; 20th, Wagon and Horses, Rochdale; and 27th, Bridge Inn, Rochdale.

London's **Kit Packham & The Sudden Jump Band** have a new album out on Spotlite. It's entitled 'On The

Shady Side of The Street' and includes assorted guest stars on various tracks. The twelve track album will be available at Kit's gigs for about a fiver and will retail for slightly more in shops. It is also available by mail order, check out prices through Spotlite Records, 103, London Road, Sawbridgeworth, Herts., CM21 9JJ.

Another London based band with an album due out in April is **Andrew Mitchell's Second Act** with 'Less Is More' featuring Andrew Mitchell (vocals), A. Hornbrook (Gtr), N. McDougall (pno), R. Armon (bass), and Sam Kelly (drums). It is available from The Wooden Mac Label, Catalogue no. AWMLP1, and contains 12 tracks. details can be obtained from Wooden Mac Productions, 2 Union Street, Barnet, Herts. EN5 4HZ (Tel: 01-440-3585).

Kinver, New Rose & Crown, 25/4.
Oldbury, Cottage Inn, 27/4.
Coventry, Golden Eagle, Keresley, 18/4 and 3/5.
Tenbury Wells, Royal Oak, Market Street, 20/4.

Well, don't say there aren't any blues gigs to go to outside London. These should be worth checking out and it's good to see some businesses treat blues in a positive way.

Other out of town gigs to get to are **Liverpool's Hardman House Hotel**, Hardman Street and **Llandudno's Aberconwy Centre** on The Promenade, both of which, John Ledson promotes. His bookings include:

Howlin' Wilf & The Vee Jays, Liverpool, on 8th April; **Louisiana Red**, with the **Norman Beaker Band** and **Jo Ann Kelly** at Liverpool on April 21st and Llandudno 22nd; Thursday May 4th sees the welcome return to gigging of **Davey Graham**, at the Hardman House; 12th and 13th, **Nick Green**, with **The Pirates**, does the double stint at Liverpool and Llandudno; Sunday 21st May, **Jimmy McGriff** and **Hank Crawford** will be at Hardman House and, looking further ahead, (July 14th) **Lazy Lester** gigs with

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13. Shout Sister Shout.
14. T. Model Slim.
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17. British Blues Review Jam.
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22. Big Joe Louis and His Blues Kings.
23. The Paul Lamb Band.
24. The Top Topham, Jim McCarty Blues Band.
25. The Jumpin' Catfish.
26. T. Model Slim.
27. Big Joe Louis and His Blues Kings.
28. Shakey Vick's Sunday Joint (noon).
28. The Big Road Blues Band. (p.m.)
29. British Blues Review Jam.
30. The Paul Lamb Blues Band.
31. The Top Topham, Jim McCarty Blues Band.