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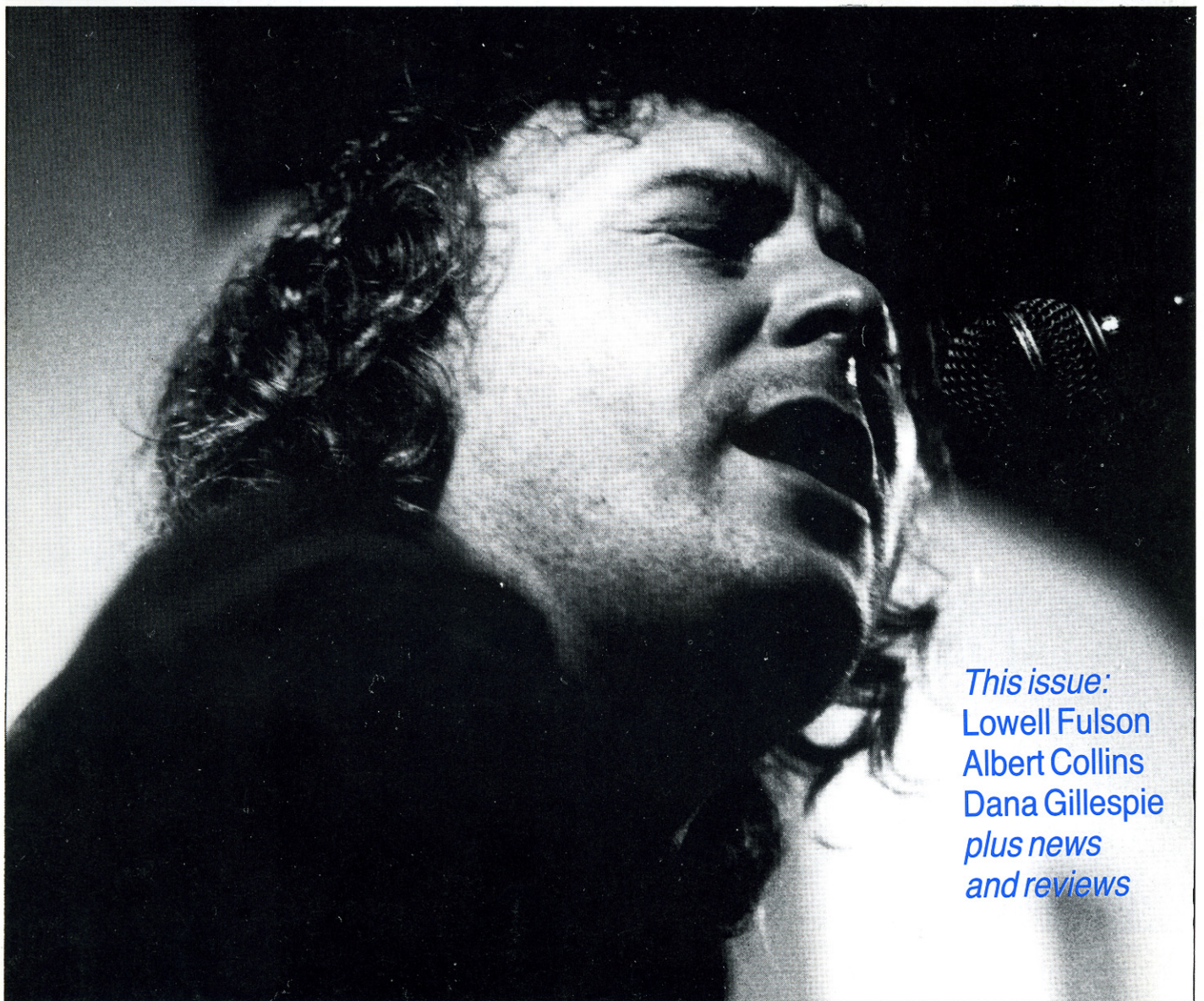
BRITISH BLUES

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*This issue:
Lowell Fulson
Albert Collins
Dana Gillespie
plus news
and reviews*

TALKIN' BLUES

The prediction business took a beating during the last few months of the decade past, so we won't be too dogmatic about forecasting the next year, never mind about the millenium.

We can nurture our hopes for the blues scene, though. Certain "experts" on the scene seem to be predicting the end of the potential for profit in the blues market. They seem to think that the boom - if there was one - is over. Yet, for example, the latest John Lee Hooker album has done really well in some shops, heading the lists in sales of *Jazz and Blues* over the last ten weeks or so. Somebody, somewhere, has got it wrong.

We've never worried too much about the experts, however, usually because they're either self-proclaimed... or part of a clique that continues to laud the worthiness of its own members at the expense of anyone else. The disadvantage of being part of such a clique is that you don't know what's going on. Your outlook is blinkered and therefore your information is incorrect.

Of course there are always going to be cliques of one sort or another - indeed we are also part of one - but that doesn't mean that we should limit our thinking by what benefits us. There is a broader view, based on observation - by going out into clubs and pubs, by asking in record shops, and so on - which gives a different picture. The blues, on the small scale, is thriving - despite the "experts". Whilst this happens, there will

remain the possibility of the music becoming yet more popular, and that doesn't necessarily mean along the lines of, say, Robert Cray and such like.

We might reasonably hope that the small gig circuit will spawn a number of bands and performers who can make it onto a circuit with larger gigs. There are enough venues around the country which can provide audiences of five or six hundred, with space to dance to blues bands, or to just listen without getting drinks spilled. Drink, indeed, might become less a part of the scene, given the pressures of the anti-drink lobby. Although the brewers are very well organised, they may not be able to cope with a change in people's perceptions about drink. Should this happen, then lots of small gigs, based on the pub circuit, will disappear. It is not unreasonable to believe that dancing to Blues will become popular again, which would certainly mean a new gig circuit, and might compensate for the loss of a pub circuit.

We must stress again that these are not predictions, merely possibilities and hopes. We have a further hope. We hope that the holiday trip to the States, following the Blues Trail from The Delta to Chicago, which we are co-promoting in September, will become an annual event. Start saving your money now and book your tickets for this year though. We know that is on the cards.



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an interview with
LOWELL FULSON
by Trevor Hodgett

Lowell, as well as being one of the major figures of blues music, is also one of the most adaptable of musicians, having begun his career over 50 years ago playing country music with a white string band. He then performed and recorded country blues with his brother Martin on second guitar, before forming various orchestras – one of which featured the young Ray Charles on piano.

Lowell admits that Charles' genius was not apparent to him at the time. "No; I knew he had talent, but he wanted to sound like Nat King Cole, y'know? So I argued with him quite a bit about that – and he changed his style."

It is not hard to imagine the influence Fulson must have had on Charles. Indeed some of the descriptions of Fulson's singing could equally be applied to Charles' in his subsequent career. Critic Peter Guralnick writes for example, "Fulson's voice, effortlessly malleable but whipcord strong, wraps itself around a lyric extracting every last ounce of feeling from a seemingly common sentiment." For good measure Guralnick adds that Fulson's guitar playing is "achingly, heartbreakingly sinuous."

Fulson has now been on the road for over forty years. "I tour about seven or eight months out of the year. But sometimes I don't do the one gig the whole month, sometimes I do a couple. I don't work lots like I did when I was a younger man," explains Lowell.

Young rock bands, after a year or two on the road, are fond of declaring, "Touring drives you crazy." After a lifetime doing it, how does Lowell feel? "If you don't do it, you're lonesome for it, and when you start to doing it you get tired of it quick. But I like meeting people and I get lonesome, yeah."

Can he possibly still get the same thrill playing the blues as he did when he first started out in the forties? "Yeah, 'cos you never quit learning. You're always learning something, and it's always a great experience when you perform well." Is it possible to enjoy playing a song for perhaps the thousandth time? "If you think about it, it's hard work. If the song comes out right and you do it right on the stage, and the band supports it pretty good, you feel good about it."

Invariably he plays with a pick up band. "I don't work enough to keep my own group, y'know. I'd have to work at least four or five nights a week and I'm not ready for that." Lowell is philosophical about the difficulties of playing with a different bunch of strangers every night. "It's, uh, educational for us. We learn from them guys that don't play your music just right. You learn something from them and it makes you feel good after the show's over and everybody congratulates you, that you've taken a

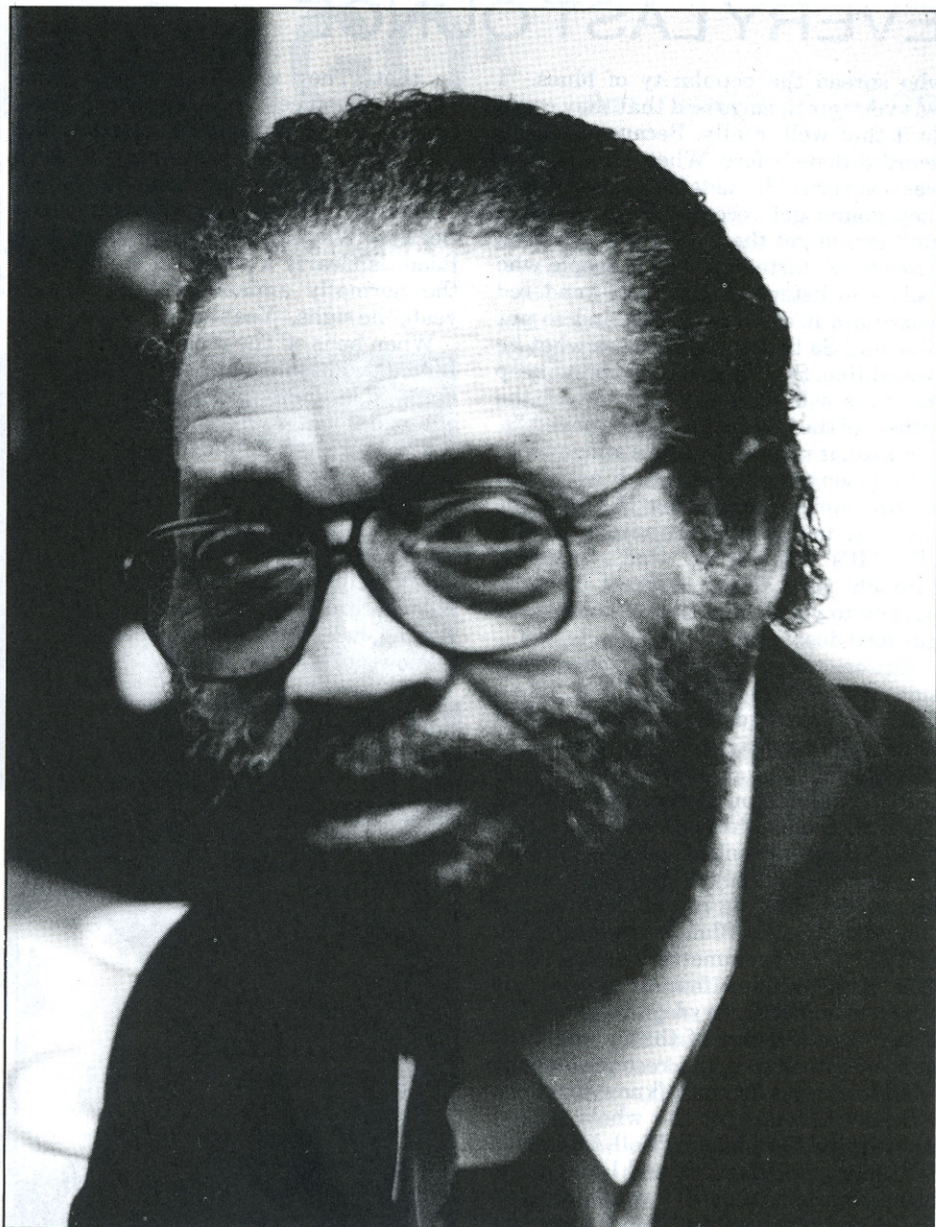


Photo: Brian Smith

EVERY LAST OUNCE

The greatest night in the history of blues music in Belfast indisputably occurred on the 9th December 1970, when the Muddy Waters Blues Band hit town. Since that magical and unforgettable night there have been memorable visits from many mighty bluesmen such as Arthur Big Boy Crudup, Eddie Guitar Burns, The Might Flea, Johnny Mars and Fenton Robinson. But surely the most distinguished blues visitor to the Lagan Delta since that thrilling night in 1970 has been singer guitarist Lowell Fulson, who recently played to a near capacity crowd of enthusiasts in the Errigle Inn.

new band and shaken it up as you go along, y'know, and put on a pretty good show."

In Belfast, Lowell was backed by the Jim Daly Blues Band. He remembered Jim's piano playing from his previous visits. "Oh yeah, I remember Jim. Yeah, Reminds me of Lloyd Glenn, who was on most all of my hit records at the beginning, starting from '49. Yeah, Jim's got a lot of Lloyd Glenn there."

The longevity of Lowell's career, and its international dimension, are due of

course to the enduring worldwide popularity of American blues music. He thinks he understands why the folk music of the American negro has had such a phenomenal world wide impact. "Because guys like you have made it popular. White boys singing them blues can be heard in more places than the black neighbourhoods. That's what I think. When they heard white boys doing it, they figured it wasn't too bad."

Lowell is uncritical of the white musicians, like the Stones and Eric Clapton, ▶

EVERY LAST OUNCE

who spread the popularity of blues. "I was very much surprised that they could do it that well, really. Because I hadn't heard it done before. When I heard it, it was a surprise. It made me feel good, 'cos they gonna get records played where I ain't gonna get them played. Face facts. After they started playing it people who had never listened to the blues wondered where did it come from? 'So and so put this out.' So they wanted to see what he looked like. So I figured they gonna keep me in a job, because I'm one of the fathers of the type of blues they played."

Fulson is revered by blues aficionados for his songwriting, as much as for his singing and guitar playing. His songs, he says, are not necessarily autobiographical. "It's something that's rapping through your mind. It don't have to happen to you all the time. Could be the guy next door."

Fulson takes pleasure in cover versions of his songs. "Well, I feel like I didn't do too bad. Yeah. Because if I wrote it I'm gonna get a little piece of the money."

B.B. King famously recorded Fulson's Three O'Clock Blues. "I haven't heard B.B. King's version," claims Lowell almost unbelievably. "They told me he did it - his first big record. I wrote it in '46. He and Bobby Bland sung it together and did a lot of commercial work with it. B.B. King covered four or five or my tunes. He cut Everyday I Have The Blues. I wrote part of that - and I got beat out of it, 'cos the record company wouldn't stand for me, y'know, in court. Ernest Chatman got the whole tune. I didn't mind that. I said, 'Well, he started the thing off.' He cut it and I just kinda re-arranged it." Lowell's words are resigned and philosophical, but, it must be said, his tone of voice is decidedly pained!

Another Fulson song, Reconsider Baby, became a standard. "Elvis Presley did a nice version on an l.p. Didn't ever come out on a single though. He did alright."

And Otis Redding and Carla Thomas took Fulson's song Tramp to number 26 in the American charts and number 18 in the British. "I didn't like the song very well the way they did it. I couldn't understand why they sold so many records. Later on I did - they had a lot of promotion! I got a little extra money out of that." Only a little, Lowell? "Well I had to split it with Jimmy McCracklin!"

Fulson never met Redding. "No, never saw him. The girl neither till later years. I never did see Otis, cos when he got hot he got killed."

Fulson asserts that record companies haven't interfered with his recording sessions. "When you're recording, if they don't want it, they won't tell you; they just won't release it."

But when I mention his late sixties sessions in Muscle Shoals, with white rock musicians, Lowell's mood changes. "Grrrr. In a Heavy Bag. I didn't want to

do that. They messed that up themselves. Engineers and producers and everything. Wasn't anything on that like I wanted to be on that thing. I don't know what they was trying to prove." The l.p., which includes a version of the Beatles' Why Don't We Do It In The Road, is clearly a very bad memory for the normally amiable Fulson. "Yeah, yeah," he sighs, "Yeahhh..."

When he is off the road Fulson lives in L.A., but doesn't hang out in the blues clubs. "No, I just go as far away from entertainment as I can get. And start writing. Y'know, a few things that have stayed in your mind, and if it's worth making a tune out of it you do." Fulson rarely even listens to records. "Not very much. I mostly watch television. And go out hunting. I like fishing. That helps me to write. I be doing more writing than fishing, heh, heh, heh. But I be out there, y'know, out in the open."



Photo: JSP Records

As Fulson's generation of seminal bluesmen ages, some critics see Robert Cray carrying the torch. Lowell seems underwhelmed. "Yeah, yeah, well he's doing very well. He's got pretty good promotion with his stuff. It takes that y'know. Spend a little money on it, right?"

Fulson's enthusiasm is reserved for older heads. "Bobby Bland, Little Milton, Albert King. Those are the guys."

And to those legendary giants of the blues scene ought to be added the great name of Lowell Fulson, who at the age of 68 still packs sufficient punch to rock the socks off any blues audience, anytime, as the 200 Belfast bluesologists who witnessed his performance in the Errigle will testify.

Trevor Hodgett

SWEET

Whilst the name Richard Black may not be mentioned in the same breath as some of his contemporaries, the man has a pedigree stretching back 23 years during which time this powerful vocalist and band leader has been a leading light on the Chicago r&b scene as well as opening up the Far East market with two decades of touring Japan, Korea, Okinawa, the Philippines and even Hawaii.

Richard's musical credits span an array of styles ranging from working with Spencer Davies in the States, and surviving the bullets in Tyrone Davis's band to providing back ups for Martha Reeves & The Vandellas and The Shirelles. Throw in gigs with the likes of Johnny Taylor and Chicago legends The Buckingham and you have a man with just about the widest musical CV it's possible to come across. But Richard Black doesn't just play. For apart from fronting Chicago's biggest horn section in the 10 piece Thyss (pronounced This), Richard has owned and "lost" blues clubs, been involved in both radio and TV and has been at the core of most of the big r&b packages that have headed East. Who better then to talk to and find out just what the present Chicago scene is like, and his impressions of blues at the turn of the decade.

R&B BACKGROUND

First of all, I asked Richard a little about his own musical background. "I started playing seriously about 1966 in Chicago on what was then the 'happening' circuit, which was mainly rock and roll, some doowop and a smattering of r&b. Mostly Gene Vincent, Jerry Lee Louis and Elvis was in vogue. The British Blues invasion was already happening but was not yet accepted in all communities. The circuit was made up of High Schools, Colleges, and even Catholic Clubs. We were in high school ourselves, but virtually worked professionally. Other bands at the time were people like Paul Riviera & The Raiders and that particular summer the Chicago scene peaked with bands like The New Colony 6, The Buckingham, The Cryin' Shame, Shadows Of The Night and The Rogues." The funny thing was here was a strong music scene, but most of us were trying to imitate British bands. So you ended up with a bunch of US muso's trying to be psuedo British bands, with the notable exception of the Shadows of The Night - who sounded like the Troggs, but scored a hit with their version of "Gloria".

"I never really became part of that British influenced thing, because I sing baritone, and apart from r&b I came back into the scene when Blood Sweat &

HOME CHICAGO:

An insider's guide

Peter Feenstra talks to singer/band leader/club owner/promoter/agent & part time Blues critic RICHARD BLACK.



"*THYSS*", Syd Brown and Richard Black

Tears and Chicago were happening. This probably explains my love of a swinging horn section."

ON THE ROAD

Richard paid his dues with a number of hard gigging bands like The Night-crawlers and Sweat... "That's exactly what it was, with something like 78 dates in 90 days, we toured the Far East, came back to Chicago and then virtually headed straight out again up the West Coast." Such a punishing schedule inevitably took its toll and the band split on the completion of the tour. Richard joined Cold Blood (a band that later appeared in the film *East Days At The Filmore*, and signed to Warner Brothers). Black's colourful career went on to include Joe Jammer – who enjoyed

two selling albums in the UK, Tyrone Davis, "I survived a few months as a back up guitarist. It was the perfect way to keep my chops up. Unfortunately Tyrone plays with guns, and if you asked for too much money he'd whip out his pistol."

Uptown followed, but being a multi racial international band, was split in effect by the immigration department who deprived the energetic Mr Black of his Venezuelan bass player and Porto Rican drummer.

Between '82 and '88 Black fronted Ryngg. Again Richard found himself in a road band that extensively toured the Far East. "One of the major bonuses around this time was my becoming familiar with the workings of radio, especially US Forces radio. You could in effect be unheard of back home, but

monster abroad. And, of course, when the guys came back home they wanted the records."

After hitting the road for some dates with Spencer Davis – who fronted Ryngg, Black started diversifying.

"I started doing some agency work in between dates, and picked up a blues club in Harvey, Illinois. I re-named it The City and tried to encourage specific audiences on different nights. The Blues and r&b nights did well, but I lost a packet in the end."

BIG BAND BLUES

Being involved in the club scene also meant Richard had a pretty good idea of who was doing what and who were the hottest players on the block. The result of his empirical knowledge is Thyss, a 10 piece unit which Richard co-fronts with Syd Brown.

"Syd is just about the most versatile person I've ever worked with. He's played with everyone from Cab Calloway and Sammy Davis Jr. to doing Musical arrangements for Ramsey Lewis and Flip Wilson."

Thyss is basically a 10 piece r&b review drawing its inspiration from both the past and current Chicago scene. Aside from the band, I asked Richard to take us through the current blues scene in Chicago.

"Well for a start, some of the music we cover is written by a talented guy called Paul Petraitis – a master of the guitar and a great r&b writer.

Clubwise you are looking at places like Kingston Mines, and BLUES – which is John Belushie's club. It was turned over to his partner when he died, they just changed the name but everyone knows it in the 'Old Town' (Chicago's answer to Greenwich Village), but its become yuppified!" Then there's The Checker Board. This club is a staple of the industry, and there's no other place like it. Its *the* place to go in Chicago if you want to hear *real* blues performed by unknowns. At any other time there might be Albert King, BB, Robert Cray, Clapton or Keith Richard in town, let alone Albert Collins etc. Its just a wonderful place, and everybody who's in town plays it. The only reason it's not better known is because it's in the heart of the ghetto. There's also PJ Flakherty's which programmes a wide range of music, consistently.

Rick is quick to point out however, that there's no reason for not checking the place out if you are in town.

CHICAGO LIVE SCENE

"Lots of white people don't feel comfortable there which is a shame because that

SWEET HOME CHICAGO: SWEET HOME CHICAGO: SWEET



Rick Struple of "RYNGG"

Colorado/Wyoming circuit has now incorporated Ski Lodge Blues sessions. These clubs are looking for Yuppies with disposable income, and are in a position to book some big acts. It's all a far cry from Chicago."

MEDIA

Blues on the airwaves, and in print is a dream that has managed to elude many a person's musical reality. Richard is in a good position to tell us why – especially in relation to Chicago.

"I was involved in an attempt to get a national blues paper together. The aim was to establish a blues organ that was entertaining, informative and credible. I helped market it, but it couldn't survive, despite lots of people out there who wanted it. The reality was that most newspapers could carry a blues section, but could not attract enough advertisers as a paper totally dedicated to the blues." (*Amen to that – Ed.*)

Where a blues newspaper failed, Chicago's radio stations are doing a great job in spreading the music.

"We even have a classical station that shares its wave lengths with a major blues show. Under the radio franchise, two people can have access to the same dial on the airwaves so at 11pm each night on W.N.I.B. (97.1 on the dial) the classical station becomes the *best* blues show on the radio you *ever* heard. Not only that, it's staffed by all the DJ's who were on when I was a kid – back in '62 and some of the stuff is syndicated."

TV also offers a rare visual outlet for the blues.

"On Cable TV there's a programme called Stone Blues run by Billy Dean. Now Billy is a blues player himself – with a couple of hits in France and the programme takes on the moniker of his band. What's great about his show is he features blues bands *you should know* about, but outside of Chicago you probably don't. Some of the bands play the *Corner Blues Clubs* – the kind of place where you cut your teeth. Unfortunately they are a fast disappearing South Side phenomenon. The Corner Blues bar is being eaten up by a strange mixture of corporate and City development and an expanding ghetto.

"The Blues Brothers movie was *not* exaggerated depiction of some of the Tipp On Inn clubs with chicken wire etc. Go directly North of Chicago to places like *Jolliett* and check out some of the hard core blues clubs and the scene is some raw, earthy blues, a shot and a beer and the end result is a fight!"

UP AND COMING TALENT

I noted that we had barely touched on the harp players and immediately Richard was at pains to push me in the direction of some of the current players. "The people smokin' on the scene now

is a big mistake.. You *can* go there and when the patrons realise you're there to see the blues, you won't find a better atmosphere to hear the music in. And what's more you probably won't see any better blues any other place.

"Buddy Guy just opened his own place in Chicago. Its a happening, smokin' club and goes by the name of The Cotton Club or something like that. However, it's inundated by Yuppies. Once they move in everything gets watered down and the authenticity starts to rapidly diminish, and you often end up with some frankly bland blues for predominantly white yuppie people."

On the question of young blacks being attracted to the blues, Richard is not very optimistic. "It's a small audience. Most young black kids are into funk, contemporary high-tech music, Rap/House music and with the advent of sampling, a synthesis of things. Probably the only credible young black band in this field is Ebony Star who perform a set of contemporary r&b and Soul."

Despite the above, the clubs are still the places to play for both established blues artists and those on the way up. As Richard explains it's a fine balance of backers that keeps the scene going.

"Well, there's a lot of Yuppie money goes into the clubs, which is both good and bad. On the positive side there is always an audience for the blues performer to play to but as I said the scene doesn't really attract many young black kids. In fact it's often the case that you might be listening to some young white guys performing as if they were black. I say young, but guys like Joe Kelly is in his 40's now, but his band is hot as a pistol and as authentic as you can get.

The future doesn't look great in this respect, because I'm not sure who is going to carry on the Chicago tradition when this generation blows out.

"One of the positive things about the blues clubs is that they are *absolutely* non racial, and they are open to everybody. You rarely get any hassle in the places where blues is performed. Incidentally another club I should have mentioned was Bidy Mulligans. Bidy's is a place where you can catch the best up and coming blues players in town."

Surprisingly, perhaps, it's relatively cheap to go and see a top class blues act in Chicago. Clubs range from free sessions to a \$5 cover charge, and maybe \$8 for the likes of John Mayall, the two Alberts, or Buddy Guy; Richard explains;

"Most of the clubs have a small capacity of say around 200 to 250, and there's a whole lot more that range between 100 and 150. I sometimes promote in a place called The Traffic Ja, and frankly it's important to sell beer. If nothing else, it's the best way of getting to put on the music you want to hear!"

"There's a new circuit opening up all the way to Wyoming, which supplements the more traditional circuit around the Lakes known as The Road Circuit. It was started by B.B. King and Bobby 'Blue' Bland. Those two cats were the first two blues bands to tour with a bus. Bobby bought B.B.'s bus and even took some of B.B.'s musicians with him in the early 70's. You head North of Chicago and head out to Wisconsin, the Canadian Border, sometimes down to Minnesota etc. The Road Circuit brought great success to clubs and the blues trail was opened up. Funnily enough the

HOME CHICAGO:

are people like Sugar Blue and Jody Noah. Sugar Blue is a happening black harp player, a well spoken gent of a man who spends a lot of his time in France. He's so accomplished on the harp, that you could give him virtually anything to play and he would.

"Jody is also an interesting player. He's of Irish stock, a little fire plug who just oozes the blues. Sugar was a Grammy award winner two years ago and made big inroads for harp players. People suddenly sat up and took notice. Here was a guy who had been playing on the Chicago street corners all his life and suddenly everybody wants to pay top dollar to see him. It's great to see. Jody is more of a traditional player and is very energetic and is now also playing guitar. He should be snapped up soon.

"Bands-wise, there is a hell of a band called Mike Gibb & The Home Wreckers who are not as yet getting the press they deserve, but that should shortly change when their album comes out."

Significantly, Richard doesn't offer a flood of compliments in the direction of some of the Windy City's home grown record companies. "Take Alligator, they have released some great stuff, but not much of it comes from indigenous Chicago talent. People like Jody Noah, Mike Gibb, Billy Dean and Sugar Blue, all have had to make it elsewhere, recording-wise."

Richard also mentions Big Twist & The Mellow Fellows and an up-and-coming, all too rare female vocalist, Liz Manville, as personal favourites. Of Liz Richard says, "She has the voice of Aretha Franklyn, but sings the blues, and is definitely a name too watch out for."

Finally, I couldn't finish this piece on



Billy Always

Chicago without a Jam story and Richard concluded with a tale of one of The Great Jams performed at the tail end of a show for British Royalty, no less. After the tuxedos came off, the real session began.

Similarly, one of Chicago's leading promoters Crazy Steve (Szabo) held his birthday party at the Chicago Limelight Club. On stage were Eric Clapton, Mick Fleetwood, James Cotton, Buddy Guy,

etc. As Richard says, "It was a fitting tribute to a guy who has been active in the city's music scene for nearly two decades."

Chicago, it seems, remains a blues town.

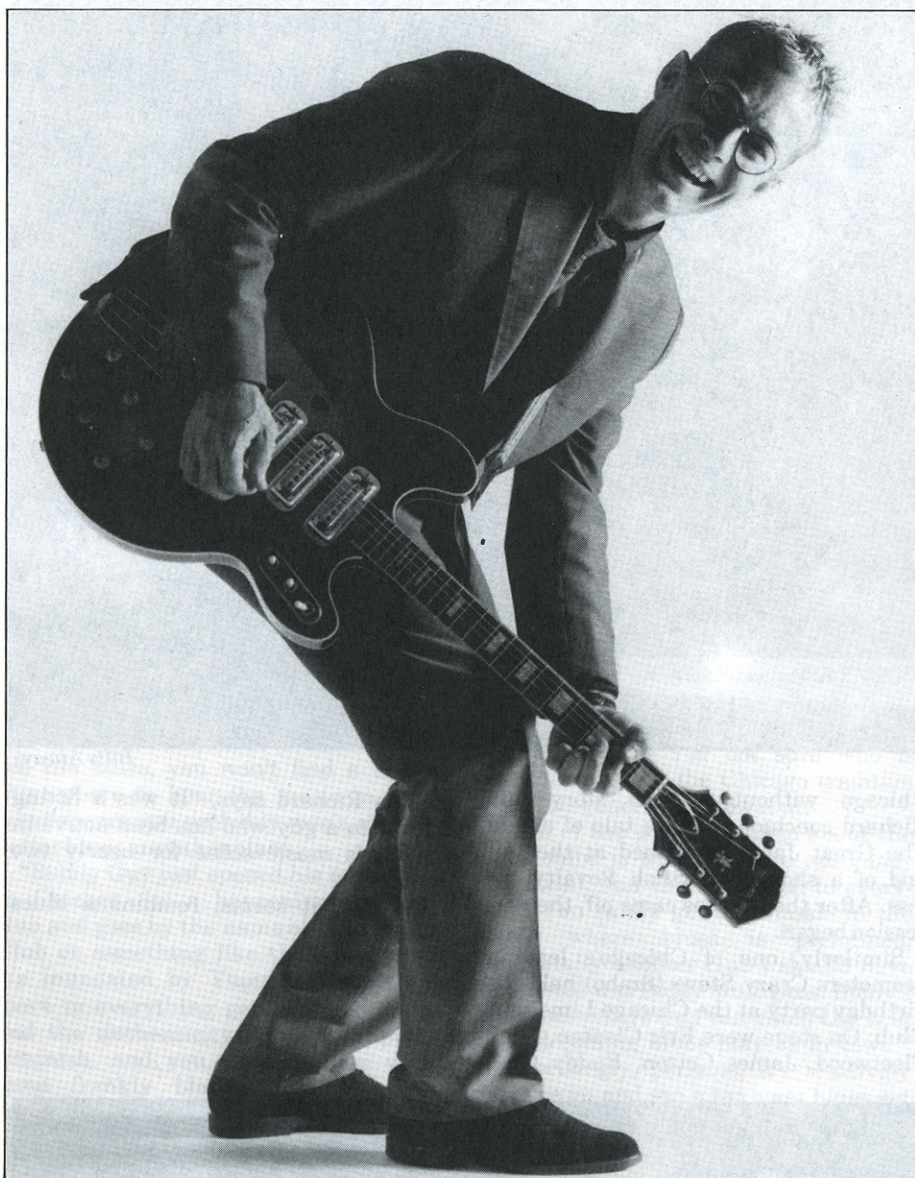
Pete Feenstra.



Guitarist Paul Petraitis

PETER JAGGER:

One-Man Blues Humorist



The Blues comes in all manner of shape, size and form. And it is to the latter that multi instrumentalist and one man band PETER JAGGER has been addressing his music.

Sure enough the spirit of, say, Doctor Ross springs to mind as you catch the busy Mr Jagger opening up for a band complete with an array of on-stage gear. On the other hand he brings with him a wry sense of humour and an engaging stage-patter that offers proof – if indeed it was needed – that blues doesn't necessarily have to be depressing.

Peter Jagger originally gained some prominence by failing to apologise for being The Support Act.

"I've known people who would rather stand outside in the driving snow than come in and check out The Special Guest on the bill," says a miffed Peter. "I found this situation quite intolerable. I mean you can always make up your own mind and retire to the bar if the support was

that bad. Significantly, in Europe the attitude prevails that the support is usually the up and coming band or individual. The same applies in the States. Without a stage for the new talent, blues is not going to prosper."

All of this is not mere speculation as the busy Mr. Jagger has enjoyed a rather varied career which has included the murky waters of band management, and record plugging. "The connection with the blues lies only with the fact that I've always been into the music, but got a bit fed up with the same old numbers being covered..."

In his performance, Peter Jagger includes the Jimmy Reed-sounding "Going To New York", and the lover's lament "Late In The Evening." Throw in a well received song entitled "Who's that Girl" and you have a contemporary bluesman who is rapidly building up a splendid catalogue of blues-related material.

So far the ebullient Jagger has built up his reputation with some carefully planned support spots; – "I think its very important to present a modicum of continuity to an audience" opines Pete, as well as the occasional foray into deeper waters. "I had the (mis?) fortune to open the Reading Festival Acoustic tent this year. It was a great festival but people were still busy coming in when I took the stage, and it's not the most conducive of circumstances to "talk" to your audience." Reaction was overwhelmingly favourable however, and more recently Jagger cut two live songs in a Paul Jones radio session.

Most of his blues influences derive from Little Walter, Jimmy Reed and Muddy Waters "But I don't have an academic attitude to this sort of thing".

Having established himself as "one of the foremost blues performers of the 80's" in the words of one well known listings magazine, Peter is not about to let the grass grow under his feet.

Having recently opened up the first night at the revamped Crawdaddy Blues club in Richmond, Jagger got the feel for working with a bigger project.

"I love playing solo. Its spontaneous, and there's no-one else to blame apart from yourself when things go wrong. But after the first hour and a quarter has departed, it can get a little taxing on both the audience and performer – let alone the voice..."

For the future Peter Jagger has put together a quartet which regularly enjoys a Sunday lunchtime session at the Prince of Orange, in Greenwich, London. "The aim is to play r&b without deafening people."

The result so far has been an interesting mix of self-penned material with classics from Slim Harpo and the aforementioned Reed.

"I think there's a market out there for blues/r&b played without heavy solos and trimmed to the bone. To a degree, Howlin' Wilf is doing it. The main difference with us is we don't play it as fast."

Together with former Ya Ya's Simon Caswell on bass, Trevor Walters on drums and Steve Morrison on guitar the band (tentatively titled The Jagger-nauts) look set to reinterpret the blues with an original mixture of authenticity tempered with a contemporary feel, and a set peppered with their own material.

As regards future solo outings, Peter is not totally jettisoning the idea. "I've still got a run of dates to fulfill, and at present I'm still opening up for my own band!"

As a one-person blues troubador Peter Jagger is amusingly refreshing. With a band, he could be in the vanguard of young British blues players. Try and catch him soon.

Pete Feenstra



Dana Gillespie. Photo: D. Cooper

“AINT GONNA PLAY NO SECOND FIDDLE”

DANA GILLESPIE talks to Spencer Leigh

‘Once seen never forgotten’ is an adage which applies to Dana Gillespie. But, like Dolly Parton, her superstructure conceals a vast talent. Dana Gillespie has appeared in numerous guises – folk singer, rock singer, film actress, TV compere, West End musical star – but her most consistent feature has been her love of the blues. Her albums for Ace, ‘Blue Job’ (1982), ‘Below the Belt’ (1984) and ‘Sweet Meat’ (1989) feature both the best, and the most humorous, British blues singing you’re likely to hear. Continental albums, ‘Move Your Body Close to Me’ (Bellaphon, 1986) and ‘Hot News’ (Gig Records, Austria, 1987), concentrate on her own rock and pop compositions.

I visited Dana (pronounced Dan-a and not to be confused with an Irish pop group) in her London home. Her house pays tribute to many cultures, and I was flattered to find my own book ‘Stars in My Eyes’ (Raven Books, 1980) amongst such unlikely companions. It is hard to concentrate with such a remarkable figure only inches away from you and, although I intended to bring the subject up, I was surprised when she mentioned it first. In fact, she mentioned her figure so many times that she must have a hang-up about it. Anyway, this is the Dana Gillespie interview as broadcast in my ‘On the Beat’ programme for BBC Radio Merseyside on September 2nd 1989.

SL You got off to a good start by being born into a privileged background.

DANA I never know whether ‘privileged’ is the right word ‘cause I know plenty of people who are wealthy and not happy. Give me someone who is poor and spiritually happy and I call him ‘privileged’. I came from a family that did alright and I went to

a very good school but I left at the age of 15.

SL Was it a musical family?

DANA My father played piano by ear and my mother used to sing the odd hymn, and I started writing songs at the age of 11. I played viola and then, one fateful day at the age of 13, which would have been in 1962, I went to the Marquee club in London and

saw Muddy Waters playing. I sat with my mouth open cause I was hearing black singers singing with a different style from what was in the charts, I was never that knocked out by the charts, and I thought, Whoops, that’s what I want. I used to go to the Richmond Jazz Centre, the Yardbirds were stars there, and they also used to play in the Marquee. By the age of 14, I was a well-known fan, being in the front seat, and Julie Driscoll was another fan. I told Giorgio Gomelsky, who managed the Yardbirds, that I wrote songs – I only knew three chords but that was enough to write songs with – and he told me to get up and sing. He told me to take lessons with Eric Clapton, who was the Yardbirds guitarist, but sadly the lessons never came to fruition because I bumped into Donovan. Donovan’s management offered me ‘Ready, Steady, Go’ on television, and I went for that instead.

SL Did you make records straight after that?

DANA My first record was on Pye when I was 15 in 1964 with Donovan on guitar and somebody on ocarina and somebody else on castanets and it was an Israeli folk song called ‘Donna Donna’ which disappeared without trace. Donovan was being promoted as an English version of Dylan wearing jeans and denim shirt and I was promoted as the female equivalent although my guitar-playing was inferior and I was only doing folk because I couldn’t afford a band. I hadn’t found my musical niche, I was too young, although I looked 20 which got me in a whole lot of trouble. I was mentally too young to handle the business, a lot of things were absolutely crazy.

SL Were you put on those pop package tours?

DANA They had good packages in those days and the first one I did, for which I got £15 a night, was with the Who, the Hollies, P.J. Proby and Tom Jones who was just starting out. I was a token female flung on with my three chords. I didn’t have any money and I used to hitchhike clutching my guitar and sometimes sleep out on a deckchair at the pier if I didn’t want to pay for a hotel. I had no idea about the business and I had 10 man-

agers in the first 10 years of my career and all of them were pretty hopeless. Straight after the single with Donovan, I was signed up by Southern Music, were really nice but nobody knew how to handle me because I was an embryonic talent and at the same time I was doing my junior British waterski championship, so I used to stop for a few months and go off and do championships, and I was in the snow ski team for Britain too, and then I would go back into the mad, degrading music business with nobody to guide me. Every now and then I would bring out a single and my first album was 'Foolish Seasons' for Decca, which had Jimmy Page on guitar and Mike Hugg and Mike Vickers from the Manfreds. Almost immediately I did another album for Decca with Savoy Brown, which was produced by Mike Vernon who has since produced two of my blues albums. These albums kept me ticking over for work but I never quite knew what I would be doing next.

SL *How did your friendship with Bob Dylan come about?*

DANA I was very young, I was 16, and he was very young too, I guess. I met him in London at a reception at the Savoy and he used to see me when he came to England. He told one press conference that he had come here to see "Dana Gillespie's jugs"! I can't say it was love 'cause I was too young to know what love was and it was awe-inspiring to be carrying someone's guitar when girls are screaming and trying to climb into the limo. You can see me in the 'Don't Look Back' film with my blond hair and bursting out of a shirt as usual. Every night the Stones and the Beatles used to come to the Savoy Hotel and they would play each other their latest recordings and you could see them vying for the top spot as the top British band, but everyone was in awe of Dylan. He was the first mega American star I had ever met and was the one person that both the Stones and the Beatles had great admiration for, so when he held court in one of the hotel rooms, everyone sat and listened. John Lennon got legless one night and fell asleep on my bed while I was in it, he didn't know I was there, he was out of it. They all drank wine but I never touch alcohol, so I was saved one demon.

SL *What about a favourite Bob Dylan recording?*

I haven't a favourite, but I like

'I Want You' and 'Boots of Spanish Leather'. I never played him much, although I love a lot of what he's done. For me, Bob Dylan is a great songwriter but his voice is monotonous. From the age of 10 or 12 I was only interested in playing Bessie Smith and American black blues artists. It's funny because I record blues and I hope that people buy my records, but I buy the originals myself. I buy Frankie Lee Sims, Elmore James, Otis Spann and Muddy Waters, and I find no reason to buy someone who is doing something a bit bluesy. It takes years of record blues-buying and years of listening to find a selection of blues songs that fit together, and not all blues is good. I would only buy something if I thought that there were going to be interesting songs on it.

SL *And when did you meet David Bowie?*

DANA I met Bowie at the Marquee when I was 14 and he was in the Mannish Boys and was 16 or 17. He came out with waistlength, lemon-yellow, Veronica Lake swept over one side hairdo, with Sherwood Forest boots with suede things up to the knee and a Russian peasant shirt and waistcoat. We became friends that night and I introduced him to my parents. My father told me afterwards that he didn't know if he was a boy or girl until I said his name was David. In those days you didn't see guys with long hair. He used to walk me home from my stage school, carrying my ballet shoes. It wasn't a love affair 'cause he was getting his career going and I was still at school, but because I had a separate flat in my parents' house, he would visit me. Sometimes I wouldn't see him for six months and then he would return and tell me about his latest girlfriend. We were always really good friends.

SL *And some years later he put you on his record label, MainMan.*

DANA Well, he introduced me to his manager and it was up to him whether he wanted to sign me or not. It wasn't David's decision, I don't think he wanted his manager to manage anybody else but him. He was probably pissed off about his manager signing other people, but he did produce some tracks on my 'Weren't Born a Man' album, which came out in '73 for RCA. While we were recording them, he became so famous in America, that Mick Ronson his guitarist had to take over and

finish the production.

SL *The 'Weren't Born a Man' album is famous, or should I say infamous, for its cover.*

DANA Everyone else thought about the image but I was not too serious about it. There I was in a black corset and a feather boa and stockings and suspenders looking like a saloon bar girl. Now, 15 years later, it looks like Joan Collins doing 'The Stud', but then nobody thought of being on their LP cover in their underwear. Women at 'Spare Rib' wouldn't review it 'cause it was considered sexist. I was astonished when guys wrote to me and said, I put your LP in brown wrapping paper to bring it home. I know some guys get turned on by stockings and suspenders but I hadn't meant to alienate female listeners. If you are pushed as a sex image, you still don't want to lose half your record buying audience which is women. I have had a feeling that it will take till I'm older for women not to feel threatened by me. It is men that look at Raquel Welch and this had the same effect. People looked at the cover and didn't really listen to the content.

SL *Do you think you might have had more success if you'd gone down the Dolly Parton road, flaunting your sexuality and yet, at the same time, making fun of it?*

DANA Well, I don't know. I think I would have to be even bigger in the bust to contemplate that! I certainly should have been born in America, as it would have helped that album and the next one, 'Ain't Gonna Play No Second Fiddle', which was taken from a Bessie Smith song. I was already wanting to do blues and it was difficult 'cause my voice hadn't toughened up, and people are a bit funny about blues, so I was still treading a commercial line. Just when my records were starting to sell, my manager and Bowie's said we should move to America, so I was in America for two years, and this was straight after I'd been Mary Magdalene in 'Jesus Christ Superstar'. Those two years were great for me in terms of touring America and working with great musicians, but at the end of it the manager decided not to manage either Bowie or myself anymore. I couldn't record for anyone else for five years and I had to go to court. It was soul-destroying because I thought I'd found the ultimate setup. After all these years in the business, I had found someone who could put

his arm around me and say 'There, there' and make me feel protected. It all collapsed and when I came back here, the music business had changed and so I didn't know what to do next. Maybe I shouldn't have gone to America 'cause at that time I was very much the queen of the West End musicals. I had done 'Catch My Soul' with Proby and 'Mardi Gras' and 'Superstar', but I didn't want to do the same show every night as that is too much like a normal job and not creative enough. It was great to get good money for doing 'Superstar', but it is the music itself that motivates me.

SL *Tell me a P.J. Proby story.*

DANA He always wanted to go on stage but he often did things, like drinking too much, that stopped him getting there. At one point in the Rock Othello, I find the handkerchief and I've got to wait for Proby. He didn't appear and I sat there for five minutes while they tried to find him, and it was weird to sit there and pretend you haven't noticed cause you can't ad lib Shakespeare, and 'Catch My Soul' was the straight verbal Shakespeare with songs to liven it up. He turned up legless and spluttered out some words but he did get very drunk and was grounded for a few performances. When he didn't drink he was great. He was great at the sound checks for his live gigs, but there's a couple of hours between the sound check and the live performance and that's when the damage used to get done.

SL *I think you also had a spell at the National Theatre. What about a story from those days?*

DANA Yes, I was doing 'The Tempest' directed by Peter Hall with John Gielgud, Julie Covington and Jenny Agutter, and it was just after my knee operation 'cause I was caught in an avalanche when I was skiing. When I was waterski champion, I used to jump 70 feet every day and the knee went when I was in 'Superstar'. The rake of the stage was quite bad and I had a cartilage operation that went wrong and had to be redone. When it was redone, I was with MainMan who said I must travel firstclass. I used to arrive at rehearsals in a huge limousine with a driver who'd take me to a club in King's Road during the lunchhour, and I would see Arthur Lowe and Julian Orchard and Sir John coming out of the tube. I knew those days of total extravagance couldn't last but MainMan

thought we should travel first class and have unlimited air tickets and stay where we wanted. It was total lunacy but artists are like children. If you offer them carrots dangling on a stick, they are going to run with it, especially if you add unlimited studio time and great musicians. At the end of it, Bowie said, "I have had five gold albums, where's my money?" The coffers were bare, and nobody spoke to anyone else for ages. My records hadn't sold enough to make any difference, but it affected Bowie because he should have had money, and he didn't as the case turned out to be.



SL *And what about films?*

DANA When I was about 17, I started doing some Hammer films. Being large-busted I was forever falling out of bits of chamois leather and wearing Raquel Welch's castoffs. From my shape I was very limited in what they were going to offer me. They were not going to offer me Lady MacBeth. My favourite is 'The People That Time Forgot', fighting dinosaurs and breathing in in the right place, but it was fun. I did 'Scrubbers' about women in prison with Mai Zetterling which was so horrific that many people couldn't watch it 'cause it was so true to life. I also did 'The Hound of the Baskervilles' with Peter Cook and Dudley Moore and recently I did 'Strapless' which was written and directed by David Hare. I got the part in 'Strapless' because they wanted an exotic, Hungarian, large busted woman of my age. If they'd wanted another look, I wouldn't have got it, but how I

look has nothing to do with how I feel, I have always felt that when I die it is like throwing away your overcoat. I don't judge a man by how he looks, I judge him by his character and the tragedy of my life is that most men have judged me by how I look. The moment I sense that, they go down so many points they don't get a look in.

SL *And you've also been having success with your records on the Continent.*

DANA I went to Vienna in 1980 as a bird with a broken wing because of this disaster with Bowie's management and a bad knee. I staggered to Vienna to do a play with Mai Zetterling, and I joined up with one of the best blues bands in Europe, the Mojo Blues Band and I became their singer for three years. I lived, slept and breathed blues, 'cause that was all that they did. They backed all the musicians who came to Europe. When I felt like doing something other than the blues, I recorded a song called 'Move Your Body Close to Me', which had been originally sung by an Indian singer and it stayed in my memory. It shot to No. 1 in Europe, which was surprising, but it never got released in England because I had been gone so long that no-one knew who I was. When this was a hit, the Mojo Blues Band, who were very purist, decided that they did not want to work with someone who worked with synthesisers so we went our separate ways. So I then spent about two years with my synthesisers writing more songs.

SL *It is clear that your blues albums for Ace have a theme, namely the relationship between blues and sex.*

DANA Yes, that's for a real reason. I thought it would be nice to put together some blues songs that had an overall concept, and all the good blues songs in the 20s and 30s were either about working the cottonfields, or my man done left me. I hadn't worked the cottonfields and my man 'hadn't done left me' and I didn't want to be a whitey trying to sound black. I thought it was much better to have an album with a sense of humour. So I went to Ace Records which is the best label in England for blues clout and credibility, and I said that I wanted to do 'Organ Grinder' and 'Big Ten Inch' - a 40s hit for Bullmoose Jackson - he is singing about his big ten-inch record but it depends on where you take the breath. I said I would call the

album 'Blue Job' 'cause I have got a sense of humour and I hope that these people who buy my records have got a sense of humour, and I was told to do it. Then I did 'Below the Belt' which is an accumulation of me listening to the blues, reading blues magazines, listening to blues artists and almost becoming a musicologist on the blues. I was a blues disc-jockey in New York for the two years that I was there, and blues was my big love. After I had done the two albums, I realised that I had done the best of the sex songs, the saucy, racey stuff. George Melly sings some songs that are equivalent to mine but I don't like the crude ones. I like ones with humour in them, and so after those two albums, I thought it would be nice to do something about sex from another angle and so I thought I would have fat songs on one side and thin ones on the other. But I discovered that in the 20s and 30s no-one wanted a thin person cause thin didn't mean affluence, thin didn't mean a good time or anything sexually, so it is nearly all fat songs.

SL *The songs are like music hall.*

DANA Yes, but much more raunchy. Sometimes I sing songs that were written for men, like Howlin' Wolf's 'Built for comfort' and '300 Pounds of Joy'. He is one of

my idols and nobody could sound like him, but I can sing his lyrics with a change of gender. I am not racially prejudiced the wrong way round but I do love early black blues singing. People say to me, is there any difference between a black and a white voice, but I don't think there is. It is just that black people were better at doing what they were doing. There are not many blues singers now, it is a dying art and I don't want to see it die. It is a music with humour.

SL *And what's happening now?*

DANA I'm doing live blues gigs, I have got a really good band and we have got a very good show but I don't know where to work in England any more. I would like to get a record deal to put out 'Move Your Body Close To Me', and there's another song that I think is very commercial called 'Did he fall or was he pushed?' which is on this album called 'Hot News'. I am very fond of Indian music. Indian music is like the blues, it's back to the roots, it's not a Stock-Aitken-Waterman music, it is more subtle and more interesting. I feel spiritually good when I go to India, composing in the Lotus position and I feel less good when I am in England. Perhaps that will change if I work more here.

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Albert Collins with Paul Jones at the BBC

organ" as he puts it.

Later on, when Albert was on the road he got chosen instead of Frank Zappa for a college gig in Tacoma. Here he met Robert Cray and later when he went to Eugene, Oregon with The Temptations, he got together with Robert Cray and worked for about four years. He worked again with him when they made the *Showdown* album. Originally the plan had been to use Gatemouth Brown and Johnny Copeland, an old friend of Albert. Gatemouth wasn't available so they invited Robert Cray.

Albert wants to develop his playing beyond the regular twelve bar structure, using additional chord changes in the way that Robert Cray or Bobby Bland does. The success of B B King inspires Albert to go for the same crossover audience.

He also met Kenny Neal in Toronto about four years ago and became excited when Kenny Neal said that he wanted to play blues. The Kinseys too, interest Albert, but his original inspiration still holds some dreams for him. The jazz big band sounds of Jimmy Lunceford still make him wish for the chance to get an eighteen piece orchestra for a recording, but that may or may not come about. Whatever happens, Albert will remain true to his style. He never wanted to play like anyone else, even though he admired them. He wanted to play his own style.

He knew Hendrix when he was still playing blues and played with him, and

also replaced Jimmy in The Drifters. He believes people should have freedom of choice, and wouldn't insist on anyone playing blues just because he himself is a blues player.

Albert comes from a different direction than most of his blues playing contemporaries. He hung out with Jazz musicians, such as Illinois Jacquet's father, an alto player who used to play with Albert. Albert came up from High School with the Texas background of big bands like that of Wynonie Harris.

Albert will rehearse an album for two or three days then go in the studio and do the recording in two days. No doubt he would prefer more time to spend on his records, but some of his best albums have been made on a minimum budget. He has plans to do a new blues album, this time with backing girl singers. It should be something to look forward to.

His schedule is still very punishing, which is why we couldn't interview him ourselves, but once again, we can be pleased that the BBC is still plugging the blues and giving people like Albert Collins his due credit.

Graham Vickery

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ALBERT COLLINS:

The Paul Jones interview

When Albert Collins was in London recently, he was unable to give an interview to the various journalists queuing to talk to him. However, he did manage to do an interview with Paul Jones for the BBC radio show on Thursday evenings. Thanks to Paul and his programme producer Dave Shannon and their staff, and also Dee Sparrow from Alligator Records, we can bring you the elements of the interview.

Paul began by congratulating Albert Collins on his achievements in being honoured five times in the year's Handy Awards. Albert explained that he'd been unable to get to the presentation as all flights out of Austin, Texas had been booked after the big ball game there. Albert had been gigging at Antones in Austin, and would have had to drive to San Antonio for an alternative flight to Memphis for the awards, but would have arrived too late anyway.

Asked about his feelings on winning the awards, Albert replied, "I was achieving something through the years, through something I wanted to do. I wanted to play music. Back home people used to laugh at me, saying 'go get yourself a job'. Through the years I've been trying to work hard, now I go back home and they give me a little respect."

Paul: "Considering how brilliant you are as a guitar player and what new things you've done with blues guitar playing, it seems to have taken an awful long time for you to become a star. Is that something that you think about, yourself?"

"I've thought about it a lot but I've been under-rated a long time."

"Has it made you bitter?"

"A lot of the guys I've known who have been playing longer than me ... they used to have a chip on their shoulder and I used to wonder why? I used to say 'that's something I don't want to beat my heart out about.'

"B B is a legend ... it took him a long time to go into the big time ..."

"Do you think that the record companies could have done more for you on promotion?"

"Yes. That's a problem I'm having now. I've been with Alligator now for ten years, but he seems to want to spend X amount of dollars for distribution on each album and doesn't go any further.

It seems like he doesn't want hits, you know?"

"It's always a problem and that stays a problem, no matter where you are. Could there have been several moments when people have given you a leg up ... I suppose the most famous one was George Thorogood getting you on stage to play with him at Live Aid ... that gave a leg up but of course it also gave George Thorogood a leg up"

"I was glad that he mentioned me ... this happened at the last minute, you know ... one group from Europe cancelled out because they couldn't make it, so George said 'try to get Albert to come'. I was in North Carolina so I flew in ... I was glad to make that one, man."

"Did you know how big it was going to be? Did you know about it in advance?"

"No. This happened in about seven or eight hours. He called me and said 'Can you drive through the night and make it to a certain point to catch a plane?' and I said 'yeah I can make it'. I didn't think nothing of it until I got there and saw all those people. George said 'Man, are you scared?' I said, 'Yeah Man'. 'Me too' he said. We went on and had a lot of fun. I met George when I was working ... a few years ago ... in Westchester, Pennsylvania. He was working in this club, stacking beer."

"Did you meet anyone on that Live Aid whom you always wanted to meet?"

"I walked right past Eric Clapton and didn't recognise him, he was wearing a beard. I'd always wanted to meet him and I walked right past him."

Asked about Bob Hite, Albert recalled: "I was in a club called the Ponderosa ... my cousin Lightnin' Hopkins played with Bob Hite so they came by the club afterwards and Bob Hite said 'Man, we've been looking for you for a long time. You want to go to California?' I went to Los Angeles in 1969 ... that's

when they got me with Imperial Records ... it didn't last too long because United Artists bought them out and then I went six years without a record. I tried to get on ABC ... but they had B B King and Bobby Bland ... they didn't need more blues. But they had the rights to me and other record companies wouldn't touch me ..."

Going back to his first recordings on Kangaroo, Frosty and Freeze, Albert gave details of the recording personnel, who in fact were his band for about seven years. He then recorded with Peppermint Harris and worked with him on the circuit around Houston. Peppermint wouldn't go on the road much, but Albert worked on the same scene as T Bone Walker, who was a great influence on him. His early influences were John Lee Hooker and Lightnin' Hopkins and he played acoustically until he met T Bone Walker and then bought himself an electric guitar.

Albert, the son of a sharecropper, grew up around Houston from about nine years old, eventually getting a job with a drugstore, before becoming a truck driver. He met T Bone when he was nineteen or twenty years old and met B B at the age of twenty one. Albert had been listening to T Bone records and big bands, such as those of Jimmy Lunceford, Tommy Dorsey and Jimmy Dorsey, which was what he originally wanted to get into. He had a ten piece band for some time. T Bone came to sit in with the band one night in a small Texas town where he happened to be living at the time. "I really got into T Bone when he put out that record, 'Strollin with the Bones'". Years later he again met T Bone, this time in California when Albert went out there with Canned Heat. He only met John Lee Hooker in 1979 even though he'd been influenced by him first. Albert had started off with piano lessons but he picked up guitar when the piano teacher couldn't get into town. A cousin showed him how to use his guitar. The cousin's guitar tuning was unusual, and Albert's tuning changed from Standard tuning to a minor tuning, but he wanted to play with an organ sound, "comping like an

THE RECORDING SCENE

KORNERED IN THE STUDIO

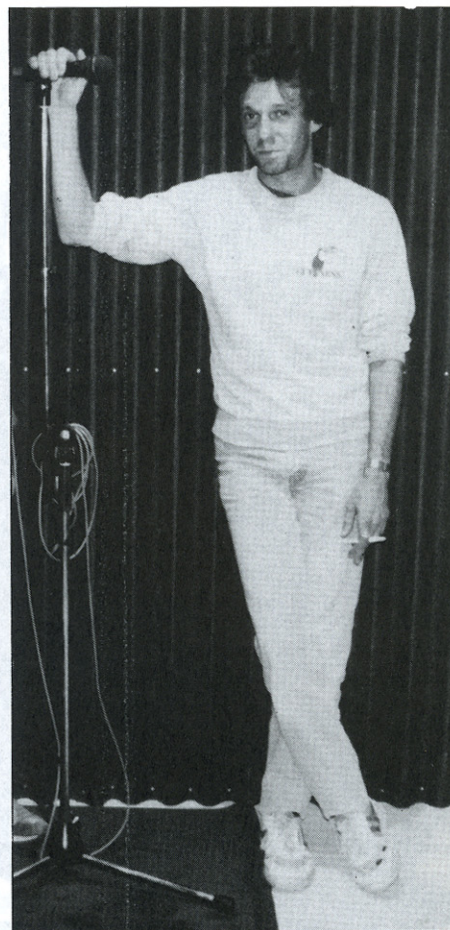
DAMIAN KORNER steps into the spotlight

Few articles on British Blues get very far without mentioning the great ALEXIS KORNER. Mention DAMIAN KORNER however, and much less is known. For Damian 32 year old son of Alexis has quietly but confidently been beavering away in studios for the best part of 17 years, applying his own musical talents to a different aspect of the recorded product.

Damian in fact has enjoyed considerable studio experience on both sides of the Atlantic, ranging from work in the Kinks KONC studios in London to Media Sound in New York and Tonto studios in L.A. Damian's studio career as an engineer and latterly as a producer has seen him working with an array of top bands including chart toppers like Tears For Fears, The Kinks, and NILS LOFGREN. More significantly perhaps he has also enjoyed sessions with the likes of PROFESSOR LONGHAIR, THE METERS, THE SOFT MACHINE and SNOWY WHITE as well as working on a few of his dad's projects. Damian Korner it seems has gleaned a vast repertoire of musical experience, the perfect credentials in fact to start up his own studio, which is precisely what he's done.

In the heart of White City in West London, KORNER RECORDERS is a hive of activity providing bands with the kind of support, professionalism and state of the art technology to make Damian's studio a popular place to work.

Damian kindly broke off from a mixing session to offer a few recollections of his dad, and give us an insight into his own studio career.



Almost inevitably any conversation has to begin with the all pervasive, much loved and sadly lately departed ALEXIS KORNER. I began by asking Damian just how much of an influence Alexis was, if indeed he followed his father's footsteps at all.

"I'm not a musician – but he was a major influence as both a friend and a father. As an example, up to the age of 14½ to say 15, I always wanted to be a professional footballer. I ultimately gave it up because I got fed up with all the training. So my dad said to me what did I want to do? I said I didn't know, but had a vague idea about working in a studio. Now I hadn't any idea what a studio was, but he said 'fair enough, you do what you want to do – but I won't help you'. He said he'd tell me if there was a job going, but I would have to get it myself.

"I had a lot of grief the first five years because of my name. People tended to treat me as Alexis Korner's son rather than a person in my own right."

Damian's early trials and tribulations didn't however preclude him from becoming involved in the music biz, and he soon found himself a job at the CBS studios in Whitfield Street. Damian cut his teeth as a tape operator/gopher/and was responsible for the tape library. However, even his first job was fraught with obstacles before he finally got his foot in the door. Damian takes up the story.

"The way I was employed was outrageous. At the time CBS had a manager

of personnel and a manager of facility. The latter wanted me in the job whilst the former obviously didn't. In all I had an 8 hour interview, during which they talked around me, and argued across me whilst I sat in the middle. I got the job finally, but being called Korner did have its setbacks. My father was simply my best friend, and there is not much more I can say about him that hasn't already been said."

MUSICAL INFLUENCES

Alexis's musical influences were as diverse as was his amazing knowledge of a plethora of musical forms. Damian was just as interested as his father and did not reject any of his father's rich musical heritage.

"I never walked away from my dad's musical influence, whether it was jazz, classical, rock or his own blues and skiffle. It would have been nonsense to ignore such a variety of stuff. For one thing he used to play so much stuff that I play now that it would be untrue to suggest I wasn't influenced by his musical tastes."

Alexis, it seems, was as much into music in general as the blues and r&b that he so vigorously championed.

"My father never dictated a style. Rather he tried to dictate a FEEL. That is he played music because you wanted to play it, and that you enjoy it irrespective of what it was. His philosophy was that you should be doing anything musical for the right reasons, i.e. enjoyment.

"I'll give you an example. In the studio

I often have to work with music I particularly don't relate to, but I always lock into something – find a spark. And when I find that locking-in point, it's fine. It makes doing your job to the best of your ability that bit easier, and more enjoyable. To do engineering for example as anything less than that would be doing just another job, and you can't do that."

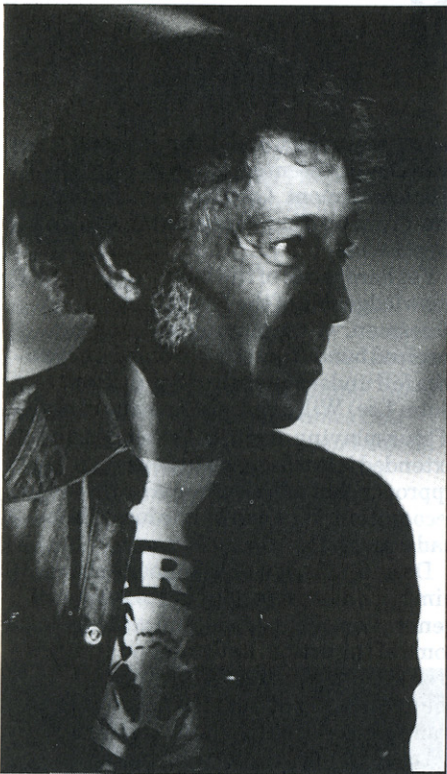
Surprisingly perhaps, given that Damian owns his own studio and is widely respected as a producer, he still feels happiest as an engineer.

"I never saw myself as a producer, if anything I've been forced into that role. It all started with helping out on my father's last 3 albums. You have to have a feel for the music to be a producer, it's more than just looking for the spark that ignites you in the role of an engineer..."

Whether he likes it or not, Damian has built up a solid reputation in the music business as a producer dating back a remarkable 19 years to his early work with Vinegar Joe. They were days that have long been superseded by technology.

"We used to cut an album in 6 weeks, but by the time of the 70's, that became something like 6 months. There was basically a lot of abuse of studio time, with big budgets and people desperately trying to spend them. Nowadays you have to go into the studio knowing what you want prior to laying down anything. In that way the music has improved despite the upswing in the use of computers.

Given the increasing role of technolo-



Alexis Korner

gy in studios and the financial pressures to come up with commercial material, I asked Damian whether he still came into contact with the blues?

"Yes, I'm pleased to say I do, because you don't lose your roots. It's a deliberate thing on my part, and I frequently play all facets of the blues at home from Boogie Woogie and Gospel to r&b and straight blues. As regards blues bands, I think blues bands these days are harder to get hold of. But there are a few, The Mean Red Spiders for example - and I'm prepared to work with many more as long as they realise they are not working with Alexis Korner. There's undoubtedly a same sort of affinity, but a different human being. It goes back to the same problem of my name. When I originally worked on blues sessions I'd either get thrown off them full stop, or made a martyr. I mean, I had situations where it got embarrassing. Some sessions would barely be into the opening few bars of a number, and people would turn around and ask me what I thought. I'd turn round and say 'play the part, you've barely started.'

"But overall I still find it a great delight to listen to the blues. I find the music is still highly relevant as a contemporary form mainly because blues has never been butchered or over commercialised, so it's a constant form. Were it to pander to the whims of the market place it would quickly become last year's model. Blues is all about feel and the way it's played, exactly the opposite of music that is edited, moulded and shaped. It is precisely because of this substance that there is at any one time always people, playing the blues, and a number of people who are on the lookout for the records. Whilst a lot of music is really the outcome of fulfilling criteria, the

blues retains its essence of enjoyment, and an ability to move you."

Damian's criteria for good blues is equally applicable it seems to UK bands as it is to a number of much touted US blues acts.

"I think British Blues bands are just as credible as their US counterparts, simply because a good blues band is good wherever it comes from. There's absolutely no image problem involved as there is in the popular music circles. In fact the great thing about playing the blues is that you can be any colour, any shape, size, or hairdo. Ultimately its the music that counts."

BUSMAN'S HOLIDAY

Finally, I asked Damian a few questions about his out-of-working-hours persona and what he is aiming for in the future.

"It's fairly impossible to divorce yourself from music even when I'm miles away from the studio. Music is my life and I suppose right from the age of about 4/5 when Alexis used to play old railroad songs around the house to get us to sleep (things like *The Wreck Of The Old 97*), there has never been anything resembling silence. I tend to get to hear a lot of stuff in my car, although to be honest when it comes to the radio, the dial often ends up on Radio 4!"

Where I wondered, was the impetus to come from to provide some innovative

music for the 90's?

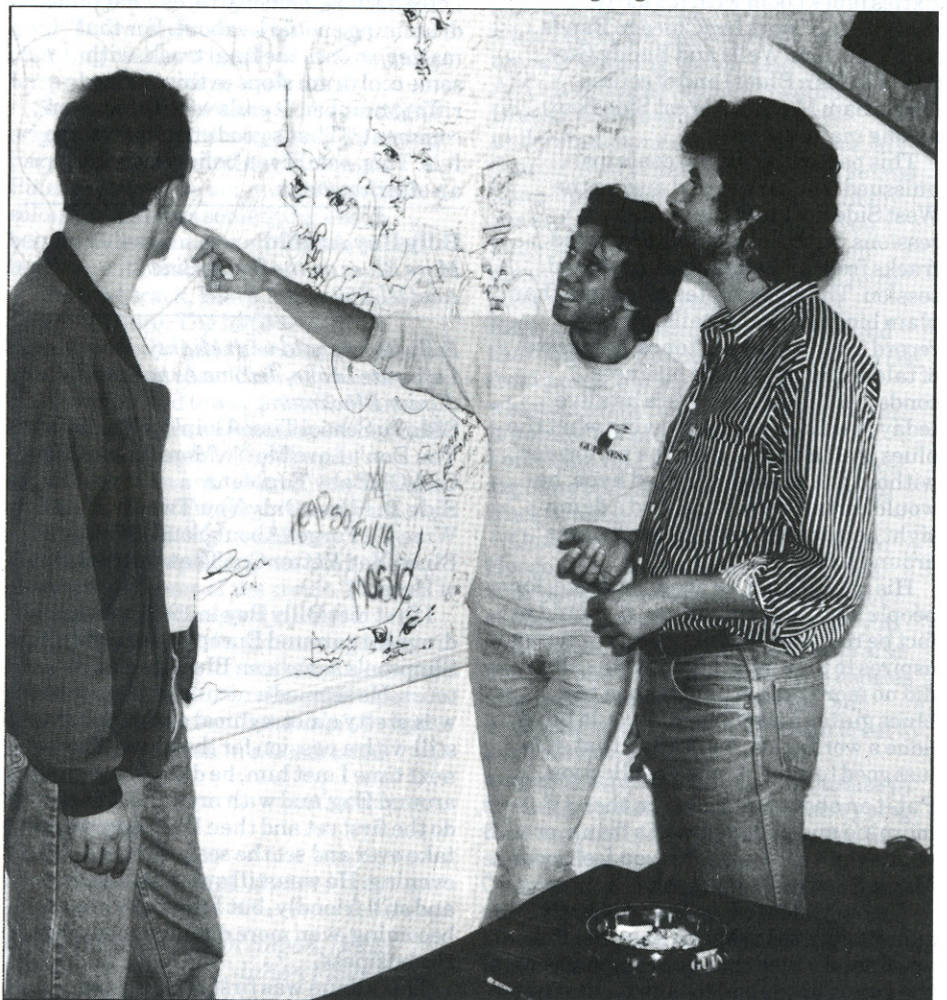
"I think the indies are going to have to reappraise their role. Some indies have already shown a willingness to put some blues and r&b on their catalogue, but for much of the time they don't take enough risks. Certain labels who at one time were considered pioneers, are now putting their money into bands they think are going to chart, rather than helping break new acts. Undoubtedly, money in the business is generated from "commercial value", but with too little experimentation, the business tends to stagnate.

"As regards your earlier question about my ambitions, I'm aiming to become better at what I do (as an engineer), and take further steps towards becoming a credible producer. I would be happy, for example, if my name was attached to a project where people's reaction about a band was something like 'they've never sounded so good', which is a different notion from formula production. I'd also like to set up a second studio and even expand into video production and be in the position to retain artistic control."

We ended up on the subject of studio rates and the amount of wasted money and time, but that's a whole different subject. It's a situation that the articulate Damian has observed closely over the years, but it is the stuff of a totally different concept of blues.

PETE FEENSTRA

Damian, centre, at the signing-in board at Korner Recorders.



RECORD REVIEW

by Graham Vickery

Having always been reluctant (can you believe that?) to venture opinions on the worth or otherwise of other musicians' offerings, pressing deadlines and a guilty conscience about the backlog of review records have led me to do these reviews this time. I must say I'm disappointed with the quality of some of these pressings and indeed with the recording quality, and I don't just mean the two that I specifically criticise. I feel that some reviews are too kind. I'm sure I'll annoy a few people, but that has always been one of the pleasures of life.

The Magic Sam Legacy

Delmark Stereo DS-651

Magic Sam with Shakey Jake, Eddie Shaw, Mighty Joe Young, Odie Payne, etc.

Side A: I Feel So Good/Lookin Good/Walkin by Myself/Hoochie Coochie Man/That Ain't It/That's All I Need/

Side B: What Have I Done Wrong/I Just Want A Little Bit/Everything's Gonna Be All Right/Keep On Doing' What You're Doin'/Blues For Odie Payne/Keep Lovin' Me Baby/

If I had to vote for Blues record companies, then Delmark would get plenty of my votes. It can reasonably claim to be one of the mainstays of the sixties blues boom with its early recordings of working Chicago Bands, such as Junior Wells and Buddy Guy (Hoodoo Man Blues) and of course, Magic Sam Maghett (West Side Soul) among many others.

This particular album contains unissued tracks recorded during the West Side Soul and Black Magic sessions, with a couple of unreleased tracks from a Shakey Jake-produced session. The sleeve notes give more than plain biographical details, for they record in unemotional tones, the waste of talent that the music business condones. Magic Sam, were he alive today, would really be showing what the blues is all about. A genuine performer, without the usual associated hype, he would certainly be huge, and a damn sight better than some of the "heroes" around today.

His music is not an acquired taste, for people who really dig Blues; it should in fact be required listening for anyone who aspires to play band blues. If this album did no more than stimulate one real blues guitar player, then it would have done a worthy job, but failing that, it is just good to have it in your collection. Put it on about one o'clock in the morning and pour yourself a drink, or whatever it is that makes you feel good. Magic Sam will do the rest.

That's All I Need, on Side A, neatly sums it up. This is Magic Sam, soulful vocals and a nice change of emphasis in the guitar at the end to take it out. That

Ain't It shows the influence of the competition in Chicago, but Sam still manages to do it in his way and the band really kicks along without overdoing things, though the harp is a bit dodgy in places. It ends less well than it begins, but is still a good track. The instrumental, Looking Good, is stronger than the opening track, not just due to the signal balance, either. It is blues for dancing and the band sound much more positive on this take, than on the opening track.

The B side has its moments too. All the musicians do the job to such effect that the band is restrained and nobody's trying to prove anything, yet they all prove their competence and effectiveness, in the process. The guitar effects are overused on track three, but only in context with this band, with anyone else it would still seem subtle. Yet there is a great feeling to the song and the band allow the voice to do the selling. Blues for Odie Payne is a tribute to the late drummer and as the sleeve notes declare, demonstrates what blues drumming should be about. For that matter, so does the final track, with some cool drum stops in this strong riffing number. It ends with the spoken comment; "That's good enough!" and so it is. This, would you believe, was only an alternate take.

Billy Boy Arnold

More Blues on the South Side/ Ace CH-253

Billy Boy Arnold with Mighty Joe Young, Lafayette Leake, Jerome Arnold and Junior Blackman.

Side A: School Time/Go in' By The River/ You Don't Love Me No More/You're My Girl/Oh Baby/Evaleena

Side B: I Love Only You/Two Drinks of Wine/I'll Forget About You/Billy Boy's Blues/You Better Cut That Out/Get Out of Here

I first met Billy Boy in 1975, when I drove him around Europe on one of Jim Simpson's American Blues Legends tours. He seemed a nice enough guy, but was pretty quiet, cynical at times, but still with a passion for the blues. The next time I met him, he did a few gigs around England with my band. I used to do the first set and then Billy Boy would take over and set the seal on the evening. He was still quiet, still serious and still friendly, but I felt that he was becoming even more disillusioned with the business.

This album was first released ten

years before that, and its liner notes, even then, presented a view of Billy's disenchantment. I don't know if he has now given up completely, but it wouldn't surprise me.

Yet here is one of the most knowledgeable of the later Chicago Bluesmen, whose playing and singing inspired bands like the Yardbirds; a man who fell under the spell of Sonny Boy (John Lee) Williamson's innovatory style of bluesplaying and then developed and extended it into his own unique approach, but with little real recognition. Who can blame him if he's had enough.

Despite this, it would be good to see him back over here, playing to a new generation of bluesfans, and getting some of the action. Let's keep our fingers crossed. In the meantime, we can, thanks again to Ace's re-issue policy, get some of the flavour from this album.

I could happily have thrown this particular disc against the neighbour's wall at least 10 times, during my attempts to listen to it, not that I've got anything against my neighbour, but I might have one day. The pressing left much to be desired – I think that's the politest way to put it. Almost every track forced the stylus to jump and make listening practically impossible – is this built-in sampling? I hope it was only this particular copy, because otherwise Ace would have had a lot of returns.

Billy Boy certainly wrote enough songs to do himself justice and it's a nice change to hear variety in the bar count, but I wish I could have had a proper listen. Though his main influence was John Lee Williamson (known as Sonny Boy Williamson), he sounds more like Rice Miller (Sonny Boy No 2) on Oh Baby, in fact the whole band sound like they could have been backing that Sonny Boy.

On Evalina they manage to sound like a train coming down the line. Mighty Joe Young does the usual tasteful tickling of the guitar with good effect on You're My Girl. On side two, the eight bar I'll Forget About You, demonstrates Billy Boy's individual approach to harp while his contemporaries were following a different route.

Billy Boy's Blues is typical of the man, a train type instrumental break that reminds me of Howlin Wolf's harp style. The approach is more country than city and may explain why Billy Boy isn't as well known as Little Walter or Junior Wells. People weren't interested in going back to that style, though some people now might be. You Better Cut That Out again shows up the contrast with Little Walter, though I think this is a great version of the song, giving Joe Young another chance to work out. Ironically, considering how many of these songs are Billy Boy's, the track I enjoyed most was

RECORD REVIEW

the B B King number, Get Out Of Here, which finishes the B side. I hope the other copies of this album do Billy Boy the justice he deserves.

Rod Piazza

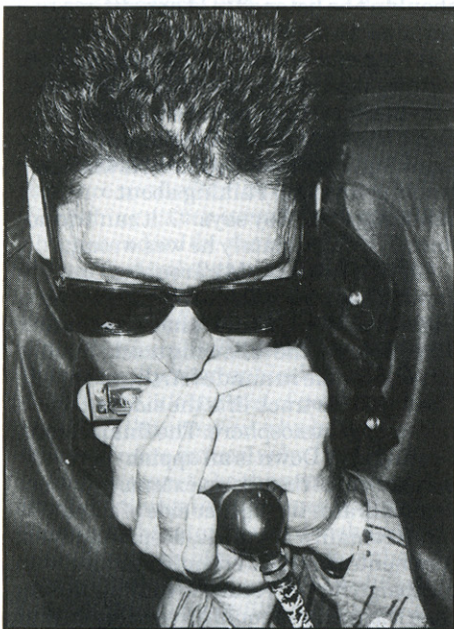
*So Glad To Have The Blues/
Special Delivery SPD 1015/*

Rod Piazza with Honey Alexander, Steve Kilman, Alex Schultz and James Bott

Side A: How Come You Women Look So Good/Harpthrob/Murder (In the 1st Degree)/Too Many Drivers/Little Southern Lady

Side B: So Glad To Have The Blues/Sharp Harp/Black Nites/The Stinger

Harp player/vocalist Rod Piazza has been over here often enough to have



Rod Piazza

inspired a number of young, indeed not so young, players with his precision playing and his showmanship. His bands have always been tight and good at making the most out of Rod's harp sorties. His early days with Bacon Fat set him on the path he is now on and anyone who has caught his show will need no urging to check out this album.

His liner message to potential listeners stresses the effect that blues "Spirit" still has on him, even today, that feeling which the blues can set tingling. It's what he aims for in his playing, though I suspect too many of his acolytes will think that it's just a matter of getting the right notes, the right setting on amplifiers and so on. He's under no such delusion, even though he is concerned to use equipment to get a precise sound. The sound is already in his head and he knows how to achieve it.

He follows in the tradition of Paul Butterfield, Charlie Musselwhite and their kind, white Americans with an

urge to be original in their blues playing. They don't all have the same background, but they are driven by the same feel for the music, and they've all had the advantage of getting their grounding where it matters, alongside black bluesmen. They need no telling that the band is as important as the frontman, in fact is vital to the proper performance.

The album opens with a New Orleans type of arrangement, with the harp covering for sax. Some of the high notes don't quite come off, but like most of the tracks here, this is better live. The second track, Harpthrob, has the band swinging behind some low register harping, with appropriate arranging.

Murder, sets another mood, with sparse backing over lowdown vocals and some simple, and thus more effective phrasing from both harp and guitar. I prefer this track to the others on this side.

Too Many Drivers follows, an easy-paced blues with lots of Little Walter influences; then the last track kicks off with more Little Walter type phrasing, indeed, the harp playing picks the number up and drives it along. This again, would be a good live number.

Side two is the better side for my taste but the title track isn't as good as some of the others, which doesn't mean it isn't good. There is some straightforward chording and some good, crowd-pleasing harp plus tasty piano work here.

Sharp Harp is as it should be given the originator of it, with some easy strutting harp against a hesitation backing. Piazza shows is he not just an excellent soloist, but knows something about being a sidesman as well. This is one of my favourite tracks.

The next track, Black Nites, is the one I like best here. The harp sets up the mood before the band come in, and Rod's vocals sound at ease. The harp break starts with a nod towards Little Walter and then changes and becomes what Rod Piazza is all about. The ending is something of an anti-climax, but this is still my favourite track on the album.

Finally The Stinger, a Honey Alexander showpiece, gives the band a chance to get some of the credit. The rhythm section do a good job and I especially enjoyed the drumming here. Honey's piano playing makes it all sound just the sort of band that I would hope to hear in a Chicago bar. It wouldn't be bad to hear it more often in a London bar either.

Silas Hogan The Godfather

Blues South West BS3 003

Silas Hogan with Sam Hogan, David Carroll, Bruce Lamb, Julian Piper and Oscar 'Harpo' Davis

Side A: Too Late/Ain't It A Shame/My Starter Won't Start/Dark Clouds Rolling/Lonesome La La

Side B: Hoodoo Woman/Free Hearted Man/Mr Charlie/Black Girl

Silas Hogan has been around a long time and has been singing his "low down blues" for much of that time. He's seen the world around him change out of all proportion since he first saw the light of day in 1921. He started playing guitar, following his father's example and played country dance music at parties around the south, but as times changed, so did his music. He settled just outside Baton Rouge in 1939 and though there were many clubs and jukeboxes around his neighbourhood, they gradually closed down as Baton Rouge expanded. He recorded his Louisiana style of blues for the Excello label, a complete contrast to the early dance music.

He's still occasionally to be heard in the Baton Rouge area, sitting in at Tabby Thomas's club on some Saturday nights. He's joined here by local musicians and Julian Piper from Blues South West, who got the album together.

The rhythm on this Album hardly gets out of first gear, so don't expect firecrackers. This is country blues, juke blues, and shows that the blues doesn't have to be raucous, to get through. On side one, the opener Too Late, lays down what is to come: real down home blues, mellow dripping vocals, laid back harp. Ain't It A shame follows, Swamp Blues...woman trouble...my wife-understands-me stuff. Track three, My Starter Won't Start is the typical sexual hang-up (or down) Blues...water in my gas and my battery's run down...you know the sort of thing...what do you mean, you don't? It's a guitar and harp piece without the rest of the band. Restrained bluesing, the sort of sound that conjures up the rocking chair on the front porch, empty country and train whistles in the hot and lonesome night. It's one of my preferred tracks. Lonesome La La gives a country dance/jug band feel, and is another favourite track of mine.

On side two, Hoodoo Woman gets to Hoodoo the Hoodoo Man for a change. Why does the fade ending on these sort of number sound so right...making you want more, perhaps? Mr Charlie is also another one I like. It hints at the hassles of being put down by the whites, yet demonstrates the black art of survival in adversity, with tolerance, and understatement, a demand for justice in the full knowledge that there isn't going to be any, in this world at least. The harp says it all, crying the blues. Congratulations to Blues South West and Julian Piper for their efforts on this album, but special congratulations too, to Silas Hogan.

RECORD REVIEW

UP Wilson On My Way Red Lightnin' RL 0078

UP Wilson with Matt McCabe, Eddie Stout, Freddie Walden, Bill Eden and Steve Herrera.

Side A: 7 Comes 11/Reconsider Baby/UP Express/Bluebird Boog-a-loo/Hold On Baby

Side B: Mean Old World/Como Station/I'll Be Coming Home/Cross Cut Saw/On My Way

Guitarist/Vocalist UP Wilson was born in Shreveport, Louisiana a few years before Silas Hogan settled in Baton Rouge. Wilson moved to Texas and made his home in Dallas in the early 1950s, where he began playing, inspired by B B King.

Wilson hung out with Frankie Lee Sims and Zu Zu Bollin, developing his style and reputation. He moved to Fort Worth by the end of the decade, but despite being in various bands, and turning down an offer to join Lowell Fulson, he never managed to sustain the climb to top level which his playing promised. This was as much to do with lack of commitment to being on the road – after all, he had a family to raise – as with any bad luck. Yet his talent wouldn't let him give up the ghost either. He had to keep playing, despite all the necessary lay-offs. Well, now, his family has grown up, and perhaps at last he'll be able to achieve a profitable recognition for his undoubted talent. He has certainly inspired respect among many of today's guitar players, who should know a good thing when they hear it. Perhaps this time, he'll get back up there with the best and stay there, something he's long overdue on.

Not being a guitar-oriented person, I didn't expect to like this album. I'm pleased to say that I was wrong in my prejudice. For once the hype is right. If you've got something to sell, then sell it, seems to be UP's approach to guitar playing. My only misgiving is that the album will produce a host of bad guitarists trying to be as fast and as good as Wilson. That's the pessimism out of the way. The mix is very busy on the whole album, but once you get used to it, it doesn't matter. The opening track 7 comes 11, conjures up a vision of a maniac dice-shaking crap shooter doing the rhumba, but the guitar lead is what it's all about.

Fulson's Reconsider Baby follows and gives UP the chance to show that he knows a bit about slow blues too. His voice is up to the job, but the guitar is still the main feature here.

Another couple of instrumentals follow, with a change of rhythm for Bluebird Boog-a-Lo. The guitar as machine-gun approach continues, and is

then followed with the best track on this side, Hold On Baby. The guitar sounds like it's being put through a shredding machine and I enjoyed the vocal. If we must have modern, guitar-led blues, then let's have it like this.

Side two-opens with Little Walter's Mean Old World, with UP giving a big-voice treatment to the song. Another high speed instrumental ensues, then comes I'll Be Home, a cluttered, but brimful-with-excitement take. The harp player sounds at times like a latter-day Jazz Gillum meeting Jimmy Reed. The vocal warns UP's lady that he'll be coming home. The way this track drives along, she'd better hope his brakes are good otherwise the house will get demolished.

Cross Cut Saw pays its expected tribute, through the vocals as much as the guitar, which really does cut. Finally, the title track – On My Way. He sure is. I even had time to enjoy the harp here, too. This is the busiest album I've heard for a long time and I shall probably be much more tolerant of guitarists after this.

Juke Boy Bonner They Call Me Juke Boy Ace CHD 269

Side A: The Best Way to Lose The Blues/A Distant Feel/Nowhere To Run/Don't Ever Get Down/It Don't Take Too Much/Shame Shame Shame/Boone's Farm

Side B: What The Blues Has Done For Me/Texas Zydeco/Nothing But A Child/European Tour/Live My Troubles On Down/Loving Arms/Gettin' Low Down

Born in Austin County, Texas, in 1932, Juke Boy Bonner, began guitar playing when he was thirteen and moved to Houston when he was sixteen, to work as a professional musician. He played guitar and harmonica to accompany his singing, and though he performed other people's hits, being in effect a living Juke Box, he developed his own songs, much in the way that fellow Texan Lightning Hopkins did.

Juke Boy's was never one of the success stories of the blues; perhaps he was born too late. His career sounds like an old familiar tale. Years of slogging around trying to earn enough to raise a family; too much drinking; too little success, too late. His music was on it's way out, and it was even more personal than most of the down home bluesmen, but it did get him over to Europe a couple of times, where he was well received.

Yet I don't feel that this album does him justice, which isn't to say that it shouldn't have been released, perhaps that's too strong – it will appeal to the school of release-at-all-costs collectors. I just find it a bit depressing. The levels

and balance seem all over the place too. Once again, I have to point out that this pressing is no bloody good. The stylus jumps on a number of tracks. I thought I was becoming paranoid, so tested this and The Billy Boy album on another player. They both still jump grooves.

Juke Boy's musicianship was probably better than it sounds here, after all, he did cover other people's material in the Juke-joints. He certainly didn't sound so bad when he was over here. I just get the impression that he'd have been better if he'd got himself a musician like Eddie Taylor and a good rhythm section and concentrated on harp, rather than guitar to supplement his vocals. He was an interesting song writer, as tracks like A Distant Feel show. These songs shouldn't be listened to at one sitting, perhaps that's the problem.

A Distant Feel actually shows an affinity with Rice Miller, Sonny Boy No 2, in the vocal approach. So too does Don't Ever Get Down. On side one, the drinking song, Boone's Farm, is the best track, to my ears. Talking about drinking, Juke Boy says: "...it can't do no harm". Unfortunately he was wrong.

On side two, Live My Troubles On Down shows the influence that Lightning Hopkins must have had on Juke Boy and the following track, Loving Arms, puts me in mind of Arthur Crudup. This track lifts the side out of the gloomy atmosphere. The final track, Getting Low Down is an uppish instrumental that, to an extent, demonstrates the lighter side of Juke Boy. I remain a fan of his, despite my comments. Perhaps I should start a campaign for the return of the single, then these tracks could have been released over a period of time, and played accordingly.

GRADY GAINES & THE TEXAS UPSETTERS "Full Gain" (Demon/Black Top records FIEND 148)

"Full Gain" is one of a number of sparkling albums to hit these shores courtesy of Demon Records' splendid decision to distribute the Louisiana Black Top label in the UK.

"Full Gain" derives its title from the coming together of brothers Grady Gaines on tenor sax, and guitarist Roy Gaines. Both brothers contribute fully to a vibrant set and both are responsible for some dynamic musical arrangements. Whilst Roy Gaines is no stranger to UK blues fans – his funky blues having provided Red Lightnin' with some excellent live cuts – Grady is something of a re-discovered talent.

MORE RECORDS

Along with label stable-mate James "Thunderbird" Davis, Grady Gaines is a whole-hearted performer who originally made his mark in the mid '50's as leader/MD of Little Richard's band.

The informative liner notes tell us Grady used to run Penniman close on the live dates, enjoying a penchant for leaping up on the great man's piano and blowing up a storm.

Over three decades later, the dynamic horn sound has lost none of its resonance and power, and if this album is representative of those heady days with Little Richard, Grady Gaines must have put on some show. All through "Full Gain" Grady blows with total conviction, adding subtlety and colour to his solos and even demonstrates an ability to put across a fine vocal line.

12 tracks await the listener within the colourfully packaged sleeve and none is better than the opening cut, "Mr Blues In The Sky", on which brother Roy plays some crisp guitar and adds earthy vocals. Grady's sax doesn't make its entrance until after the first verse, but his opening attack is venomous and sets a high standard for the rest of the album. Both soloists play lucidly over a pumping horn section as the excellent track is succeeded by a batch of classics.

Grady himself offers a spoken vocal on the musically biographical "I've Been Out There", it's the sort of performance that begs the question why he isn't featured more extensively. Part of the reason appears to be the use of three other guest vocalists. Former Bobby Bland collaborator Joe Medwick adds an almost baritone phrasing style to the gently lilting slow blues "If I Don't Get Involved" and Grady fills in with some delightfully smouldering tones. The first of two instrumentals follows. It's the title track which really swings and comes complete with rolling piano and an excellent solo from guitarist Clarence Holliman.

Pianist Teddy Reynolds, another veteran from the 50's, adds his soulful vocal style to a couple of slow tempo affairs, and the fact that he, along with most of the other 50's survivors, sounds so fresh in the late 80's is surely reason enough to consider this album an outright success.

SNOOKS EAGLIN **"Out of Nowhere"** **(Black top/Demon FIEND 146)**

Whenever a reviewer receives a batch of albums, almost inevitably it seems the individual has to plan some time to listen to an album individually – or at the very least draw a line at playing two LP's back to back. The general point here is that no matter how good a record

is, after a few hours of whatever the kind of music, there's always a time for a welcome break. I mention this by way of introducing SNOOKS EAGLIN's "Out of Nowhere", because this is the kind of album that holds an array of musical surprises for the listener. And in truth, were you to skip over the album, you would miss a wealth of aural delights.

Snooks has always been the kind of name associated with the occasional number that any self respecting bar blues band might revert to in lieu of a paucity of material. "Out Of Nowhere" offers several nuggets that cover a diverse range of styles and overall it's probably the kind of album Taj Mahal would be happy to walk out of a studio with.

Curiously perhaps, the album takes a couple of tracks to catch fire. The Louisiana influenced "Oh Lawdy Baby" and the almost forgettable "Lipstick Traces" are standard fare, but hardly inspired.

However, as if to illustrate my original point, the more you listen the more you get out of the record. Snooks Junior, for example, lays down an exotic bass line on "Lipstick", and guest harp player SAM MYERS adds his well crafted style to the blues ballad "Young Girl".

This fine but rather conventional cut is nicely juxtaposed with a cool jazz workout on the title track "Out Of Nowhere". As in the title of the song, so with the unexpected nature of the material. The Matt McCabe piano fill, tucked in behind the jazz guitar chords, is something special. As the number develops a fierce sax bursts into life over a sublimated walking bass line, before the cut finishes with a tongue-in-cheek thrash outro.

Ever full of surprises, Snooks ends side one with a captivating slice of jump/jive on "Mail Man Blues," with the back beat fairly leaping from the speakers. By the time of side two the listener is fully engrossed, and it comes as something of a hiatus that the set resumes with a mid-tempo blues. However, the innovative spark is again ignited on a ludicrous but delightful piece of mock classical guitar that sounds like Zorba the Greek tangling with the Spanish guitar style of say, Manitas de Plata. I imagine that this number must be a show stopper when performed live. Entitled "Kiss Of Fire", this electric piece of composition leads into an altogether more simpler piece, "Its Your Thing" which hits the kind of groove Bobby McPherrin brought into the charts last year.

Ronnie Earl adds his guitar to the proceedings to good effect on a slow blues, while "Play Girl" again demonstrates Eaglin's musical diversity as the number launches into some Western swing and boogie. There's

simply not enough space to come to grips with what's on offer here. Even the throw-away piece that concludes the album is the perfect end-piece.

This is an album by a mighty craftsman. Living blues indeed!
Pete Feenstra

SPENCER BOHREN **Live in New Orleans** **Great Southern Sound CS** **11023**

Tony Burke gave an outline of Spencer's background in BBR No.4, so I will just state that he was born in Wyoming in 1950 and has now become an adopted New Orleanian. This is his third album, recorded in March 1989 and it presents Spencer totally solo, except for the harmonica playing of one Jab Wilson on several tracks. It is a fine showcase for the singer/guitarist's versatility.



Once the introduction is out of the way, Spencer and Jab come on very much like Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry on a fine version of "Key To The Highway". It is followed by Percy Sledge's big hit "When A Man Loves A Woman"; unfortunately, this song reveals the limitations of Spencer's approach, and the same weakness occurs on the covers of Earl King's "Your Mama And Your Papa" and Bo Diddley's "Hoodoo (i.e. Who Do!) You Love". The rhythms of these songs demand a more forceful treatment than they receive here, though to be fair, Spencer sings well and the results are not unattractive. Of the three, the Bo Diddley opus with its riffing harmonica is the most successful.

"Like A Miner Loves Gold" and "Mindin' My Business" both feature tough playing on a National guitar, with bottleneck work strongly reminiscent of one of Spencer's greatest influences,

Bukka White. Still in the Mississippi Country blues vein are a straightforward version of the well-known "Dark Road Blues" and "The Sky Is Crying". The latter is more inventive; instead of the usual updating that many blues are given, Spencer takes the Elmore James classic and performs it as Elmore's mentor Robert Johnson might have done it – and it works very well indeed!

"Eight More Miles To Louisville" is a lovely 'East coast' style blues nicely picked with a fine raggy feel to it, and Spencer's version of "Maple Leaf Rag" reminded me very strongly of Reverend Gary Davis. The closing number, "Walkin' After Midnight" is a relaxed white country blues piece, which means I have just to mention "This Body Is A Prison" reminding the listener that Spencer's earliest musical experiences

were in the Baptist church, where he would undoubtedly have heard such accapella songs as this.

To sum up then, this is a very entertaining set from an accomplished musician and singer. Spencer may not be a household name at the moment, but releases like this will ensure that he gets wider exposure.

Norman Darwen

Review

LOUISIANA RED
at The 100 Club, London on
23rd November 1989

Red has been a popular visitor to Britain over the last decade, and judging from the large crowd for his gig, he will continue to be welcome for many years yet. He may now be a resident of Germany, but his blues still come straight from the fertile soil of Mississippi and the factory floors of Chicago and Detroit.

The excellent Bob Pearce Blues band from Southampton opened up the evening with a fine set of modern-sounding blues, before Red took the stage for a solo set, evoking the music of such giants as Robert Johnson, John Lee Hooker and Elmore James, though coupled with Red's often strikingly original lyrics. On several numbers he was joined by Paul Lamb, whose very authentic sounding harp-blowing reinforced the feeling of listening to the blues of the early post-war years firsthand. Red told us that he wanted to show us "the roots", and he was as good as his word.

For the second set, he was joined by Bob Pearce's band and Paul Lamb again, resulting in a strongly Muddy Waters styled hour of music. This impression was reinforced by the inclusion in the set of "Hoochie Coochie Man" and "Champagne and Reefer" from the great man's repertoire, along with Red's own "Tribute To Muddy Waters". He also delivered a stinging imitation of Muddy's patented slide solo! Another, much more unexpected cover version was a downhome rendition of Ivory Joe Hunter's classic "Since I Met You Baby" (again owing a lot to Muddy). The most modern sounding piece of the evening was a Chuck Berry styled rocker, before Red bade us goodnight with "When The Saints Go Marching In".

Red's ability to recreate the guitar styles of many Blues giants so effortlessly ensures that his shows are always entertaining affairs. He is a staunch traditionalist (though not a hidebound one), and like many of the Country bluesmen of the past, he uses music as an outlet for his emotions, making his gigs unpredictable events...

but if you want to hear blues in the raw, catch Louisiana Red next time he's here.
Norman Darwen

MOJO BUFORD **ERRIGLE INN, BELFAST**

Belfast, infamous the world over as a city of doom and gloom mercifully has its happier side – as evidenced by the enduring enthusiasm of large numbers of its citizens for American blues.

This is indeed a passionate blues city. A couple of dozen local blues bands regularly ply their magical trade in the city's clubs and pubs, and bluesmen visiting the Lagan Delta are assured of an ecstatic welcome.

The latest American blues hero to drive a Belfast audience deliriously berserk was Mojo Buford, who for five years from 1956 played harmonica with Muddy Waters, and is thus a member of a select and revered club that includes Little Walter, Junior Wells, James Cotton and Carey Bell.

Buford is a mighty performer whose passionate playing and singing, and authoritative stage presence, injected freshness even into such old warhorses as Peeping and Hiding, Hoochie Coochie Man, I'm a Man, Going to Chicago, and of course, I've Got My Mojo Working.

Ireland's finest, the Jim Daly Blues Band, backed Buford sympathetically and with considerable skill, and the trading of solos between Daly on electric piano, Ronnie Greer on electric guitar and Buford on harp achieved a level of excitement and intensity that threatened to blast a second hole in the ozone layer! Nearly three hundred thrilled Belfast blues fanatics reacted with shouts and screams of delight that must have been audible in the Checkerboard Lounge, Chicago (well at least in the Half Moon, Putney).

In the nineteen years since Muddy Waters himself performed in Belfast there have been few more convincing blues performances than this. Will the Blues In Belfast organisation please bring Mojo back to our fair city at the first available opportunity? Thankyou!
Trevor Hodgett

Blues news

If you haven't booked your holiday this year, you might consider joining us on **The Blues Trail**, from the Delta to Chicago, a two-week trip to the USA which British Blues Review is co-promoting. We shall be starting off with the Delta Blues Festival in Greenville, Mississippi, on 14th/15th September. Greenville, the "heart of the delta" is an ideal place to start our trip, which will follow the route north to Chicago, a journey undertaken by so many delta bluesmen. **The Delta Blues Festival** bill includes, among others, James Son Thomas, Bobby Blue Band, Albert King, Shirley Brown, Betty Latimore, Frank Frost, The Jelly Roll Kings, and Bubber Barnes. There will be Lectures and films, etc., in addition to the concerts.

We shall then "take a little trip, up the Mississippi" but should be better received than the British were in 1840. We shall visit St Louis, which also plans a blues festival around that time. We can visit the Blues Museum in Clarksdale and so on, before we travel to Chicago by train. We should be able to take in the Chicago blues clubs, before flying back.

The trip will be jointly promoted with **Hallmark Travel and Leisure**, who have considerable experience in such tours, and they will be taking care of the travel arrangements. It could well become an annual event. More details are given on page 12 of this issue. During the Amtrak train journeys, you will not be expected to "ride the blinds".

Meanwhile, back at the Bar-B-Q, **Elisha Blue**, the US singer guitarist who's been over here for a while now, will be doing a gig for

Blues news

Northampton Jazz, at The Racehorse, Abington Square, Northampton. The gig is on Saturday 24th February and starts at 8.30 and tickets (£3.50) can be obtained from Northampton Arts Centre, Tel: 0604 407544.

Dorset's **Barrelhouse**, Blues R&B and Jazz Club, has been on the move during the last year but now have got permanent premises, thanks to Mr. Goddard, landlord of the Crown & Anchor, in West Street, Blandford. Doors open at 8p.m. On 15th February, they present the **Pete Moody/John Dummer Blues Band**, from Bristol. Pete is of course our assistant Editor and John Dummer wrote for us last year about the Howling Wolf tour he did. Which reminds me, I still haven't returned the photographs I borrowed from them.

To get back to the Barrelhouse, on 8th March, they present **Gene 'Mighty Flea' Connors**, former trombonist with the Johnny Otis band. This should be a good night for them. The club will be putting on gigs around the third Thursday of each month. They are also holding a Saturday gig on 30th June, a Barrelhouse "Special" at Blandford Upper School which will feature the last ever public appearance of the **DeLuxe Blues Band** line-up of Danny Adler, Bob Brunning, Mickey Waller, Dick Heckstall-Smith and Bob Hall. The band are splitting after many years of playing together in one form or another. Other commitments force the break-up.

Ian Carbray of **Fleetwood Blues Club**, informs us that the club will be running every Friday from now on, still at the Catholic Centre.

Robert Tilling writes from the Channel Islands to say that he has been booked again for **The Burnley Blues Festival**. We have no details yet, but will keep you informed when we get them.

Monica Fleming, organiser of **Farnham Maltings Blues Festival** will be doing an additional presentation in Summer. Details later. In February, the Maltings gigs are as follows: **Thurs 1st, Rolling Drunks; Sat 3rd, The Roosters; Mon 12th, Blues 'n' Trouble; 15th, The**

Marauders; 22nd, The Paul Lamb Blues Band and 26th, The Hamsters.

Martin Van Olderen has really gone to town on this year's **Amsterdam Blues Festival**, which will be on Fri 16th and Sat 17th of March in De Meervaart, Osdorpplein 205, 1068 SW Amsterdam. Tel: 020 107393.

The bill is: **Friday, 8pm, Snatch It Back, Ponty Bone and The Squeezetones, Honeyboy Edwards, Margie Evans & the Chequerboard Bluesband, featuring Gene "Mighty Flea" Connors** and finally, **The James Harman Band.**

On Saturday at 2pm, **Katie Webster, Charles Brown and Honeyboy Edwards** will do solo spots. In the evening, 8pm, the bill is: **Herbert Noord and his R&B Band, Magic Slim &**

The Teardrops, Katie Webster, Charles Brown and his Band and then the **Kenny Neal Band**, featuring **Big Voice Odom**. A great bill if it all comes off.

Washington DC's **Ripsaw Records**, which has been concerned with roots Rock 'n' Roll and Rockabilly, sway towards the blues side of things with their latest release, "Oooh-Wow" by the **Uptown Rhythm Kings**, an eight piece jump blues band fronted by **Eric Sheridan** on vocals. The Rhythm Kings are based in Washington and recently headlined the DC Blues Festival and they've been repeatedly nominated for Wammie awards.

Back home, **The Busted Fender Blues Band** have the following February gigs: **2nd, Wickham, Hants, Black Horse; 9th Weymouth, Dorset, Verdi's; 11th, High**

Blues news

Wycombe, Bucks, Nag's Head and 23rd, Milford on Sea, Smugglers. **March gigs: 10th, Portsmouth, Landmark; 11th, Yeovil, Somerset, Quicksilver Mail; 31st, Milford on Sea, Smugglers.**

The **Paul Lamb Blues Band** gigs: **Feb 1st, Dingwall, Scotland, Legends; 2nd, Fort William; 3rd, Inverness; 4th, Edinburgh, Preservation Hall; 5th, Fife, Cely Rock Club; 6th, Newcastle, Jumpin Hot Club; 8th, Stockton, Cleveland, Harveys; 9th, Workington, Carnegie Arts Centre; 10th, Blackpool, Station Hotel; 16th, London, Torrington; 22nd, Farnham, Maltings; 23rd, Lille and 24th, Paris (to be confirmed).**



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FEBRUARY

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- 3 Big Joe Louis & his Blueskings
- 4 Shakey Vick's Sunday Joint (Noon)
- 4 Giles Hedley/Really The Blues (Eve)
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MARCH

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