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**BRITISH BLUES**

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*review*

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*This issue:*  
**Anson Funderburgh**  
**Paul Oliver**  
**Eric Bell**  
**Burnley Blues Festival**

# TALKIN' BLUES

BRITISH BLUES



Forty or so years after the country blues became urbanised in the Chicago bars and clubs, setting alight the listeners with the new tough mix and tension of the immigrants' innovative approach to playing, the blues continues to attract.

There have been changes, it's true, but the basic appeal has survived, which says something for the way the music was laid down in those changing times.

There hasn't been anything like it since that last great migration. The music seemed to erupt into a dying scene simply by being more brash than the old established Bluebird beat and the jazz swing-based blues of the cities. There may never be anything like it again, because the conditions have changed.

The new blues players have been brought up on a more sophisticated approach to the blues and are desperately seeking to reach new audiences, seeking that "Crossover" sound which could bring success undreamed of by those young new Chicagoans from the South.

Instead of being music of the neighbourhood bars, blues is having to find a way of reaching audiences from concert hall and perhaps in future even from sta-

dium. It is becoming music of the rock scene, with loads of stage equipment and high prices and security teams, far removed from the juke joint. This may in turn lead to a new kind of blues in the same way that Muddy and Little Walter, Wolf and Elmore and their contemporaries forged a new approach to the established music.

The recording industry will still be in charge of the purse strings, but there is a difference now in that the bigger record companies are showing an interest, whereas in the fifties Chicago, big record companies were losing interest, leaving the field to the small new independents. Given this fact, it does appear unlikely that anything really creative and exciting is going to emerge, until they make their money and depart the scene. The smaller companies may come into their own once again and spawn a host of new tough-sounding blues. Yet unless the musicians manage to keep some control over their input, even this prospect could be just a dream. Fortunately, such musicians are hardly going to be taken under the wing of the larger companies. There is hope yet.

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# Letters

Dear BBR,

No doubt the erudite readers and contributors to this organ will have noticed a definite resurgence of the blues in the public eye of late. Certain established acts are returning to their roots (Gary Moore, Clapton) and the new breed of rock groups are making their influences more than clear (Quireboys, Thunder); indeed, the more "purist" bluesmen also seem to be enjoying a new popularity. Whether this is a backlash to the truly dreadful manufactured pop music currently in fashion is open to conjecture; that the blues is returning in force is simply good news for lovers of good music everywhere. This new awareness will, I hope, help to bring people from out of their living rooms and back enjoying good live music; it is certainly true that live music needs the people.

There is a wealth of blues talent in this country, a great deal of which is unrecognised, overlooked or ignored. Smaller bands on the gig circuit exist more or less on the "buzz" from a performance – it sure ain't the money, I speak from experience! But it is soul-destroying to put your all into playing when you are entertaining 3 men and a Jack Russell. Yes, it's all part of "paying your dues", but let's face it, it's an uphill struggle anyhow and I am convinced that it could be evened out a fraction at least.

I truly believe that lesser-known or fledgling groups help to keep the blues scene – or any music genre really – alive; a publication such as British Blues Review would be doing the future of blues a great service by covering such bands, mainly reviews of gigs or the occasional demo perhaps, thus hopefully increasing interest. Constructive criticism would also be invaluable for any band in order for them to improve. Also, readers, give bands a chance! Check out the unknowns when they play at local or well-known venues; The Fabulous Marauders, Blues 'N' Bitter and Blueprint to name but three are worthy of attention, and there are many others which are hungry for your support.

I have mentioned the wealth of unsung blues talent in Britain – one has only to attend the excellent jam sessions at the Station Tavern on Monday nights to see some of this in action. To that talent, I say: arrange and publicise gigs together; get some interest going! I want to do my bit, too; write to me, tell me what your band's

about and I will attempt to arrange some gigs together with ours; over the last 1½ years I have come to know several venues relatively responsive to my charms! To those not in bands, I say; what're you waiting for?

Together, with a little effort, we could make blues blossom in the 1990's. I'm sure you'll all agree that it's a target worth aiming for.  
Thanks for listening,  
**Steve Leon,**  
London, SW9

**(Unfortunately, the Monday Night Jams at the Station Tavern have ended. – Ed.)**

Dear Editor

Brighton is a south coast town of Regency and Victorian architectural splendour, and home to one of the most precarious and uncertain club scenes in the whole damn country.

A clubland that in recent years has altered itself profusely; almost as if it were a vast amorphous "urban chameleon", changing its colour to suit its weak shallow surroundings. Therefore, it would appear to some as an unlikely place for a blues, R&B and gospel scene. Particularly, when the current music and club explosions have brought forth a whole new expectant generation of "electro-beatsters", a boisterously hip-hip crowd of fast-moving, energetic, fashion-conscious trendies with immense appetites for all-night-clubbing and Chinese take-aways.

But there is one club night amongst all the glam' and pomp. A club night which has caught the town off-guard. A club night that has been carefully fermenting over the past 2½ years, like wine in a cellar, and seems to be setting the precedent for black secular music for the 1990's. The club night I'm talking about is called – "THE CATFISH CLUB"; a sensationally unique night of the wildest, raunchiest, meanest and sleaziest Black American blues, R&B and gospel in the land!

The Catfish can not put on live bands at it's present venue location yet, because of problematic reasons:

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- 2) That the club uses every available inch of space for dance.
- 3) The club night is popular enough just with it's resident Deejay and club founder (RUMBLE CHILLEN MOSES) who plays only the purest of

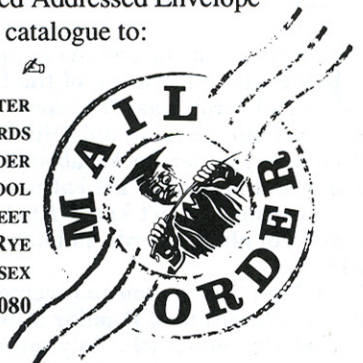
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south!!

NB: The Catfish Club does put live bands on at larger venues.

**Carl Anton Moss,**  
Hove,  
East Sussex

(We mentioned this Club in one of our first issues. Glad its still running – Ed).

## British Blues Review

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a weekly Blues Session  
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# "COOL DRINK OF WATER"

**PAUL OLIVER**  
talks to Spencer Leigh

*No thrill in my life will compare with hearing Elvis Presley for the first time in 1956. An impressionable 11 year old, the records completely blew me away. I gave up childhood toys and, 34 years on, those early rock'n'roll records still excite me. But they excite me in a different way. Back then, I had no basis for comparison – all I knew was Eddie Calvert and David Whitfield, so the sound came to me from thin air. Now I know it was a fusion of country, gospel and the blues.*

One book that helped me to appreciate the importance of the blues to rock'n'roll was 'The Story of the Blues' by Paul Oliver. Paul Oliver has written many other books about blues and jazz and he makes me enthusiastic about musicians I don't know. His latest is a guide to blues records, published by Blackwell.

When Paul Oliver came to Liverpool to talk to the Institute of Popular Music at Liverpool University (the only university to have such a faculty!), I spoke to him for my BBC Radio Merseyside programme, 'On the Beat'. The following interview was broadcast on 7th April 1990.

*Let's start with the chestnut that the blues all sound the same. I had a friend who had 26 John Lee Hooker LPs and I couldn't see why he needed more than one.*

Well, in the case of John Lee Hooker who tends to work within one chord, that would probably be true, but the blues is an individual form of music, so it is the approach of each blues singer to the idiom that is of interest. Each blues singer composes his own blues and has a unique way of expressing it, which is the source of its fascination. Structurally, it is not complex, in fact, its simplicity makes it possible for blues singers to improvise around it and personalise it, so the anticipation that it is going to be complex is starting from the wrong position. The more you get involved in the music the more the subtleties emerge, and then the more the diversity of the individual singers and musicians becomes apparent. To me, there's a long way between John Lee Hooker and Chuck Berry, and between the earlier Mississippi and Memphis singers, which you might consider them to be, there is a still greater gap with an immense amount of variety over a tremendous span of artists over 60 or 70 years.

Do you agree with the various distinctions like 'urban blues' and 'city blues'?

They are different in the sense that they are regional. They are terms which critics have applied in order to identify the blues that they hear. They are not necessarily the terms that the blues singers use but most of them recognise the difference between blues in Georgia and blues in Texas and blues in Mississippi. There are differences in their approach, their timbre, their dialect, their ways of saying things, their degrees of lyricism and so forth, and in my view it is possible to identify stylistic differences in many areas of the south. As the migration from the south to the north took place there was a difference in quality, the actual sound quality changed so that although there was a convergence of singers for different reasons, the synthesis was also affected by the change in the environment.

*The black blues musicians wrote of their experiences. Were there white ones who did it too?*

The earliest recordings by white musicians date back to about 1928 or 29 with the Allen Brothers who recorded a large number of blues. The white blues of the period is more laconic and does not have the depth of emotional expression that you find in black blues. They were recording from personal experience but in a very special way – there is an amused detachment about it, but the things which they are singing about such as colic in the cottonmills or the prices of cotton were the same themes as the black singers. It was perceived from a white position with a different emphasis in both style and emotional quality.

*On the whole, would it be true to say that the black people were singing blues and gospel and the white people country?*

In very broad terms, yes, but those terms don't take us very far. If you say 'country music', then there is the question as to what kind of country music, whether it's hillbilly, Tennessee, Appa-



*Illustration for 'Radio Times' for 'Development of the Blues' (BBC, Jan. 29, 1967)*

lachian, there are as many styles and varieties of white folk music as there are in black folk music, and one has to get fairly deep into the subject for these to become apparent. There is a uniformity in black music as there is in white music which makes it possible to make broad generalisations but as soon as you get beyond those simplistic levels, then it becomes much more complex.

*Am I right in saying that a blues singer wouldn't sing gospel and vice versa, until Ray Charles came along?*

No, the earliest recordings by Blind Lemon Jefferson were spirituals and not blues, they were not the first to be issued, but they were the first ones he made. Most of the early blues singers such as Barbeque Bob who recorded as Robert Hicks recorded gospel songs or spirituals. Generally they used a pseudonym, but this was usually because of the record companies. What was less evident was the recording of blues by gospel and spiritual singers. Their attitude was that this was selling out to the Devil but as the blues singers had already sold out to the Devil, it didn't really matter that they were singing spirituals.

*But Ray Charles was controversial.*

Yes, he was using gospel techniques for secular songs. Gospel in the meanwhile had developed some very exaggerated mannerisms and stylistic features, and Ray Charles applied these to secular songs and that was shocking in a way. Also, he had a particular way of projecting anyway. It wasn't the content alone,

it was the combination of content with style.

*Can we consider the language of the blues songs – terms like 'Got my Mojo Working' and 'My John the Conqueror'?*

Those are superstitious terms. A mojo was a small charm or fetish for protecting yourself and also for attracting a lover, depending upon how you used it. My John the Conqueror was a root and this root was used as an aphrodisiac. Muddy Waters was using them in an urban context in the North where those superstitions had largely disappeared. By singing about them, he was singing of old folk superstitions from the South in a very urban, modern context, which gives a frisson to the relationship which makes them stand out. One wonders why he did it. Was he saying to recently arrived Southerners, what you believe in still applies, or was he making a joke about it by taking a very urban view of the superstitions? That's an unresolved question and it is an interesting one.

*One of the most powerful records I have ever heard, and it still sounds great, is Howlin' Wolf's Smokestack Lightnin'.*

'Smokestack Lightnin' which is a very very powerful recording is really a version of a very much older blues. It was originally recorded by Charley Patton as 'Moon Goin' Down' and in Charley Patton's version, it has far more sense. Howlin' Wolf's version makes very little sense at all. Smokestack lightning, in itself, doesn't mean anything as a phrase but when Charley Patton sings, 'It smokes like lightning, the bell it shines like gold', you know that this is a train which is sending out sparks which is the lightning. By the time the images have been converged in Howlin' Wolf's version, it is a very powerful projection but it's not at all clear what he's singing about and I am not sure that he knew himself.

*Elvis was said to be a mixture of country and the blues. Is that how you see him?*

His first recordings are surprisingly straight black versions of songs. He was taking current black themes and singing them in a very black-influenced way, but he was including something of the white tradition which was emphasised more by people like Scotty Moore who supported him and whose rhythmic approach was not black. I feel that not enough analysis has been made of the first dozen or so songs by Elvis Presley to show the transitions that took place during that time.



*Illustration for article In the Sixties (Music Mirror, Vol 2, No 4, April 1955)*

*His version of 'Milkcow Blues Boogie' starts as a slow blues.*

'Milkcow Blues' was originally recorded by Kokomo Arnold in the 1920s and it is an interesting item anyway because it was popular amongst the western swing bands of Texas in the 1930s – it was even recorded by jazz bands such as Nappy Lemare – so that it is exceptional anyway. It was a tremendous success in the black market in the 1930s and it was a well-known tune. Elvis changed and adapted it, that is certainly true. He took 'Reconsider Baby' from Lowell Fulson, 'Hound Dog' from Big Mama Thornton, and 'That's All Right' from Big Boy Crudup. I don't wish to put down his particular talents because it was very considerable and

very special but he was drawing upon black material and playing it his way.

*Let's turn to some of the British groups – take the Rolling Stones.*

They were particularly interested in the Louisiana singers like Lightnin' Slim and some of those on the Excello label but they also brought a more modern band sound to those songs, which were basically rural in kind, and to that extent they were influenced by Chicago. The Detroit sound, particularly that through Motown, had influenced British white groups, and they were delving into it and making their own synthesis.

*They did 'Confessin' The Blues'?*

That comes from a number of sources. They probably got it from B.B. King but it was recorded by Jimmy Witherspoon and James McShan around 1940 and before that by Walter Brown. It was a fairly popular and a well-known blues.

*How authentically dot they play it?*

It depends on what you mean by 'authentic'. It was authentic in their terms because they emerge as an individual group. They weren't trying to sound like blues singers, or if they were, they signally failed. They sound a strong and powerful, emerging rock group and this is where their importance lies. It is not as being white English blues singers.

*Do you know why the blues bypassed Liverpool? There was the Roadrunners but there was no-one to match the Animals or the Stones.*

I haven't the remotest idea but it is an interesting question. Liverpool had a black presence, and a strongly African one in the past, so you might have expected it to emerge in Liverpool. Motown with Mary Wells and so on was an influence on the Beatles, and that probably deflected the groups away from the blues. The synthesis in Detroit was of a different kind, partly gospel and so on. As they were excited by that, their excitement was being channelled in a somewhat different direction.

*Bob Dylan's first album was blues-based.*

Dylan was eclectic in his early years. Although he was blues-based in part, he was drawing widely from Woody Guthrie and the white tradition. When he was composing blues of a kind, these might have been derived from early songsters like Henry Thomas. But in the early stages of any singer's career, he will look to his antecedents and, if he has any talent he will give them a new twist. Depending on that for your whole career is a thing that I regret, but in Dylan's case, he had this extraordinary creative capacity as a poet and invested his songs with that. He shook off his dependance on the blues and then his own personality began to emerge. He returned to a rock-based blues but he shook that off too.

*It's a little odd to hear someone of 20 doing 'See That My Grave Is Kept Clean'.*

Well, Blind Lemon Jefferson wasn't more than 25 when he sang 'See That My Grave Is Kept Clean' so that I'm not sure that it makes a lot of difference. The difference lies in the fact that Blind Lemon was referring back to something within his own tradition, a religious song which he was adapting, whereas in Dylan's case, he was adopting rather than adapting, it was not of his tradition. It was part of his eclecticism. If you go back to 'Fixin' to Die', which was

recorded by Bukka White about 1940, he was going back to something that excited him and the illogicality of singing it in his early 20s probably didn't occur to him.

*And how highly do you regard Eric Clapton?*

There is a long line of blues guitarists and a long line of great ones, but whether he is at the end of that line I have to question. I don't find very much in Clapton that hasn't been anticipated by other blues guitarists whose work I admire more. I feel very neutral about him. There is a long line of blues guitarists but in terms of the electric guitar, T-Bone Walker was a major influence and his early recordings in 45 and 46 showed a new approach to the amplified or electric guitar which eventually B.B. King picked up.

*So what about B.B. King, who has*



*Illustration for 'Radio Times' (August 1959)*

*become a remarkable stage performer?*

His early recordings in the 1950s are extraordinarily exciting and also what he recorded in the 1960s and the Chicago phase. Today he is trotting out the old phrases and there is an element of professional showmanship which interferes with originality. I haven't heard an original idea emerging from him for a long time. He has a talent and a skill to reshape things so that it appears to be new but it is a series of tricks which are skilfully executed. I don't think you should examine his work in the light of what he has been doing on stage in the last few years. The vital period of the late 50s and early 60s was remarkable.

*So many blues musicians who came to this country in the 60s had trouble with the bottle. In a way, it's understandable because it was an alien culture and they were largely backed by young white musicians.*

Most blues musicians in the 60s felt extremely insecure and spent their time in hotel rooms with the blinds down and another generation has begun to appear who are looking at their grandparents' music and are excited by it, like Robert Cray, so there might be a revival. From their point of view, success is singing for white audiences so they are not performing the same social role as the earlier blues musicians. Obviously, they don't

they waited for an interview or they jived around between each other in adjacent rooms, but they never went out into the city and they were apprehensive. They hid it in various ways by singing, by playing cards or shooting craps or drinking, which helped to enforce the stereotype of the blues singer. Like all stereotypes, there is an element of truth in it, but one wasn't seeing them on their home ground and they were different people in a European context.

*Is there a new generation of blues musicians coming up?*

I didn't think that there would be. I thought that the last of the blues singers was moving out and would not be replaced but I was basing that on the attitude of the 70s when young blacks were embarrassed by the songs of their parents and their attitudes. There was a violent reaction against the blues, but perceive it that way and are thinking about a career. If they do generate a new kind of blues, it is bound to be different as it won't perform the role that it used to play.

*How have the primitive recordings transferred to compact disc?*

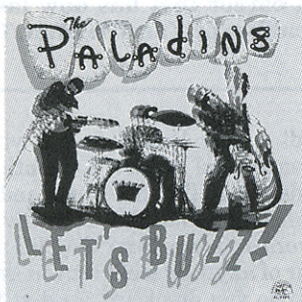
Seldom is the answer to that, as on the whole it is not the primitive recordings, either technically or musically, that are being transferred. It is recordings made in the 60s and 70s when fidelity was relatively good, where the master is very clean and the transfer is possible. But at the present time, the position doesn't favour the blues at all. They have released a few compact discs on singers with big reputations, but the kind of music which was made in the 20s and 30s, the heart of the blues, has not been reissued and it is very unlikely to appear.

*Blackwells have just published your guide to blues records. Is there one blues record that to you stands out above all others?*

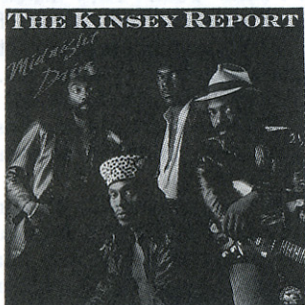
'Cool Drink of Water' by Tommy Johnson is one that I would certainly recommend. It's a Mississippi recording made in the 1920s that demonstrates the beauty, the simplicity and the variety of the blues emerging from one singer in a tradition, which brings us back to the point we started with in our discussion. When you get into the depth of studying blues, then these qualities emerge. Tommy Johnson sums it up very well.



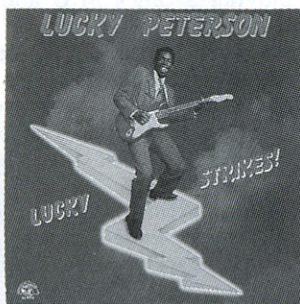
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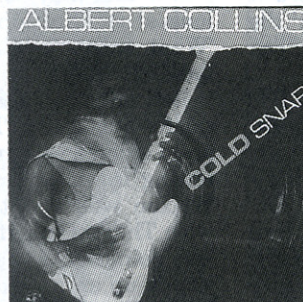
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# Built To Last

Like most of his contemporaries Bell paid his dues with beat groups and showbands. "The Atlantics was the first band I played with," recalls Eric. "We did Shadows numbers, then Beatles numbers, then the Stones came out, so we went from instrumentals to the Beatles to the blues. After that I was in about twelve groups. Every band I left Gary Moore would take my place!"

Joining the Deltones seemed like the Big Time. "They had their own van which was unheard of, and they had a Vox AC 30 amp – I used to dream about owning a Vox A.C. 30!"

Eric added to his credentials by gigging with Van Morrison, after Morrison had left Them. "I was in Crymble's music shop in Belfast one day with about sixty musicians and Van walked in. He came over and introduced himself, and gave me his address in Hyndfort Street. I went up to his house and he had this big reel to reel tape recorder and a few songs. He plugged me into an amplifier and said, 'Play along.' He seemed to like what I did, so we formed a band, and he got these two guys that was in the Alleykatz: Joe Hanratty, a drummer, and Mike Brown on bass. We played around Ireland for two or three months – Van Morrison And Them Again. The first gig we did was the Square I club in Belfast. The place was absolutely jammed and the stage was quite small, so I was standing about six inches away from the front and these two girls tied my shoelaces together as I was playing the guitar! I'd seen them doing it – but I couldn't stop playing!"

Van proved a challenging leader. "I had the list of numbers on the top of the amp, but he just said, 'Start a blues in E.' I said, 'What about the list?' and he said, 'To hell with the list – start a blues in E!'"

"We did Sammy Houston's, Carrickfergus Town Hall..." The famous gig where Van read from the Bible? "I can't really say what went on that night – it was quite an eye opener. I don't think it was the Bible – it was a book of poetry, but he didn't read from it. He closed it and said something else through the microphone." What did he say? You can tell me, Eric. "You'll have to ask him!"

What was Van like to work with? "He was quite intense and a perfectionist. Some places, they didn't understand what he was doing. But he was a professional. You can't force people to like you. We played Queen's University Rag Ball one night. It was absolutely crazy. Everybody was smashed – the audience and the band. All these students had painted the stage before we went on so it was nine different colours. I was pissed as a newt and I was playing the guitar too loud and Van said to the bass player, 'Tell Eric to turn down.' Then Van turned up – he played guitar as well –

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**The mid sixties British blues boom, that saw the emergence in London of mega legends like the Stones and the Yardbirds, had its equivalent in Belfast, where dozens of bands such as Them, The Alleykatz, Shades of Blue, Just Five and the Mad Lads brought the sounds of Chicago to the city's pubs, clubs and dives. Great musicians such as Van Morrison, Henry McCullough and Gary Moore found their destiny in that halcyon era – as did ace blues guitar player Eric Bell, who in a career that has now lasted over 25 years has played with musicians of the calibre of Van The Man, Thin Lizzy, Noel Redding and Bo Diddley.**

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and I said, 'To hell with this,' and I turned up as well. I got a really bad write up in the City Week. 'Last night Eric Bell tried to outshine our Van Morrison with sheer volume.' I left the band that night because there was a bad feeling."

Bell turned pro with the Bluebeats showband in Glasgow. "We lived all in one room – eight of us – for nearly two years. We came back in the same shirts that we went in! Then I went to Leeds for two years with another Irish showband – Ray Elliott, the sax player out of Them was in the band."

Returning home, Bell replaced Gary Moore in Shades Of Blue, regulars in the legendary Maritime Hotel. "It was a real dive, but it had an absolutely amazing atmosphere. Whatever it takes it had it. The ironic thing was they shut it for a few weeks and did it all up, and nobody went back cos it lost its atmosphere!"

Next came the Dublin based Dreams showband. "Like being in the army. You weren't supposed to do this and that. You had to smile on stage. The manager used to stand in the balcony, and if you weren't smiling he'd go.... (puts fingers in mouth and stretches lips into a smile). You'd get a drop in your wages. I couldn't come to terms with it."

One night Bell had an experience that changed his career. "I went to see Skid Row in this club. I was in my showband suit and I had really short hair so everybody was looking at me, and I was really stoned as well. I'd never heard anything like it. Gary Moore was playing guitar and they were absolutely ridiculous, absolutely unbelievable. And I said, 'What am I fucking doing in a showband?'"

Bell left the Dreams and began looking for musicians. "I threw away the suit and I started wearing hippie clothes and letting my hair grow. Then I met Eric Wrixon who was the original organist with Them. He had left the Trixons and was doing the same thing as me. So we struck up an acquaintance and we went to the Countdown Club one night and I took half a tab of acid. This band Orphanage came on with Phil Lynott singing and Brian Downey was the drummer. Afterwards I went into the changing room and I said, 'My name's Eric Bell, I used to be with the Dreams

showband' – they looked at me with a great disapproval when I mentioned showbands – 'but I'm into blues and I'm trying to form a band. Do you know any bass players or drummers?' So Phil said, 'If we hear of anybody we'll let you know. What pub do you drink in?' And at that point I looked at him – on acid – and I seen his face melting and I went 'yeah'. That's all I said: 'Yeah'. They asked me what was wrong and I said 'It's my first trip on acid,' and immediately I said that they seemed to change towards me. So Phil said, "We'll form a band on two conditions: if I can start playing bass – I'm taking lessons – and if we do some of my songs."

Bell and Wrixon convened with Lynott and Downey for a jam a few days later. "It was in this cellar which was totally covered in water – we had to walk over planks to get over – and there was a little alcove you couldn't stand up in. Phil didn't know where he was on bass. We were playing a blues in C and he went off somewhere in F#".

Nevertheless Thin Lizzy was born. "One day the manager said, 'There's not too much money around – I think we're gonna have to go three piece. So Eric goes, (shrugs) When do you want me to leave?'"

The band began to take off. "After four months there were people queueing up outside everywhere we played. I used to say to Phil, 'I wonder who we're on with tonight?' I just couldn't believe what had happened."

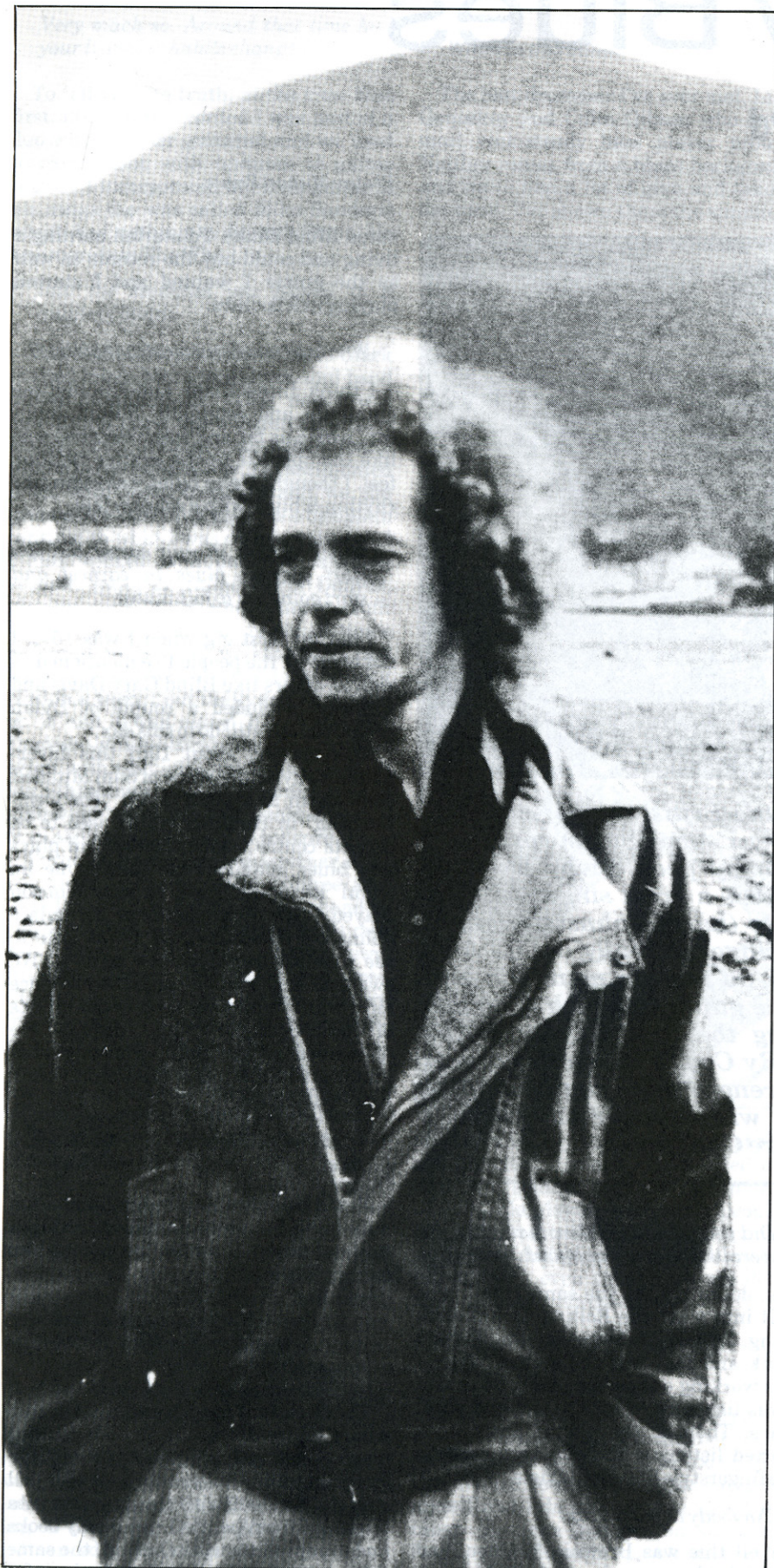
The band recorded their first l.p. in London. "We recorded in the same studio where John Mayall had recorded the Bluesbreakers album with Eric Clapton, so it was a big deal for us. The producer was Scott English who wrote Hi Ho Silver Lining and he had a bag of grass about the size of a pillow case!"

Lizzy began gigging in England. "It was desperate. Embarrassing really. English audiences all sat down in the lotus position, smoked dope and watched every note you played, whereas Irish audiences got pissed and jumped up and down. So we were a bit overawed. But we started building up a steady following."

The band's breakthrough came with Whiskey In The Jar, which emerged from a bored rehearsal hall jam. "Our manager Ted Carroll says, 'Play that



## The Eric Bell Story by Trevor Hodgett



again, I think you have a hit.' I went, 'Come on, man, we left Ireland to get away from Whiskey In The Jar!'"

The manager's judgement prevailed and the song was recorded and released. "For three months it didn't do a thing. We had to go to Germany to stay alive – this horrible tour. We were playing wine bars full volume. A guy would be looking into his girlfriend's eyes, with a bottle of wine, and the wine would be jumping up and down on the table. Me and Phil had a fist fight on that tour – the only fight we ever had. Then we got a telegram saying; CONGRATULATIONS WHISKEY NO. 20. COME HOME."

After Lizzy's third l.p. Bell packed it in. "It was ill health – too much drink, and also we weren't allowed to jam on stage anymore. We had to play the same every night, and I said, 'I might as well have stayed in the showbands.'"

Bell returned to guest with Lizzy on their 1983 tour. "I felt like a stranger to be honest, cos I hadn't that much in common with them any longer."

In 1986 Lynott died, "It was the only time Brian Downey ever phoned me. He said, 'Eric, I've got some bad news for you. Philip's just died.' That was the, y'know...(Eric mimes sticking a needle into his arm)... heroin."

How does Eric remember Lynott. "He was extremely romantic and incredibly, unbelievably determined. If he wanted to do something there was nothing stood in his way. He loved fame and fortune. From the early days people used to ask him in interviews, 'What do you want?' 'I want to be rich and famous.' That's all he said."

Since leaving Lizzy Eric has toured and recorded extensively, firstly with Noel Redding, and subsequently with his own blues band, who are still regulars on the London pub circuit. He also recently toured Europe with Bo Diddley. A mean, embittered dude, by all accounts. "No!!! He's not bitter at all! I used to go to sleep in the van with my head on his shoulder!"

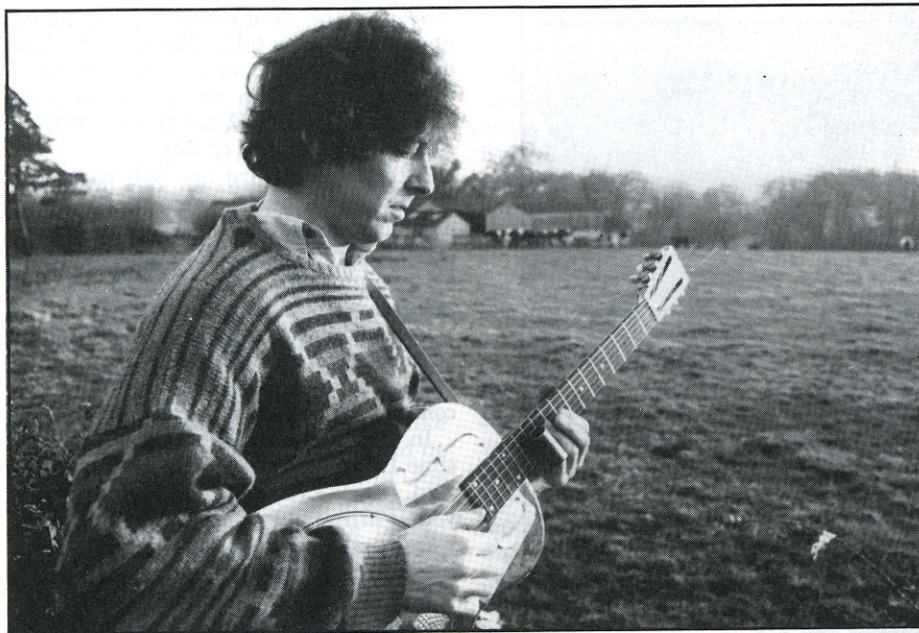
And last year he released an excellent l.p. Live At Ronnie Scott's, with Main Squeeze. "That was the band that backed Bo Diddley. Keef Hartley was in it, and Victor Brox, and Dick Heckstall Smith." Live At Ronnie's is an excellent l.p. that provides still further irresistible evidence that Belfast's sixties blues heroes were built to last!

*Trevor Hodgett*

*Photo: Courtesy of the Belfast "Newsletter"*

# "Still The Country Blues"

Interview with Roger Hubbard  
by Michael Prince



**Roger Hubbard has been part of the British blues scene for over 20 years and is well known to some but surprisingly remains an unknown to a great many people who like this kind of music. This is a shame as he is a great singer without contriving to put on a "black" voice (Larry Johnson thought him about the only white English singer to really cut it.) Also he's a first rate guitar player and no fool on mandolin and piano. His forte is undoubtedly slide guitar in which style this writer considers him to be among the best players in the world – up there with the likes of Ry Cooder. Roger's current band, Buick 6, have gone from strength to strength and are now as fine a band as you could wish to hear anywhere. I spoke to Roger at his home just before Christmas:–**

*When did you start playing the guitar?*

When I was 8 years old. I was fiddling about with the piano as well.

*And when did you first become interested in the blues?*

Well basically I used to escape from home life to my mate's house and listen to things like Robert Johnson when I was about 13 or 14. At that time we also listened to Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, and I particularly remember the "Murderers' Home" album that had been recorded by Alan Lomax – and there was one by Snooks Eaglin.

*Did you actually realise that what you were listening to was blues?*

Yes, definitely. At the same time I was well into what the Rolling Stones were doing. "Come On" was in the charts I think and that was the sort of music I was working out on the piano. So in fact I was listening to both urban and rural blues. Then at the age of about 15 I started listening to techniques used by the fingerstyle blues guitarists.

*Anybody in particular?*

Well this was Brownie McGhee, and then a bit later on when I started having a record collection of my own I disco-

*Photos: Michael Prince*

vered Blind Blake. I'd started earning a living and could buy the records as well as the guitar I wanted and I started playing in folk clubs.

*Who impressed you most at that time?*

I think Blind Blake and the ragtime guitarists and especially Robert Johnson, which as far as I was concerned was like the opposite to the gentler ragtime feel. I thought Delta blues was more like rhythm & blues with a country feel.

*At what stage in your career did you start playing blues in earnest and start going out to folk clubs?*

I did my first gig when I was 15½. I did blues by the people I've mentioned as well as others like Blind Gary Davis and I always included a couple of Dylan songs, which I still do to this day.

Then around about 1967 this Liverpoolian guy by the name of Sam Mitchell came down to a place called "The Combination" in Brighton which used to be an arts centre where they put on plays and blues evenings. He taught me an awful lot about how Robert Johnson played – he'd managed to formulate Johnson's technique and I was able to see with my own eyes how to do it. We swapped licks and he stayed at my place for a while, where we used to put on lots of obscure country blues records. We discovered all the really amazing slide guitarists like Blind Willie Johnson and Kokomo Arnold.

*Had you not been playing slide before this?*

Yes, a little but very basic things. Sam was doing far more complicated things at the time but I think I've polished up on that area now!

*Is that the time when you recorded your first album for Nick Perls' Blue Goose label?*

That's right. I used to run a blues club where I'd invite all the British country blues people including Jo Ann and Dave Kelly and Andy Fernbach. Sam Mitchell was the resident with me. It was a rota of about fifteen people I had on my books and every fifteen weeks we'd do the same thing again! The album came about by Jo Ann Kelly's recommendation to the

record company. I felt very privileged. I then started doing a few London gigs – just a handful – but my confidence wasn't up to much at that time to actually project myself in front of an audience. We've sorted that out now.

*Very much so. Around that time had your listening habits changed?*

To tell you the truth, at the time that first album was recorded I was part of a duo with another guitarist and we used to experiment with textures of guitar sounds. I incorporated my slide guitar to his songs (he was called Mike Sanders) which had nothing to do with blues. He was more into The Who...

*Into the seventies you played in a couple of bands.*

Yes, a good friend of mine, Piers Clark invited me to join a local funk-soul band called Stepping Out. This music was new at the time; there weren't so many discos, and certainly not that many people performing it live. I experimented a lot with electric guitar and we did quite a few fairly big gigs. As a complete contrast to what I was doing in the band I also worked in a duo with another acoustic guitarist called Barry Denyer, playing rural blues and country stuff. We toured Germany a couple of times and went down really well in places like Nurnberg and Wurzburg. I'd just got my National then; I put really heavy strings on it and I was away! It's a national Duolian, which I think has been mucked about with a bit – it's not totally original but I think most of it is. It's been chrome plated as well. I've been told it dates from about 1933-35 but I'm not sure.

Through Barry I joined another electric band, initially called Dupree and then Delta Wing. I left the funk band to join them and that was where I first met Jon Cleary. He'd been playing guitar with Eric Money (in whose band Loose Change I still play). It was a very friendly band that enjoyed playing mainly around the Rye and Hastings area. We got as far as recording a demo, then I left – really because Brenda and I went off into the country to have our children.

*Going back to Jon Cleary – was he just playing guitar then?*

*Yes he was, but I did hear him playing about on the piano when the band was setting up sometimes. I knew he had that sort of music in him. Then he disappeared to New Orleans and came back as a pianist – and quite a good one at that!*

*What was the next stage in your musical career?*

In the mid-eighties I played solo for a while, getting new material together and returning to acoustic guitars after playing a Strat in Delta Wing (possibly influenced by Ry Cooder at the time).

After this solo period I then started playing with a band again a couple of

years ago. Originally called the Roger Hubbard Band we've recently changed the name to Buick 6, after the Dylan song we've been doing for a while now. On stage it's probably our most popular number – we get a sort of Fred McDowell feel.

*Who's in this band?*

The best drummer I've ever met, Liam Genockey and Colin Gibson who is the most rock-steady bass player around. Neither comes from a blues background and we've had a lot of give and take in the band. I've shown them the simplicity



of blues and they've shown me what they can do with it, which has resulted in a different sound completely. I'm very comfortable playing with these people – it just seems to add the right sound to my vocals and guitar work. It's quite a big sound – even though we are doing mostly music from the thirties.

*Do you think this pre-war blues is still relevant?*

Yes, very much so. A lot of people are totally unaware that it is the root of a lot of the music they listen to today. Also I've always been in the "poor category" myself and I do believe it helps to play blues. You can just get on stage and forget your financial problems making these wonderful noises – and hope that one day these wonderful noises might

solve your financial problems!

*And you've left the electric guitar behind and gone back to the National.*

Yes, we tried for a bit just putting a lead into the P.A. through a little pre-amp and I used to get a lot of feedback because Liam is a very loud drummer – although the way he plays is positive and right for the band. So I've discovered that by taping up the holes in the guitar I do away with this. However I still retain the same steel-bodied National sound, which adds to the band's originality.

*Over the years you've written songs yourself – do you intend to use these more now?*

Yes, especially as the band is now so comfortable playing the set we've worked out. We've just started to work on the songs we've written now and already include one in the live set. We'll always do country blues though, as that is the sound our band relies upon.

*Do you still listen to country blues?*

Yes, Robert Johnson still sounds as good as when I first heard him! It's still as valid as ever as a musical form.

*Apart from Buick 6, all the band members moonlight in Eric Money's Loose Change.*

That's right. It's just a gathering of local musicians who play for fun – it's not a blues band. The band is in no way professional, we just have a good time playing live.

*Going on to other musics, you've got plans to move to Ireland some time in the future, partly because you've always had a strong liking for Irish traditional music.*

It sounds a bit strange but I think it's always been in my blood. I've got a great love for Celtic music. When we go over there I sit in at the local pub, playing my National – which is a bit loud as an accompanying instrument. I'll take my other guitar (wooden bodied) next time.

*I once remember Alexis Korner on the radio playing an air by an Irish piper and commenting that if that wasn't the Irishman's blues, what was it?! Have you thought of applying slide to Irish traditional music?*

Yes – it has been done. For instance Jerry Douglas plays dobro on the Davy Spillane album.

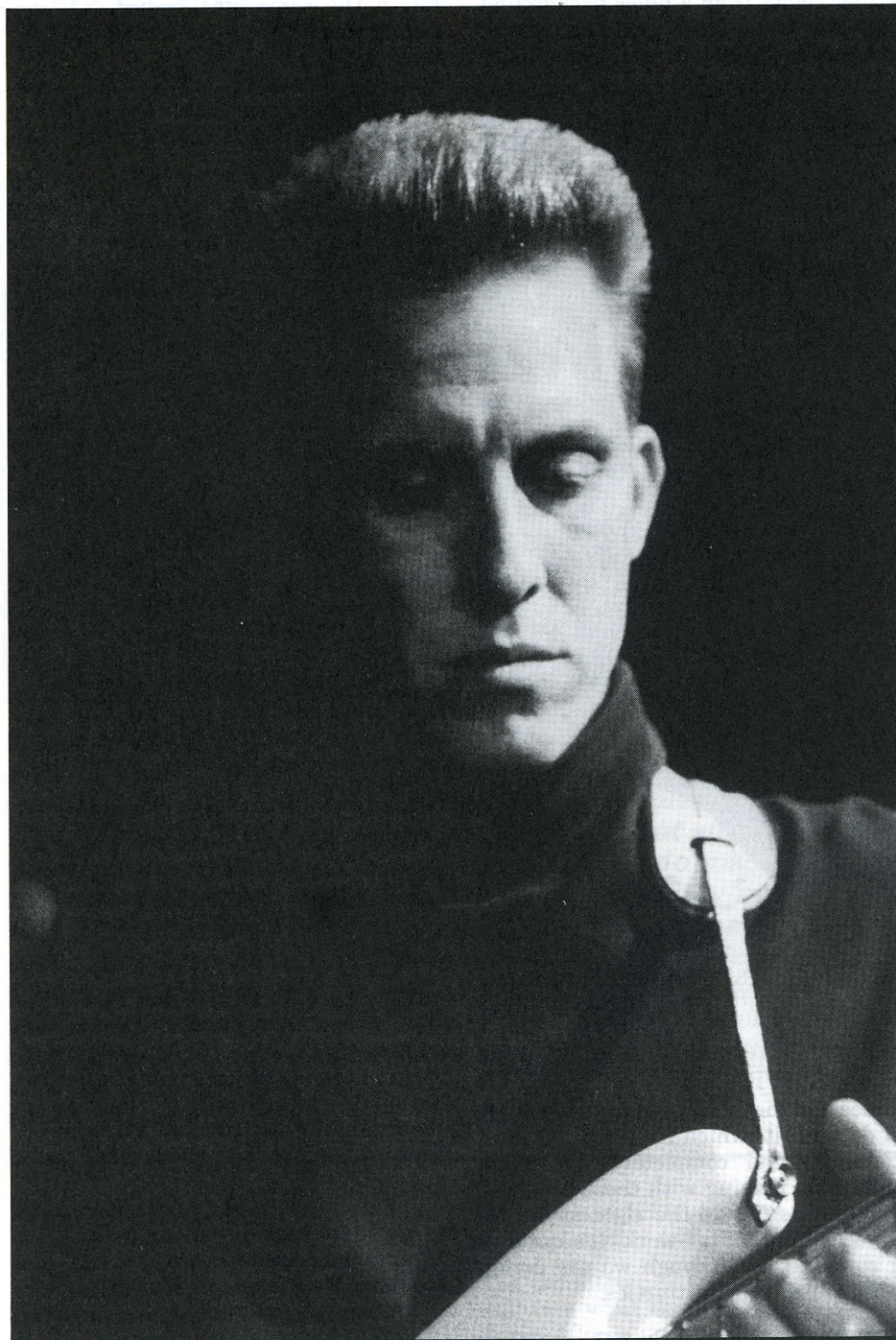
In the meantime I recommend everyone to take a listen to Roger in Buick 6, either at a gig if you can catch them, on their new album "Cypress Grove" or better still both.

**Michael Prince**

# “POPPIN’ SKIRT TAILS”

## Anson Funderburgh

Talks to the Editor



Dallas based guitarist Anson Funderburgh, with his band The Rockets featuring Sam Myers, breezed into London for a quick one-gig stopover, before moving on to Amsterdam. The editor caught up with him the morning after his successful Town & Country 2 performance.

“I started this band in 1978, October. Of course it was a lot different now, from what it was then. It was a four piece, guitar, harmonica, bass and drums. In 1982, I met Sammy. The old version of the band were playing in Jackson, Mississippi, and he came in and introduced himself and sat in with us that night and we became friends and in 1984, Hammond recorded that record ‘Love Is Here to Stay’ with Sam and myself and it was just a different project to do, besides doing what the Rockets were doing, Sam of course wasn’t in the band at that time. In 1986, Darryl, the guy who was singing and playing harmonica for me at the time, decided to leave the band, and when he did, I called old Sam up and said: ‘Hey let’s get out and see if we can do something with this record that we recorded’. It just kind of went from there.”

*“How do you find it working with him, when you have been used to working with younger guys?”*

“I would say this, you know, that through all of it – I mean it has its moments just like any thing, where it’s a little bit difficult at times – but when he gets up there on stage and opens his mouth to sing and play harmonica and you turn over, there’s nothing like it. It’s been an experience...just at life, to me, because Sammy’s...well he’s not much older than I am – I’m fixing to be 36 this year and Sammy’s 54, almost 18 years my senior, but just in attitude of life and the way he views things, it’s very interesting. We don’t always agree, but that’s life itself. It would be pretty boring if we were all the same.”

*“The whole band seem to come from all over the States...”*

“When we first started out, we were basically a Texas band – the only person that wasn’t a Texan was Doug in the old version of the Rockets. He plays piano and he’s from New Orleans, but now we’re from everywhere. We got Matt McCabe he plays piano for us...actually I think he’s from here...he was born over here, or in Ireland, but he spent a lot of time here. Our bass player is from Albuquerque, New Mexico. Sammy of course is from Laurel, Mississippi. Our drummer Danny is from Fort Worth Texas...we’re kind of spread out I guess.”

*“When did you actually start playing? What got you started?”*

“I’ve always loved it. My mum and dad both loved music. They always had the radio going when I was a kid. In Texas they had all those Country and Western shows on the radio and TV. There was a local shop where they’d introduce the people who’d be playing in town that night, so you’d get on down to see them after you’d seen the TV show. They had all the country greats there. I’ve seen Jerry Lee Lewis on that show, George Jones...I’ve always liked music. Anyway, I really wanted a guitar and then my mother bought me this guitar from a lady she worked with and the lady threw

in a stack of singles. There was Freddy King's 'Hideaway', Albert Collins' 'Snow Cone', parts one and two, I guess it was on the Hall label, I don't know. I also had Bill Doggett's 'Honky Tonk', It also had some Jimmy Reed stuff...of course among those records was some other stuff, the popular stuff of the day, but when I heard Freddy King's 'Hideaway', I thought this was pretty cool...it really threw me. That kind of music really hit at an early age. That's how I got started. I was fifteen nearly sixteen, when I first started playing night clubs, so I've been stumbling around those sort of places for quite some time."

"You have a mix of styles in the repertoire. Do you choose the songs or does Sammy?"

"Both, I guess. Sammy usually comes up with most of the words on those tunes, the original songs. We try to cover some tunes, make them a little bit different from anything else, throw our ideas in too."

"What do you think about this tour?"

"I like it. I find it a bit difficult in places not knowing the languages, but people are good to us, wherever we go. I really can't remember any place that didn't treat us good."

"How does that compare with the States?"

"The States are fun too. We'd gotten to that point now in the States where there are little areas in the States where people don't turn up, but we're getting past that point. Occasionally we'll play somewhere new where people don't know us, but those are the places that we've got to cultivate, until people get to know you. You can't expect people to come out and see you, to pay money, if they've never heard you before."

"Do you find there is more interest in The Blues in the States now...you've been travelling around for some time..."

"Yes. There have been times in my career when I haven't been doing so well. We're doing okay now. We make a living playing music. If you can get into this business and you get really stylistic...I don't know if that's the word. We've kind of fallen into a thing that we play blues. If you can turn people onto that and make them like what you do without bending over backwards...if you can find some kind of happy medium there...you're doing really well there, because things in the music business are hot and cold. What's hot today may not be hot tomorrow. If you're in this business for the fast buck, it can always happen, and the chances of you making a lot of money in this business are probably a lot better than it is if you're out there banging on a nail, but at the same time, I think if you look at it realistically, you must do what you like to do, and try to educate people into giving what you do, a chance, and playing for the music - not completely, because you have to live - but playing what's true to your heart, you'll be a lot better off in the long run."

"Yeah, I agree. I've been playing blues since the sixties, and there have been

*times when, even though you're playing in the same town, there's a new audience who don't know the songs and you really have to keep on playing what you like until they know the songs. Once they know the songs, it's different, of course."*

"It's really hard also, in your home town. It's harder to be respected in your home town. Well, we do pretty well now in Dallas since this last year, but even then we do better out of town. We can go to Louisville, Kentucky, on a Wednesday night and draw four or five hundred

join a band called Bees Knees and we made two albums for a little lable in Texas, playing soft rock. I went from that band into this band. We then worked all the time."

"It's a bit difficult to work all the time playing blues over here, at least until now. But your band is very good for dancing to...I think blues is dance music, it doesn't make that much difference as long as you swing, people can move to it..."

"Yeah, to me it's really a fun kind of



Sammy Myers

people. In Dallas, we draw three or four hundred people, on a Friday night. I guess what I'm trying to say is that it's hard to be a hero in your home town. You've been there so long that people just take you for granted. In 1978 I started playing a place called Poor David's pub, with the band. We played every Monday night when we weren't on the road. In fact we played there every Monday at the beginning because we weren't on the road then, and people would just get used to...' Ah they're down there all the time. We can catch them next month, or we'll catch them next year...' Now we're not in town. When we're in Dallas now, they think: 'They haven't been around for a long time. We'd better go catch them.' So now it's just starting in Dallas."

"When you first started playing in a band, you were in someone else's band?"

"When I was fifteen I played in someone else's band. We played some rock. Back in the sixties, there was a dance in Texas called the Texas Push...a cross between a jitterbug and...a routine. Jimmy Reed songs, Ray Sharpe's Linda Lou, stuff like Kansas City, Hideaway...they were like the favourite songs. If you couldn't play these songs, you didn't get a job. This was just fine for me, they wanted to hear shuffles, that's what they danced to. Then I had some blues bands of my own but they weren't too hot. You couldn't get work in the seventies playing blues. People just didn't want to hear it. So these friends of mine asked me to

music. I think people take it a little too serious sometimes. It's a very emotional music, but I'm not sad all the time...God help the person who is! I can find humour in it at times".

"I think musicians tend to approach it differently from fans, especially collectors. It was more a case of 'thank God it's Saturday Night, let's get down the juke joint and forget the problems."

"You know I read a review last night, over here which was pretty hard on us, on our record 'Rack 'em Up'. It said we were trying to sound like an old record...we're not trying to sound like an old record any more...at one time, yes, I was emulating, but things have changed. We want to stay in that traditional sound, but I'm not trying to sound like Johnny Guitar Watson or Jimmy Nolan. It's already been done."

"Yes, you can go home and listen to their records."

"Yeah, I have those records...I love those records, just like these reviewers did, but they were really tough on us. They said that Sam was an okay harmonica player and had very limited range...Sammy can sing anything he wants to..."

"He's got a great voice..."

"Yeah, he's wonderful, man...I don't know...they were just a little hard on us."

"I think the point is that they're limited on their outlook. That's the reality of it. They have this idea about how it should be, not how it is, or how it was."

"Yeah. I don't know what any of these people have been listening to. What do they think about Lightnin' Hopkins or Lightnin' Slim? If you want to talk about limiting, have a look at what Jimmy Reed did. Jimmy Reed was an okay harp player but limited and look what Jimmy Reed did. I still listen to his records even now. I think it really was hard on us, I'm not sure why. Okay, you can't get people to love you or like you everywhere you go, but they were really hard on us. It kind of made me laugh to myself and wonder where this person was coming from."

"Well they don't come from the same place that you come from."

"Obviously not, because we're not trying to be someone else. At one point we were. We're actually trying to keep something alive and a little fresh at the same time. It was really a toss of everything that's been written about us. It said I played too much...yet everything else that's been written about me said I don't play enough...it's the exact opposite of everyone else."

"It's easy to be a critic, especially if you don't have to face the guy the next day..."

"I hope he liked the record better than he said, but maybe not... maybe he's right in his own mind. I'm not saying anything bad about the guy, I think he was even there, but it was just a shock to read it."

"It pulls you up a bit."

"It keeps you humble..."



Matt McCabe

"Come on, it keeps you happy. They don't seem to understand that you're just not playing for them, but for yourself too."

"Exactly. In this business you have to learn to play for yourself, because, especially when you're starting out, the audience may not be there, and the money may not be there, so either way, you'd better enjoy it."

"It's not just that either, is it? If you're not getting anything out of it, it shows, doesn't it. Why should the audience enjoy themselves if you aren't?"

"Sure. I have a good time when I play. I like to have fun. I like to get a point across and touch somebody with what I do. It's not that you can make someone

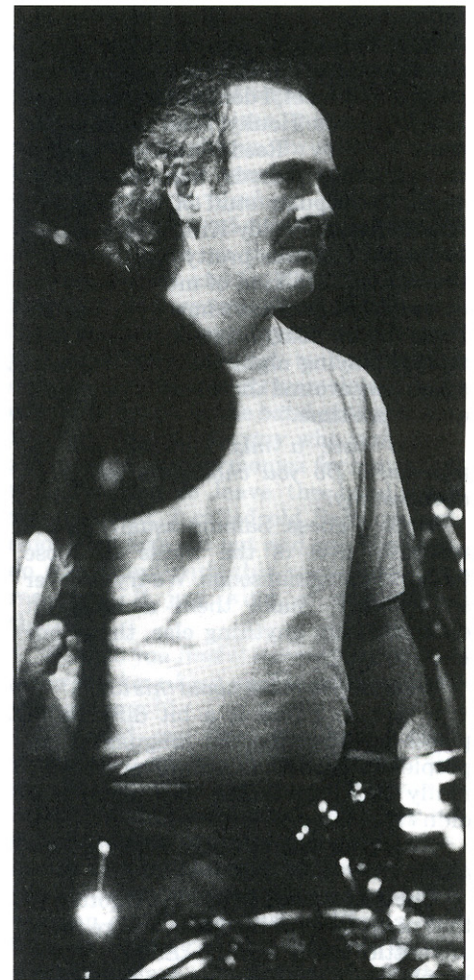
happy or sad every time you pick up your guitar, but it's something to strive for but I guarantee that if you can do something for yourself and make yourself feel some sort of way, you have a better chance of getting that across to someone else rather than if you're just going through the motions. Yeah I just love it".

"The point with this kind of music is, you can't really do anything else but play it the way you want."

"That's true. I've been very fortunate. I kind of feel like a Jimmy Reed, I've taken what I do, and I've had a lot of success with it. I've been able to come over here. I've seen a lot of the United States, all through playing my music. It's been a lot of heartache too at times, but I've been very lucky."

"Do you see yourself going on... how do you see the future?"

"Just doing the things we're doing. To make good records and just get as many people to listen to them as possible. The more people that we can reach, through records and appearances... we sell quite a few records I guess, nothing like the majors of course, but they have their limitations and drawbacks, but I think if we just keep plugging at it, that's all we can do. The chances are that, with this kind of music, you'll never be rich, you'll never be a Whitesnake... I guess anything's possible, I don't expect it. I'm very happy doing what I'm doing. It's kind of gruelling at times, but I'm really



Danny, from Fort Worth....

get a lot of Press out of that record. This record, 'Rack 'em up', the band had been together for about three years. We got into the studio, we picked the songs out, we hired the horn players, brought them down, flew them into New Orleans, rehearsed them for a couple of days and just cut it, and the tracks are basically live. There might be an overdubbed horn here or there, but basically we cut it. Basically, we tried to make music the way we do on stage, and try to get that across on record. Now if somebody makes a big blunder, we're not going to just leave it there. Back in the early days, I guess we didn't have any choice. Most of our records are put down in two days. You can beat something to death if you do it too long."

"Do you actually like being in the studio?"

"I'm getting better at it. I've been doing it... well I even recorded in the studio a couple of times when I was sixteen. I haven't heard those things, I don't even know if there is a tape of them, but I was a nervous wreck... the tape don't lie. Now I'm more comfortable with it than I was. When I did those first Rockets records and I heard that sound I thought, 'Oh my God, I didn't do that!' All those records were alive too, the horns played with us. Those two records were cut all in a big room, baffled off but like they did in the old days. There's lots of bleedover. Same thing, I guess that's why they sound like they did. I'm more comfortable with it now. I've done a lot

pretty happy. I've met a lot of nice people. There seems to be a bond of some sort between all the people that enjoy this style of music, it's kind of like something that they can come and put their arm around you with, it's something personal to you, you know. Sometimes I'm not sure that that holds true with just radio music. Everyone likes to know something that's on the in, that not everyone else knows".

"When you go to cut an album, how do you like to do it?"

"We cut it pretty much live. We cut that last record live and got pretty good praise for it. That particular version of the band had only been together for six months, when we cut it. We really did



like ours and you put us on a big stage, the intimacy just disappears. There's something about just being as near as from me to you and hearing something and seeing something done... there's just something about that. Not always, but a greater percent of the time, a concert situation is not as intimate. You lose a little bit. You can be playing your heart out."

"Yes, I prefer to hear you playing in that situation last night, but obviously you have to come to some concerts."

"You're damned if you do and you're damned if you don't. I love playing clubs. This type of music, I'd rather play in a club than in a big hall as far as the feel of the playing but then again it gets back to getting over to people, so I also have to do my best and try to really put myself in that frame of mind when you're playing that big place. You are getting across."

"They are there to listen to you and you have to get to them."

"Yeah... but I'm with you... this type of music. It's... a big dance floor, people... you got it... me and Charlie, the guy who used to run Charlie's guitar Shop in Dallas, he's passed now, we used to call it Poppin' Skirt Tails, you know, out there doing the Push. There's just something about a big dance floor and people out there just poppin' skirt tails and having a little beer, having a good time and enjoying the music... there's nothing like that."

"It's what the music is all about, isn't it?"

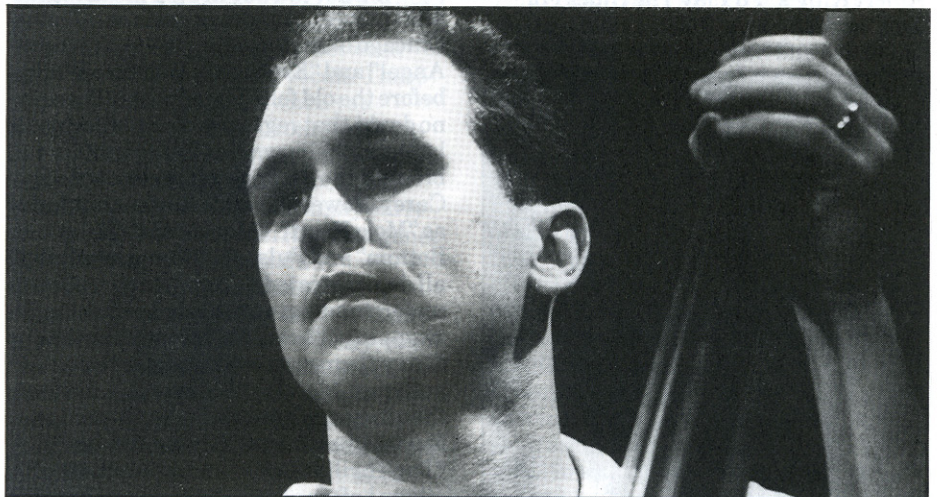
more recording, thanks to Black Top. I just got through doing Delbert McCClinton's new record in Nashville... I think I've got better with it. It's actually a challenge. Everybody does it different. With Delbert's new record we did all the rhythm tracks and then went back and did the solos. It was really fun watching a different producer work. This guy has produced just about everybody, and it was fun to watch someone else produce."

"Do you see yourself getting more into producing?"

"It's something I would like to do. I'm not sure that I would be good at it. I think my records would have fewer things on them. People tend to put too much in records... to me. If you've got a great song you don't need to cover it up with too much just because you're able to do it. I don't know how I'd be, outside of just blues. I always co-produce my own records, but someone else's stuff I don't know. It's something I'd like to do."

"Is there any particular track you really favour?"

"I like that new record. There's a couple of songs that I might have done differently, but all in all, Rack 'em Up is really a good effort. Of course Percy Mayfield tunes are timeless any way. I think 'Are You Out There' is really good, I think it's a great song. I like Grady's solo on 'Walk Right Up To Me Baby', the old James Brown song that we covered on this record. I like the title cut, 'Rack em up'. I tuned the guitar down to D. All the Strings were really loose. I used an



...from Albuquerque

old Vibrolux amp and an old Silvertone guitar. Sam used a G harp, which is a low sounding harp. I went and did the Jimmy Reed kind of thing first and then went back and played the chords. The strings were just really loose and it kind of distorted. I really like that stuff. That's where I come from. I could play Jimmy Reed stuff all night. I really like that record."

"When I was there last night, it sounded to me like a real Bar Band, which is what I really enjoyed. A lot of people don't rate that much, they don't reckon it's a star band, but to me, that band, if you can play it like that, you're a star anyway."

"Unfortunately, when you take a band

"Yeah, it is to me... the most smoky bar and... right at home..."

**We ended the interview there as our time ran out, but I look forward to hearing more of Anson Funderburgh and The Rockets, with Sam Myers. Check them out when they're around next. You'll enjoy the band.**

All photos: Jimmy Appudurai

Astonishingly, it's 13 months since the first wonderful Burnley bash and here we all were for another excellent five days.

The pattern was very much as I described last year – excellent headliners on each night, supported by good length, quality acts, with even more day time gigs and master classes, lectures and even after-show jamming at the Keirby Hotel. It can be a bit overfacing, unless you can manage to stay over the weekend (which I couldn't, at least not if I wanted still to have a wife at the end of it!) and, like similar events, is probably best approached selectively. Even so, I managed four nights and one day and most of those I missed turned up elsewhere. This year's line up was perhaps a trifle Chicago-dominated and, thus, not quite as varied as last year. The undoubted compensations were the first Northern appearance of one legend in 20-odd years, a number of welcome new faces, including one stunning newcomer, all topped off by more Bells than a Glasgow pub on Burns Night!

The unenviable job of opening the first night fell to the Mighty Houserockers. A new band to me, they produced a bigger and harder sound than their three man line up suggested, taking in songs from Hound Dog Taylor, Buddy Guy, Chuck Berry, as well as their own Red Lightnin' album. They are built firmly around Les Wilson's vocals and excellent guitar and I particularly liked his renditions of Albert King's "I'll Play The Blues For You" and Elmore's "I Can't Hold Out". I'd like to see and hear more of this lot.

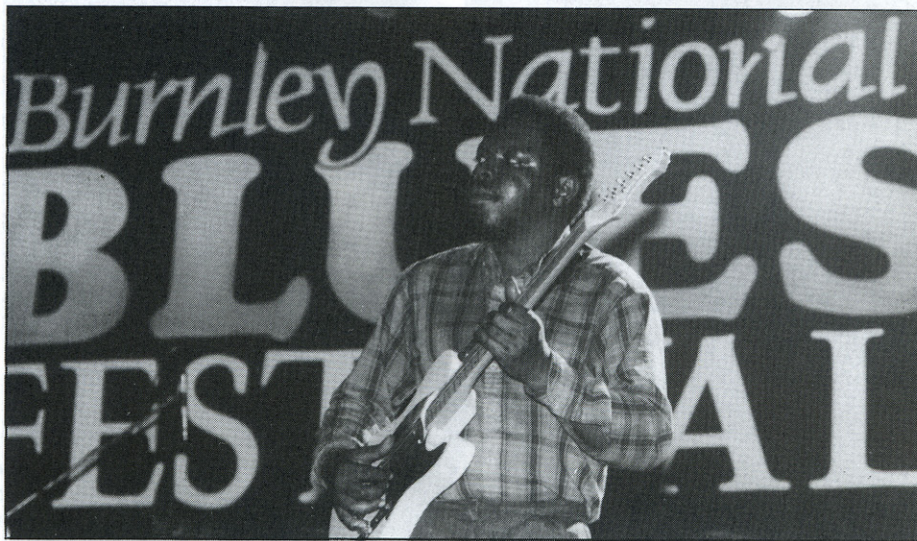


Carey and Lurrie Bell (Photo: Brian Smith)

The rest of the evening (appropriately dubbed "Chicago Blues Dynasty Night") was a showcase for the whole Bell family – dad Carey on harp, son Lurrie on guitar and, I think for their first visit, his brothers Steve (on harp), Tyson (bass) and James on drums. Carey and Lurrie looked the part but the three young lads, as someone observed, looked as though they'd just stepped off skateboards – but what a band! They were one of the real hits of the festival, turning up all over the place, guesting with others, jamming in bars and rapping with local kids on the street corners! The 4 brothers kicked off the set and were terrific. Lurrie took centre stage but they were very much a single,

# BURNLEY '90

## - Buddy, Bells, Brown & Booze!



Lurrie Bell (Photo: Brian Smith)

extremely hot, band. Lurrie is an outstanding guitarist in the very best Chicago tradition. He is intense and very self effacing and almost painfully shy, but he cut loose with guitar work which was bettered by no-one all weekend. Steve too gave dad a run for his money, with some high energy solos. Lurrie also proved to be a thunderingly good singer and they swept through some excellent Chicago blues including "Sweet Little Angel" and "Everybody Wants to Win", before the old fella joined them. There is no doubt that regular playing with his lads and their own excellent form, brought the best I've yet seen out of Carey. Powerful versions of such classics as "Mojo Hand", "Meet Me In The Bottom" and Fulson's "Reconsider Baby" all demonstrated an excellent understanding, with some lovely swapping of licks by Carey and Lurrie. Carey then went walkabout in the audience, blowing "Blues with a feeling", then to be replaced by Lucky Lopez Evans, guesting on "Ghetto Woman", "The Thrill Is Gone" and a couple of others before all the Bells encored, with the old Harp-slinger and Steve "battling" to a storming close. It was a rare privilege to see a top notch working Chicago band at the top of its form.

Saturday was the show I missed, but Richard Studholme and Johnny Mars apparently gave their usual impressive performances and reports of Lucky Lopez made me glad that he was also appearing on Monday and nipping in and out of other people's acts!

Sunday was for surprises – the first one not so pleasant. I'd not spotted the earlier start that day so, when I tried to photograph Stefan Grossman and John Renbourn on what I thought was their soundcheck, I found out the hard way that they were about to start their act. I was roundly slagged off by the old

Ragtime Cowboy Jew and slung off stage! This was a bit unnecessary and unintentional and rather took the edge off what was otherwise a welcome reacquaintance with his entertaining brand of excellent guitar picking and story telling, of his days learning at the knee of Blind Gary Davis. Songs from the Reverend, Willie Brown and Lonnie Johnson, plus collaborations with Renbourn (including a Booker T adaptation!) completed a short but highly entertaining set and, happily, hatchets were buried and misunderstandings cleared up afterwards.

Now for the real surprise of the weekend – Angela Brown. She had been down for a Bessie Smith afternoon lecture and presentation (to piano accompaniment) which, with her theatrical background and bugger all else known, sounded a bit dry. How wrong can you get! I arrived for the evening show to rave reports of this spot and a rip-snorting, off the cuff jam in the bar. She did two evening spots, the first accompanied by an excellent solo pianist (announced as something like "CC The Boogie Man" – who was he please?) She revealed a wonderfully strong, rich voice and mastery of the audience, in a mixture of "jazz-blues" standards like "St James Infirmary" (wonderful) and "Am I Blue", a pounding "Stagger Lee" and a hilarious risqué "Kitchen Man". What a voice, but even better was to come.

The vastly improved Norman Beaker Band did their own spot and now noticeably benefit from the absence of the squawky sax man who always seemed a bit out of place (I hear he has migrated to Froggier climes, to escape Maggie's poll tax!). Norman's guitar work gets better all the time.

They also accompanied the second





Angela Brown (Photo: Brian Smith)

Angela Brown Set which was an even wilder slice of eye-rolling, hip-grinding R & B, including "Rock Me Baby" and lot of other raunchy ones I didn't know, but would love to hear again! After stopping the show, she then proceeded to do the same at the late night jam at the Keirby, backed by Norman, assorted Dubious and Bell Brothers, ending with a "Proud Mary" even wilder than Tina's! Five shows in 10 hours and not a song repeated. Where the hell's she been, God knows, but now we've found her, please get her back here as soon as possible. The prospect of her with someone like the Big Town Playboys is indecently mouth-watering.

Finally it was Monday and Buddy Guy day!

First, though, my one chance to taste the daytime delights – bargains in the foyer record fair, free gigs in the bar and Acoustic Room, a "Living Blues" exhibition in the basement and renewing many old friendships from last year, over fine local ale and cheap fodder (apart from the one bitter disappointment of the weekend – where was the wonderful Burnley Broth which kept me going for five days last year?!) The place, the crowd who come, and the informal way the whole thing is put together, really do make the marvellous atmosphere, which is already becoming its own trade mark and one which is almost unique in festivals of my own acquaintance.

On to the afternoon and the Harp Championships. Carey was still in bed (!), so Steve took his place as judge and Paul Jones' arrival was delayed by car trouble. Once underway, the standard proved even higher than last year and Ian Hollister's obvious surprise and elation at his deserved, unanimous win was a pleasure to see.

Off to an interview with Buddy Guy

with the "Blues and Rhythm" team – he was in a lovely, chatty and informative mood and the result, in a forthcoming 'B & R' should make for one of the best recent interviews we have had with the man (so much for the commercials!)

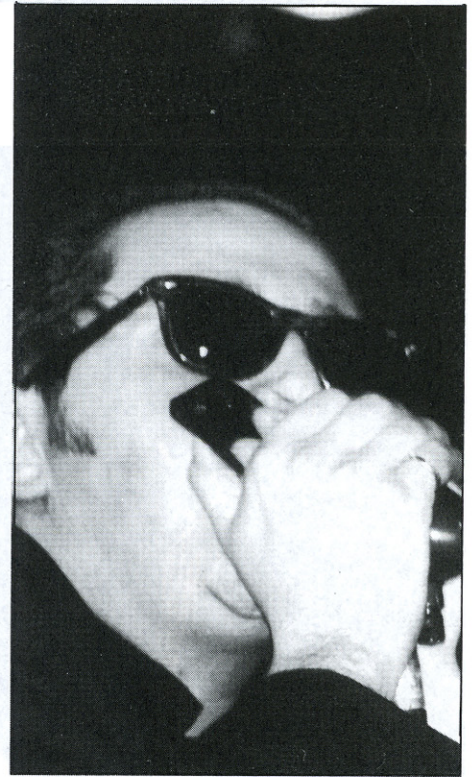
And finally (exhausted) the last evening's concert. First, a lovely, welcome bit of country blues from Clive Mellor on harp and Larry Gott (guitar), followed by the excellent Richard Studholme again and another short appearance by Lucky Lopez Evans.

Since Leo emerged from the mere accompanist of whom we had heard vaguely, he has developed a rich soulful style which is getting him growing respect here, if not yet to the same extent back home. Imposing in a white suit, stetson and pony tail (!), he grooved through a couple of funky items including his regular "Rainy Night In Georgia", plus "Paycheck To Paycheck" and others, all showing his warm strong voice and confident guitar playing to excellent effect.

So to the top of the bill, Buddy Guy, fresh from his profile triumph on the Clapton Blues Nights. It was noticeable that the most ecstatic reception was from the younger fans, with some of the older ones perhaps a little more grudging. It all depends I suppose how you approach Buddy Guy and what you expect, especially if you've had disappointments in recent years. When I first encountered him in his stunning Chess heyday and on his first appearances here in 1964/5, you did not get solos so much as those mind-scrambling bursts of guitar, between and behind his emotional vocals. There were several later years when you simply did not get these from Buddy, to say nothing of the bugging about with Junior Wells which badly shook his reputation and first caused many early devotees to lose patience. His emergence as something of a guru and an acknowledged major influence on countless younger guitar heroes, seems to have had several effects. Firstly, the "influence" seems now to have been partly reciprocated, in that we now get some long "guitar hero" solos we never got from the young Buddy. On the credit side, however, both at Burnley and at Birmingham last year, a good deal of the earlier urgency seems to have returned. Certainly, the best of his Burnley set was when his old emotion and short stinging guitar runs came through.

The crowd was a bit of a pain in the bum, at times, shrieking and whooping at every single note uttered and picked, and this irritated a number of reviewers. I'm a bit more philosophical these days, willing to take the good, gratefully, where it comes, especially when unexpected – thus I enjoyed much of his 2 hours immensely for there should, in truth, have been enough there to satisfy most tastes. Even the guitar hero antics are better than most of those he is emulating, though I do wish he would do something about the tinny tone and low volume of his own guitar, which lessens

his impact. The crappier end of his repertoire was there in "Mary's Lamb" and he still has a tendency to drag out one song too long, whilst seemingly ditching another, just when getting into his stride. That said, "Stone Crazy" was worth the admission on its own and brought a few old-time tingles, as did



Paul Lamb (Photo: Brian Smith)

many stunning bits throughout a packed act, including Elmore James' "Yonders Wall", "All Your Love", several excellent Muddy's and the usual sing-along "Sweet Home Chicago". There's no doubt too, that playing with the Bells, with Lurrie on such good form, made him pull out all the stops and, after some of the bad reports in the 80's, it's churlish to do other than bask in what was best about this performance. He kept the masses at his mercy for all 2 hours, despite handling generous solos to Steve and especially Lurrie, who (also busting a gut, in such company) came out of his shell and gave Buddy as good as he got.

All in all, a very welcome and enjoyable return and a fitting end to another splendid weekend's Blues.

Again a monument to excellent, efficient organisation and my own thanks to Dave Pierce and his cohorts for this and all their help to me.

The model for the future seems to be firmly established and there seems to be little more which can be put into 5 days. One word of caution perhaps – as it reaches its limits of accommodation, time and audience, I hope it retains the informality which has made it very much "The Friendly Festival". Too much emphasis on the limitations of access and security, as gigs become more "professional, can end up being self justifying and endanger one of its best attributes. Still, can't wait for next year!

Brian Smith

# Reviews

**The Blues Band**  
at The Harlequin, Redhill  
Saturday 28th April



There was a full house to hear the show at Redhill's newish theatre. The support act was John Fiddler, ex-Medicine Head, whose solo performance consisted of eight or nine number which I found offered little variety, and not enough blues. The audience were polite to him, which is better than being rude, I suppose.

The Blues Band followed with a very tight performance. Paul Jones was, as I expected, very smooth and flashy. The band were excellent, managing to get a rocky blues feel into their music. They have two strong vocalists in Paul Jones and Dave Kelly, and were well received by the audience.

They played 'C'mon, Can't Get Started' and 'Green Stuff', which the audience certainly liked and with 'Victim Of Love', featuring Dave and Paul, my row of seats began to move, which didn't help my note-taking, but certainly showed what the crowd enjoyed.

They also loved Paul's efforts on Adderley's instrumental 'Work Song', though I found it a bit 'Old Hat'. 'Catfish', again with Paul and Dave,

showed what can be done with a duo. Arthur Crudup's 'That's All Right Mama', with Dave on vocals and a brilliant guitar solo from Tom McGuinness went down really well with the crowd.

'Hallelujah I Just Love Her So', was good, loud and raunchy. 'Blue Collar' from their new album (Back For More) featured a crowd pleasing harp solo from Paul. 'Twenty Nine Ways Into Bo Diddley' meant playtime for the audience, with Paul down among the front seats to embarrass anybody who didn't seem to be joining in.

Another plug for the album showcased two more numbers. In the Whistle Test theme, Paul Jones' solo led into 'The Saints' and then into a scorching drum solo. 'You Talk Too Much' did the necessary. The encore was a bit contrived, but Dave Kelly's guitar on 'Hoochie Coochie Man' was brilliant. 'Out Go The Lights' brought more audience participation, and an end to the show. I've no doubt that the audience will be back for more when The Blues Band appear here next.

**Penny Green**

**Blues Benefit for  
Civic Forum in  
Czechoslovakia**

– Mandela Hall, Belfast

With peace and harmony breaking out in numerous previously benighted parts of the world it was fitting that this benefit gig for the democracy movement in Czechoslovakia should have been held in a hall named after Nelson Mandela (albeit in a city where confrontation is still the preferred method of dealing with political conflict).

Preacher John, more a rock than a blues band and devout disciples of The Mega-Decibel, blasted off proceedings thrashing through Johnny B. Goode and a highly revved Baby Let Me Follow You Down, as well as a somewhat limp version of that old cockrock warhorse Allright Now.

The Ronnie Greer Trio followed, with the most blueswailing Greer, the most authentic Chicago-style guitarist in the country performing with his usual white heat intensity. Greer zapped the audience with emotional versions of Five Long Years and Hoochie Coochie Man, while his polished rendition of Robben Ford's Help The Poor showed the subtler side of his playing.

The Jackie Flavelle Band, with guest vocalist Sam Mahood brandishing as ever a bottle of red, red wine, rampaged through crowdpleasing versions of Hi Heel Sneakers, It Hurts Me Too and Everyday I Have The Blues. Mahood's voice was sometimes a little strained but his manifest delight in singing the blues was infectious and the crowd loved him – as crowds always do.

But despite Mahood's best efforts the Best Showman Award undoubtedly goes to Jim Armstrong Band singer Jim Gilchrist, a grizzled white bearded veteran wearing his hair in a red headscarf, pirate fashion. Gilchrist is the grooviest mover this side of Michael Jackson, and even young Wacko would surely have been impressed at the sight of such an unlikely character belting out Sweet Home Chicago while alternately highkicking each leg above his head (egged on by the thrilling sound of Jim Armstrong's slide guitar lifting off into the stratosphere).

Five hours of music with some of Belfast's finest uniting in an honourable cause: any chance of any Czechoslovakian blues musicians playing a benefit for us over here?!!

**Trevor Hodgett**

## Larry McCray Band

### Live at the Borderline

LARRY McCray is a big man with a big voice, and luckily, on this oppressively hot night at the Borderline, he turned out to have a big heart as well, thus circumnavigating the phrase 'The harder they come the harder they fall.'

For, despite a willing audience, fine band and strong material, the ridiculous temperatures played havoc with Larry's guitar strings, necessitating a retuning after just about every number. Yet despite the less than favourable circumstances and variable P.A., Larry McCray and his band came through with a raucous set that blended blues, rock and funk influences, topped by Larry's mighty voice.

The set kicked straight into the album title track and new single, *Ambition* – the sort of powerful soul infused number complete with serious guitar licks to suggest that Larry has a potentially wide crossover appeal. And it is this very cross-over market that promises to project Larry from the clubs into an altogether bigger domain.

Larry seemed concerned to put across the concept of *Blues Power* – but in truth there was little of Albert King here. In fact McCray has an altogether wider range than Albert. His solos burn with intensity; his vocals are crystal clear and enjoy a strong range, as on the raucous rasp of *I Don't Mind*, or in a more gentle ballad setting of the very Marvin Gaye-sounding *Me & My Babe*. Above all Larry McCray gives the impression that he really is truly happy to be here. Unlike many of his hyped predecessors this man has actually spent half of his life on the assembly line in Detroit, and at this Borderline gig he was taking his chance with both hands, whatever the circumstances.

In the event, Larry and his very tight band triumphed on the night. Songs such as *Sally's Got A Friend* in New York City and the boogie-down *One More Lonely Night* were strong album tracks that, rendered live, gained in both stature and arrangement. By the time of the mellow blues *Keep On Walkin'* – on which McCray hinted at a gospel approach, the big man had done enough to suggest Virgin were right to invest in him and the new crossover blues market. More Blues power to their elbow!

## Redbone Mania

### Shaw Theatre, Camden

Judging by the rapturous reception from a sold out crowd at Camden's Shaw Theatre, LEON REDBONE is very much the flavour of the moment. Yet it took only two numbers into an enjoyable but eclectic set to realise that the man himself is far happier in a musical

environment dating back some 70 years.

Taking the stage in top hat and tails the endearing Leon resembled one of those curious medicine men that used to pop up in dated Western films. He quickly added to the W.C. Fields-like countenance by use of a droll line in patter and the occasional use of a number of simple but amusingly effective props. *If So Relax*, the single so successfully featured in the BR TV ad has broadened his following, then the newcomers to the fan club must have been impressed with the sheer vitality and diversity of the music. Redbone's set was a celebratory journey through the annals of Trad jazz, Jimmy Rodgers-like yodelled Country, Downhome blues and a dash of old time vaudeville. Classics like *My Blue Heaven*, *Fats Waller's Ain't Misbehavin'* and an early Redbone favourite, *Shine On Harvest Moon*, took their place with gentle ballads such as *Breeze* from the new *Sugar* album, and feverish improvisations on a number of familiar musical themes.

By the time of a ridiculously fast *Diddy Wah Diddy* the accompanying quintet had become enamoured of Redbone's catalytic qualities and swung with abandon on the closing instrumental, apparently titled *Clarinet Marmalade*. Leon Redbone's music may emanate from the early 1900's, but it effortlessly found its niche in front of an ecstatic 1990's audience.

## Albert Collins

### T & C Club, Kentish Town, April 21, 1990

ALBERT COLLINS is raging hard. Together with his flamboyant 7 piece band, THE ICEBREAKERS this Texan Master of the Stratocaster thrilled a heaving Town & Country Club with a blues based equivalent of a James Brown soul review. The major difference appeared to be that Collins's show concentrated more firmly on music than hype.

Newly signed to Virgin's Power Point label, Albert's new paymasters smartly cashed in on the marketing potential of presenting their new signings to the target audience. Before the end of a climatic show an apparently complete roster of label artists – from Gary Moore to Larry McCray – had joined Collins for one last guitar led frenzy.

But this show was all about Albert Collins who pleased his ecstatic followers with some measured use of sustained and the occasional tension-breaking flurry of notes on his guitar. His vocal style proved strong enough to top the swinging horns and impressive second guitar of Debbie Davies of the Icebreakers. He grimaced, he danced, he gesticulated and fired the band through a thundering *I'm Tired*, a humorous *I'm Not Drunk, I'm Only Drinking* – complete with a simulated conversation between two drunks, on his guitar – and

funked his way through Hop Wilson's *Black Cat Bone*.

As the temperature rose, on walked Gary Moore, who was subsequently joined by new blues stablemate Larry McCray, plus Donald Kinsey and Ron Prince from *The Kinsey Report*.

As the set passed the two hour mark the band returned to encore Collins' instrumental trademark, *Frosty*.

"We're real pleased to be back here at the T & C" shouted a beaming Albert. The audience responded with a roar of approval, and for once you just knew everyone meant it.

## Country Cajun

### Waterman's, Brentford

With a packed house well before the starting time, Waterman's administrators might well have felt like cocking a snoot at those media trendies who had the temerity to ask where Brentford was as they busily consulted their A-Z's to find the venue hosting the night's Cajun activities. In the event I was more concerned with searching out the Cajun itself as the close harmonies of Country Music dominated the night's proceedings.

THE WHITSTEIN BROTHERS I could have no qualms about. Advertised as the nearest living example of "The singing traditions of the older brother duets", in the style of the music from the 30's and 40's, they accurately lived up to their billing. The combination of lead and tenor vocal, allied to some pleasant, if undemanding, guitar and mandolin, obviously pleased the crowd at the front. Those of us at the back were a shade less fortunate in receiving occasional screeches of feedback that threatened excellent renditions of *Freight Train Boogie* and the classic Country favourite *In The Pines*. The duo started the number with some low harmonies – a difficult enough feat to pull off – and went on to repeat the exercise on some Hank Williams material, the delivery of which far surpassed the unoriginal choice of songs.

The Cajun element still did not arrive immediately as D.L. MENARD on guitar and World champion fiddler Ken Smith took the stage, and proceeded to extend the Honky Tonk feel of the evening. Not until the sad eyed but excellent EDDIE LE JEUNE took the stage and livened things up with some excellent accordion did the Cajun element of the set begin to emerge. Whilst Menard managed to sing and introduce his songs in English – yet still remain incoherent, Le Jeune chose ancient French and through a clever use of pitch and timing proved far more effective.

As the rhythms quickened, Le Jeune took us through the classic *The Mistake I Made* and the Whitsteins joined the fray for a Baptists' revival outro, on *I Saw The Light*.

*Pete Feenstra*

# RECORD REVIEW with PAUL LEWIS

## Big Mama Thornton – You Ole Houn' Dawg (ACE CHAD 277)

*Hound Dawg/Walking Blues/My Man Called Me/Cotton Picking Blues/Willie Mae's Blues/The Big Change/Partnership Blues/I'm All Fed Up/I Smell a Rat/I Just Can't Help Myself/Yes Baby (with Johnny Ace)/Tarzan and the Signified Monkey (with Elroy Peace)/They Call Me Big Mama/Before Day (Big Mama's Blues)/Me and my Chauffeur*

Here's another selection of Big Mama's finest from the good people at Ace Records. Ranging from her first Peacock release in 1951 up to a brace of Kent recordings from 1965, 'You Ole Houn' Dawg' is both the perfect companion to the first Big Mama volume ('Quit Snoopin' Round My Door' ACE CH 170) and as useful an introduction as you are likely to find to the work of a woman whom Chris Strachwitz once referred to as 'the greatest blues singer of this or any other decade'.

That's a matter of opinion of course, but I defy anyone hearing for the first time the snarling way she belts out that big, bruising opening line to 'Hound Dog' not to get a severe attack of spinal shivering. It's a fantastic record by any standards, far out-classing the more famous Presley cover and a superb opener for this fine collection. Equal in ferocity to that classic is another Lieber & Stoller tune, 'I Smell A Rat', which was recorded a year after 'Dog' and which deserves to be far more familiar than it is.

But, lest you should think that the only weapon in Big Mama's emotional armoury is a kind of terrifying anger, just listen for comparison to her raw desperate pleading to a lost lover on 'Willie Mae's Blues', or her humorous performance on the novelty duet 'Tarzan And The Signified Monkey' wherein she castigates the unfortunate Elroy Peace – the most peculiar Jungle Lord I've ever come across – for keeping her awake with his nocturnal yodeling. Johnny Weissmuller was never like this, believe me!

The album's other two-hander, 'Yes Baby', finds Big Mama in the illustrious company of the great Johnny Ace for a rocking number which will be familiar to readers who already have this 'Memorial' album on their shelves. My favourite 'rocker' on display here however, has to be 'They Call Me Big Mama', another from the 'Hound Dog' sessions with good, driving accompaniment by Johnny Otis and his Orchestra. Otis' band in fact provides backup on most of these tracks, and is particularly effective on the vibedrenched 'Walking Blues', on which Mama's sad, almost wistful vocal is given a brooding, atmospheric setting. Johnny Talbot's band takes over for

the last two tracks which are somewhat younger than the others, emanating as they do from a single she cut in the mid-sixties at Kent. They're more than worthy of inclusion here nevertheless, with 'Before Day' providing the album within at least one example of Big Mama's feisty harp playing.

Sound quality throughout this set is exemplary with only the two earliest numbers ('Partnership', 'Fed Up') showing the signs of having been dubbed from disc. But dressed as it is in a magnificent gatefold sleeve with copious liner notes, this beautifully presented package is a fitting reminder of the enduring legacy and multi-faceted talents of Willie Mae Thornton. Buy It!

## Charlie Musselwhite – Ace of Harps (Alligator AL 4781)

*The Blues Overtook Me/Mean Ole Frisco/She May Be Your Woman/Kiddeo/River Hip Woman/Yesterdays/Leaving Your Town/Hangin' On/Hello, Pretty Baby/My Road Lies in Darkness.*

'This Is The Best Band I Ever Had' claims Charlie Musselwhite on the jacket of his new Alligator LP, 'Ace of Harps'. That's no mean boast, given some of the heavyweights that feature in his illustrious C.V. Most recently, he was one of the guests on Hooker's 'Healer' album, albeit the one most likely to send John Lee's new-found M.T.V. audience scurrying for their reference books, muttering 'Who?' His atmospheric playing was one of that set's high points, and his manipulation of the old tin sandwich is no less impressive here.

And sure enough, the band is splendid too, with Andrew Jones, Jr. deserving of special mention for his scintillating guitar work, against a solid rhythm section consisting of Artis Joyce (bass) and Tommy Hill (drums). Presented here in the kind of luxurious sound we've come to associate with Bruce Iglauer's label, we have ten tracks, six originals plus covers of Crudup ('Mean Ole Frisco' – excellent); Lockwood ('Hangin' On'); Brook Benton ('Kiddeo' – given a raw, bluesy treatment: similar to, but not quite the equal of John Littlejohn's version), and would you believe, Jerome Kern!

In fact, to hear just how good Musselwhite is, lend an ear to his version of the Kern standard, 'Yesterdays'. I always associate the piece with jazz giants like Coleman Hawkins or Ben Webster, and indeed Musselwhite phrases his rendition like a horn player, almost caressing the notes, squeezing every last ounce of emotion out of this achingly beautiful ballad. It's quite the best piece of jazz harmonica playing I've heard outside of Toots Thielemans, and it's quite an unexpected pleasure nestling, as it does, in the midst of this superb raw blues

collection. I would have liked to have heard Hill use brushes on this track but you can't have everything.

Of the new compositions, 'River Hip Woman', pitched halfway between Slim Harpo's 'Shake Your Hips' and Z.Z. Top's 'La Grange', was a favourite as was 'My Road Lies in Darkness', an acoustic country blues on which Musselwhite swaps his harp for a guitar, and proves himself perfectly adept with that instrument too.

There can be little doubt that Charlie Musselwhite is one of the greatest white practitioners of the blues harmonica. Indeed, since we lost Butterfield, he may even be the no. 1. This beautifully presented release merely confirms this fact.

## Clarence 'Guitar' Sims – Born To Sing The Blues (Eli Mile High TK 1001)

*She's Gone/Reap What You Sow/3rd Rate Love Affair/Watchdog/Don't Treat Me Right Blues/Things I Used To Do/I'll Be A Better Man/Hard Luck Blues/Body Language/Lonely Heart & Broken Mind.*

What a great record this is! Ten slices of top quality Bay Area blues from 'Guitar' Sims, formally the vocalist Fillmore Slim, (45s on Kent, Dooto and Dore), until five years in a Texas penitentiary caused him to re-assess his life, drop the old soubriquet, study the guitar and re-emerge into the blues community as a fully-fledged axeman.

This, his debut set, was actually recorded back in '87, two years after his release, and it consists mostly of songs written by Sims himself whilst inside. From the moment Dave Wellhausen's harp rips into 'She's Gone' you know you're onto a winner, and although Sim's guitar is not pushed to the fore on this opener, by the second track it's clear the man has not wasted his period of incarceration.

Constructing guitar passages both razor-sharp and spider's-web fine, Sims is from the same bag as Anson Funderburgh, and to hear him in tandem with 'Good Rockin' Robinson on 'Watchdog' or 'Don't Treat Me...' is a delight. The songs are witty, well-structured and firmly rooted in the blues tradition, and the arrangements and production excellent. His voice is still good, (he's 53 now), his impressions of Guitar Slim and Roy Brown are amusing and get the two cover versions off to a bright start.

I thoroughly enjoyed this album and if you can get past the tacky cover, (Is he supposed to look like Abe Lincoln or what?), you undoubtedly will too. Get it from ELI MILE HIGH RECORDS, 3629 Martin Luther King Jr. Way, Oakland, CA, 94609, USA.

**THE STORY OF  
BLIND WILLIE McTOOL**

Lawdy Lawd!

Well, Blind Willie sure hit it big in Memphis. Ev'ry day him and Barrelhouse played down on Beale street and ev'ryday they done made a whole lotta money.

When Barrelhouse got to thumpin' out that boogie...

... and Blind Willie done got to howlin' and moanin' on that harp...

... then ev'rybody on that street be rockin' and folks would come from miles around to see them boys play. There's was good times for Barrelhouse and Blind Willie...

Come a day when Willie got spotted by a scout from a record company up nawth.

Say boy, you wanna make a record?

(sure man)

Here's \$200. come down to the paramount hotel tomorrow morning.

well awright!

Man We's gonna make a record. we's gonna be rich.

sho' nuff babe, let's go out and celebrate

slow down there man

Now Blind Willie was a big star, 'specially with the wimmen-folk. somethin' them men never could understand.

'nother drink babe?

say willie, blow that harp jus' one mo' time worit ya

jus' can't figure it out. How comes that blind willie gets all the women?

sure looks an ugly cus to me.

Say boy, you really think you's somthin' dorit ya. If you knowd what's good for ya, you'd get outa this town right now...

But Willie dont take no shit from no-one

c'mon man, we've got a record to make.

sure nuff babe, let's do it.

See ya later honey

later that morning in a makeshift studio in the paramount hotel

Blind Willie blues take one... and roll'em

my name's blind willie and you can't see, but I can really smell

A fish man passed my house, jus' the other day. I thought it was a certain lady, said "babe I'm goin' your way"

Play it boy!

an' ev'ry woman in this whole place, wanna come along an' sit on my face.

We can edit that out later.

**Blind Willie's BLUES**

Hear Willie blow that harp

Vocal and harmonica with guitar

major record label sensation!

Soon....

**Bea's RECORDS**

Bessie-mae, will you stop playin' them blues records and do your school work.

aw, momma, ev'rybody jus' crazy 'bout Blind Willie....

... he's jus' so cute.

# Bluesnews Bluesnews Bluesnews

## THE GREAT BRITISH RHYTHM & BLUES FESTIVAL 24th-27th August – Municipal Hall, Colne, Lancashire

Blues fans who are fed up with seeing their British heroes pushed down the billing by American performers will welcome the news that a Major Festival will feature nothing but British based blues outfits.

THE GREAT BRITISH RHYTHM & BLUES FESTIVAL will delve deep into the British hall of Blues fame and seek out the brightest new talent for this welcome addition to the current Blues boom.

Veteran British Blues-stars will include Dr Feelgood, Stan Webb and The Blues Band while rising stars from the current generation will include The Paul Lamb Blues Band, King Pleasure & The Biscuit Boys and the first winners of the Banks Brewery Best of Blues competition – Blues 'n' Booze.

The three and half day festival will take place in the

heart of one of the busiest parts of the current British Blues scene. East Lancashire has already a thriving Blues circuit with regular gigs and an Easter Festival dedicated to showcasing American Blues. THE GREAT BRITISH R'n'B FESTIVAL firmly establishes the area as a true "Blues-belt".

The programme of events already lined up for the festival will include six major concerts, open fringe stages for electric and acoustic players, street blues and on Saturday night the inaugural presentation of awards by The British Blues Connection.

The Festival is organised by the same team which successfully created The National Blues Festival in Burnley last year and the aim is very much to carry on with a task which was begun then. Festival Organiser

GARY HOOD said "The National Festival was just the beginning. No single Festival can properly cater for the different forms of Blues. This Festival will make sure that British based performers get the recognition they deserve."

### Main Stage Festival Running Order:- Friday, 24th August 7.30 p.m.

Blodwyn Pig  
Blues and Trouble  
Stan Webbs Chicken Shack  
Dr. Feelgood

### Saturday, 25th August 12 noon

Festival Stage, Barrel House  
Piano Bar, Acoustic Cafe  
Buskers Street Artists  
7.30 p.m.  
British Blues Connection  
Awards  
8.30 p.m.

British Rhythm 'n' Blues  
Party featuring –  
Mr. C  
King Pleasure and his  
Biscuit Boys

Otis Grand and the Dance  
Kings

### Sunday, 26th August 12 noon

Festival Stage  
Main Festival Concert Stage  
1.00 p.m.

Blues 'n' Booze (Banks Bitter  
National Winners 1989)

The Harp Breakers  
(Manchester)  
The Mighty House Rockers  
(Birmingham)  
The Mean Red Spiders  
(Ipswich)

7.30 p.m.

The Ray Minhinitt Band  
featuring the Q Tips Horns  
Paul Lamb and the Blues  
Snakes

Joann and Dave Kelly  
(Country Blues)

The Johnny Mars Blues  
Band

### Monday, 27th August 12 noon

Festival Stage  
Acoustic Cafe

1.00 p.m.

The Main Festival Stage  
The Red Lemon Electric

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# Shakey Vick

at the

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## Tues. 26 June

to launch his new album

## 'Night After Night'

Doors open 8pm

Entry £5, Concessions £4, BBR subscribers £3



# Bluesnews Bluesnews Bluesnews

Blues Band  
(Wolverhampton)  
Bare Wires (Manchester)  
The Hot Lick Cookies  
featuring Gipsy Dave Smith  
(Newcastle)  
Shakey Vicks Blues Band  
(London)  
**7.30 p.m.**  
The Hamsters  
The Victor Brox Blues Train  
R. Cajun and the Zydeco  
Brothers  
The Blues Band

(There may be some truth in the rumour that Rory Gallagher will play the Colne Municipal Hall during the last week of June so keep your diary free. More details soon.)

For further information on all these events contact the box office, telephone (0282) 864721.

Further afield, the **2nd Rheinberger Blues Party** have practically finalised their line-up. On Friday 19th October in Rheinberg Town Hall: **Johnny Mars Blues Band** and **Luther Allison Blues Band** featuring Bernard Allison; Saturday 20th (Town Hall), **Al Jones Blues Band** and **Buddy Guy Blues Band**, plus another act yet to be confirmed. On Sunday 21st, at the Church in Rheinberg-orsoy there will be a gospel concert with **Marsha Grant**. Rheinberg is 30km from Dusseldorf. Further details from Kulturinitiative Schwarzer Adler, Baerler str. 96, 4134 Rheinberg 4, West Germany. Tel: 02844 2458.

Alligator Artist, **Big Twist** (Larry Nolan), whose death we reported in the last issue, was given a big send off by more than six hundred fans at a party on March 25th in Chicago. Koko Taylor, Lonnie Brooks, The Kinsey Report, The Sons of Blues, Albert Collins, and Otis Clay were among a host of musicians who dropped by. What a way to go!

**Koko Taylor** has her latest recording out on Alligator, **Jump for Joy** which will only be available on vinyl or CD in the UK. It's her most contemporary sounding record yet, according to producer and

record boss Bruce Iglauer. Koko is yet again nominated for a grammy award after appearing on NBC's 'Late Night With David Letterman' show. She's also appearing in the movies, with two songs in 'Wild At Heart'. Alligator are also putting out an album in the States, (and over here too, we hope) by **Kenny Neal's** father **Raful**. Called **Louisiana Legend**, it showcases Raful's harp and should be pretty good.

Another Alligator harpman, **Charlie Musselwhite**, whose latest album came out in February, has also appeared on 'Late Night With David Letterman'. (The American TV show has been broadcast over here in the past.) Charlie also did a track on John Lee Hooker's fast

selling album 'The Healer' and has been extremely busy on American radio stations throughout the country.

As has **Saffire – the uppity blues women**, a trio of ladies who know what to do with a man when they don't want one, or do, as the case may be. They certainly appeal to the female members of this organisation, and will definitely get the men eating out of their hand, which could be dangerous – for the men. They're busy plugging their album and we'll get it reviewed in the next issue, along with all those others. (Now where have we heard that before?) **Lonnie Brooks** was unable to make the Town & Country 2 gig in May, but it is hoped that he will be over here later in the year. An Alligator artist who

did make it here, was **Lonnie Mack** who certainly packed them in at the main T&C. We had arranged an interview the next day but were unable to make it. We apologise to Alligator for the default. The gig itself was marred by the sound, detracting from Lonnie's soulful singing, and in fact, when he did a quite spot without the band, he was able to be appreciated for what he is – a real professional.

Perhaps the T&C isn't the right place for this kind of music. Let's hope that isn't so because they've got some more good performers lined up, with **Snooks Eaglin**, **Earl King** and **Bobby Radcliff** on June 24th and **Etta James** on 23rd and 24th.



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**DANCE KINGS**

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