



BSWPA NEWSLETTER VOLUME 19, ISSUE 14

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Spring, 2024



‘Don’t be convinced not to be you....’

In every adventure, I always look forward to that one caveat that makes me smile and feel that all is good with the world. That said, I was going at a fast clip, making my way to my favorite chiropractor kiosk at the Atlanta airport. My body and my thoughts needed readjusted before I made my flight connection that would take me to the Blues Music Awards.

As I approached that wellness booth, a young 30ish chiropractor whom I will call Mike almost tackled me. He excitedly called out to me, “**You do Blues don’t you?**” We had chatted many times during my layovers about music and its healing powers. Mike exuberantly told me that during the prior week that he had met a **real famous Blues musician** who had stopped for a treatment. In the middle of the treatment, Mike said that that famous artist stopped him, looked him in the eye and told him not to make the foolish mistakes that he had, wasting years, friendships, talent. That **famous artist** had told him ‘To walk the straight and narrow’ if he wanted to keep his family together and stay upright in today’s world. Mike was very exuberant as he relayed their conversation. I marveled at the fact that that **famous artist** saw something, picked up on something in Mike’s words and demeanor that made him feel the need to speak up and give guidance. That famous Blues artist... **Eric Gales**. Tears rolled down my cheeks as Mike relayed all that he had learned and had absorbed from Eric’s hard-won thoughts about life, real life.

The next evening after Eric Gales had received his Blues Award as Blues Rock Artist of the Year, I sat with that famous Blues Player. Eric Gales graciously listened to my telling him that story.... The story of his making a difference and impacting, perhaps saving another in distress. (Yes, the tears flowed readily once more thinking about the simplicity of one human’s kindness towards another.) Eric humbly lowered his head as I spoke. I may be mistaken but I think I saw a tear that went along with his quiet smile.

Eric Gales has a story to tell and it needs to be shared with our readers. Armed with my questions and those from several performers in Western PA, it was ‘game on’ to understand how a man who was humbled by obstacles is back in play and playing his best musically and personally.

Jonnye: Your style of playing: left-handed, upside-down, and backwards, taking a right-handed guitar and flipping it over. You watched your older brothers play. What about their playing brought you to the Blues. What about the music spoke to you?

Eric: “It sounded and felt great. It was inevitable that I was going to end up playing something.”

Jonnye: Matt Barranti who worked with Fog Hat would like to know if you took lessons. He and vocalist Stevee Wellons would like to know who influenced you?

Eric: “I never took lessons. My brother Eugene was a big mentor. Stevie Ray Vaughn, Albert King, and Muddy Waters were very high on the charts as far as influence. And gospel.”

Jonnye: You were signed to a record label at 16 years old. That had to be exciting. What hurdles did you have to scale to continue to move forward?

Eric: “The hurdles were juggling a lot of different schedules - maintaining being in school and a marching band.”

Jonnye: Finding out that Carlos Santana spoke up about being impressed with the playing of 16-year-old Eric Gales, had to be amazing. What kind of pressure did that put on you to live up to that legend’s expectations?

Eric: “There was no pressure, if anything, it was gratitude.”

Jonnye: What were the pitfalls to being talented, on the verge of being the best in the world and succumbing to everyday temptations?

Eric: “The pitfalls were being drawn into the wrong things that come with it and succumbing to those.”

Jonnye: You have many albums and a stable of great songs, how do you decide what to play and when.

Eric: “Just by the feel every night.”

Jonnye: You sing ‘Stand UP’ as a main stay to your show. Please explain why this means so much to you.

Eric: “It’s a song about equality - that’s why it’s important!”

Jonnye: You repeatedly stated that ‘love saved you’. Please explain. What was the one moment when you knew that changes had to be made.

Eric: “I was introduced to someone that helped me figure out that there was a better way. The moment was realizing what I was doing was not working.”

Jonnye: Stevee Wellons also commented that you play from the heart and soul and that can be felt in every note. She among others would like to know how often you practice.

Eric: “Not often at all, only upon inspiration or I have something I need to rehearse for.”

Jonnye: Bass player, Erik Zettlemeier would like to know who do you think are the most underrated Blues guitar players?

Eric: “Philip Sayce.”

Jonnye: Guitarist Jeff Fetterman wants to know if you are Jimi Hendrix reincarnated. Jeff’s words, “That man is a monster player”.

Eric: “No - but I wouldn’t know if I was.”

Jonnye: Matt Barranti asked what are your interests outside of music? And where do you see yourself in 5 years, maybe 10?

Eric: “Bowling! Chilling with my family and pets. Eating my wife’s food.” “Doing what I’m doing - *more of it on a bigger scale.*”

Jonnye: How do help the younger people in the music world today. What is your advice to them to aspire and to avoid the pitfalls given your past experiences.

Eric: *“Don’t quit. Stay focused. Find inspiration.
Don’t be convinced to not be you.”*



THE BSWPA PRESENTS

**19th ANNUAL
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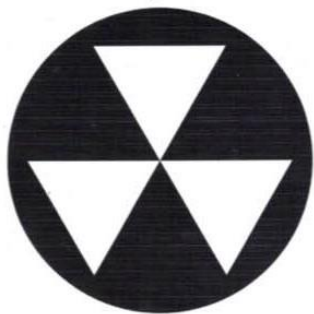
There will be 11 acts competing in one day. Each will give their best 20-minute set with 10-minute change overs. A dinner break will be observed. The show will roll all day. Join us and experience a sampling of the outstanding talent that resides in Western PA

Memphis State of Mind



Memphis for me is a yearly family reunion, so it means a lot to me. When I imagined what Memphis was before I initially saw it in person was not very much different. Although, I will say reading about it and seeing it in video does not do it justice. The only way to really see Memphis in my opinion is to see it in person.

I recommend anyone who gets the opportunity to compete in Memphis to do it. Even if you are not competing.... just go for the experience. I would not be where I am at today had it not been from my annual experiences and interactions on Beale Street. The amount of networking that can be done just on the street or in the lobby of The Orpheum Theater is a huge perk. It can completely change the trajectory of someone's life and career. I have seen it first hand and I am living proof. The relationships that are built on Beale Street are priceless! I have been very blessed to have the confidence and support of the Blues Foundation and to be given a home every year at the International Blues Challenge at Alfred's on Beale, hosting the Billy the Kid and friends showcase and after jam. Some of the biggest advantages of having that platform is getting to catch up with old friends and meeting and mentoring new ones. ~ *Billy Evanochko*



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The Blues is the Roots,
everything else is the
fruits...Willie Dixon

The Bail Jumpers



A thank you note from the Bail Jumpers...

Participating in the International Blues Challenge was a dream come true for us. We spent a week among the best of the best in the Blues. Nothing can replace that feeling of hearing live music coming from every bar and

club when you walk down Beale Street. We were surrounded by so much talent at the Challenge and are so grateful we were able to perform alongside some of the best artists in music, many of whom we now consider friends. The memories made in Memphis together as a band and with our families who traveled with us to Memphis to support us are now some of our best memories. From the music, to the food and drinks, and even the unexpected snow, the trip was everything we could have wanted and more. We cannot thank the Blues Society of Western Pennsylvania and all our family, friends, and hometown for believing in us. This has meant so much to us to have so many people come together to help send us small town guys to the most special city for our genre of music. It truly was an honor to represent Western Pennsylvania and we will remember and cherish it forever. ~Jeffrey Claypool/ The Bail Jumpers



The International Blues Challenge ... WOW!!!!

I set out from Russell, Pennsylvania for the **International Blues Challenge** in Memphis. It was about a 14-hour drive, and I figured that I would stop halfway-ish around Louisville to stay with my brother for a night and catch up with the family. It was even better than I had imagined because my oldest brother was there as well, and I do not see him much now that he lives in Scotland. It was great! I slept, and then hit the road early AM from Louisville to Memphis. Snow and ice had been flowing. It was not a reprieve from Northwestern Pennsylvania. They do not maintain the roads the way we do up north since they seldom have snow and ice. I bypassed rush hour at Nashville by heading west, and down through Arkansas. Arkansas is a long road...get gas or you may not make it! There was one station, with no bathroom (though that is another story!) When I arrived in Memphis, 4x4 trucks were having a hard time on the snow and ice. I was doing okay in my Pennsylvania 2005 Toyota Sienna. Having never been to Memphis, I first drove around the Beale Street areas to familiarize myself.

I headed over for the IBC registration and check-in at Alfred's. There were tons of blues musicians pouring in. I quickly met some great people! No family like Blues Family!!! I got my pass. When I got my program, I found out that I was playing at the Blues Hall. The Blues Hall was great!! I walked in and saw Furry Lewis's guitar case on the wall and knew I was in the right place!!! There were signatures on the walls from all over. I noticed a BSWPA sticker over the top right corner of the door heading into Rum Boogie. (I signed my name on the sticker. If you are ever in the Blues Hall...look for me!) **6.**

The first night of competition I played dead last in the rotation. It was a long night of hearing some great musicians do their thing!!! Again, the level of musicianship was off the hook. I made friends in that room! Finally, it was my turn to play. I did an all-original set, and everyone seemed to dig it.

The next night I played third in the rotation, playing the same set as the night before since the judges were different, and the crowd was different. The night went well!!! I was nervous waiting until the end to see who would move on to the semifinals, hoping the list of names would include me! I went down to Alfred's to await the news. It was great hearing my name read from that stage. Billy "The Kid" Evanochko, a buddy of mine, was heading up the after jam. He showed his support in congratulating me on my moving forward to the semifinals. I also heard that the Bail Jumpers (the BSWPA Band) had moved on to the semifinals. It was strange that the Bail Jumpers and myself performed at the same times in different clubs each night which meant we could not support one another. That is how it goes sometimes. I found out I was once again playing at the Blues Hall. I was excited, because I loved the vibe of the place. Little did I know the powerhouse musicians that were moving in!!! The competition was stiff and the energy was insane!! The overall winner, Joe Waters, was in that room that night! Leon, from Texas who was a mixture of John Mayer and Michael Jackson (an incredible young musician) ...his duo moved on into finals as well.

I did my best that night...but the competition was so steep that my music did not get me through to the finals. The finals took place at the Orpheum Theater. What a beautiful concert hall! The best of the best was on the big stage! Joe Waters was incredible...playing a Jew's Harp and singing at the same time, with an expertise on the harmonica as well. He was the standout performer (a solo act that kept the crowd going is not an easy task!) Piper and the Hard Times from Nashville were the first-place band winner...and they were tight. Their stage presence demanded attention! With horns, keys, and charismatic frontman Al "Piper" Green...they brought down the House!

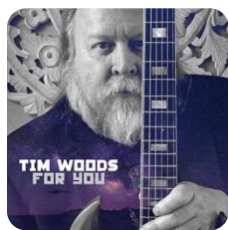
Following the finals, my van broke down. I crashed at a friend's Airbnb (whom I met while at IBC) and worked emergency situations, securing my own Airbnb till my van could get fixed. I met and befriended some locals, including Jeremy Powell of Southern Avenue. They helped me get around while my van was in the shop for repairs. They showed me the best of Memphis: STAX... Graceland... some of the best food places on the map...but beyond that, they showed me that the best part of Memphis is the people! I truly came to understand the meaning of "Blues family." People were going out of their way to help complete strangers. It was beautiful. I am forever grateful.

I made contacts with label owners, producers, advertisers, DJs. I even rubbed elbows with someone who just won a Grammy and chatted with him after the IBC.

While stranded in Memphis I sat in at Rum Boogie with Vince Johnson and the Plantation Allstars (he had just received his Golden Note on Beale St.!!!). I was able to watch Barbara Blue do her thing... and I got to see the real Memphis, not just Beale Street.

Even though my trip was riddled with ups and downs, I would not change a thing. (Except perhaps the bill for van repairs!!!). I had a blast! I am thankful to have represented the Blues Society of Western PA in the competition. It was life changing. I have made great connections, have been offered a record deal (more on that to follow!) and have made friends that I know will last a lifetime. Thanks to everyone who helped support me. I hope you will continue to support me as I keep moving forward.

~ Love & Blues, "Big" Bay Allen



For You

Tim Woods

Tim Woods has had no shortage of inspiration and influences infused into his music over the course of a 50-year career. Although, exposed to jass, rock, bluegrass, and blues early on, he eventually drifted towards the latter after being exposed to the sounds of Willie Dixon, Howlin' Wolf, Reverend Gary Davis, and Muddy Waters later.

Nevertheless, he retains his own distinctive style, one that finds him playing both lead and rhythm guitar simultaneously and in fine form. Those skills have brought him to the attention of several notable musicians of marquee status-Sonny Landreth, Mick Fleetwood, Donna Godchaux (former member of the Grateful Dead), and George Frayne (a.k.a. Commander Cody), among them. His tenure in a jam band early on established his acumen, and eventually brought him recognition in his own right. That was affirmed by his 2012 induction into the New York Blues Hall of Fame.

Woods' new album, **For You**, finds him drawing from a sprawling musical tapestry. Produced by Bobby Lee Rodgers, with special guests Paul Hornsby (the man behind the boards for the Marshall Tucker Band and Charlie Daniels) and Erik Lawrence (who had a hand in efforts by Levon Helms Midnight Ramble Band and Little Feat). It boasts a contemporary feel and a decided and determined edge and intensity. The songs reflect a strong rock imprint and intensity as defined by the tellingly titled *Can't Stop Rockin'*, the gravitas and groove of *Are You Kind*, the rock steady title track, the ominous and imposing *Believe*, the sprawling and slightly psychedelic number titled *The Story*, the funk fueled *Mimic*, and the darkly defiant *Reaching Out*, all of which find Woods pursuing a steady and steadfast groove.

Even the song that pushes a clear connection to the Blues-takes a robust approach, courtesy of its edgy attitude. Still, the album's best offering may well be *Within*, a riveting and compelling ballad that finds Woods' fluid fretwork making a decidedly empathic impression. It is a sound that is as haunting as it is compelling

Purists may push back on Woods' willingness to bend a few boundaries but that should not deter them from giving **For You** the attention it so decidedly deserves. After all, the album's title alone could be considered a means of reaching out to listeners and bringing new followers into his fold. ~Lee Zimmerman



Blues is the Roots ...

The Willie Dixon Story Review

On Sunday, February 18th, I had the pleasure of attending the New Horizon Theater’s production of “**Blues is the Roots**” at the Pittsburgh Public Theater. The play showcased the history of Blues music, the exploitation of African American and the Chicago Blues Scene. Willie Dixon’s profound influence on the Blues was showcased throughout the play. The legal battle between Muddy Waters, Willie Dixon and Chess Records was explored. Those Blues music icons paved the way for Blues musicians to recoup royalties from white musicians who performed their music. I can tell you, not only was I entertained, but was educated as well!!

The play was written by playwright Charles Dumas and directed by Herb Newsome. The stars of the show included: Michele Bankole, Kevin Brown, “M.J.” James. Lance Joos, Sam Lothard, Cole McGlumphy, Jenny Malarkey, and Nicholas Page. “**Blues is the Roots**” takes you on a musical journey through the foundation of Blues music and its influences on Rock N’ Roll. The production is outstanding, both musically and visually, as well as humorous and entertaining. The performance included music from Blues artists: Willie Dixon, Muddy Waters, Chuck Berry, Etta James, Koko Taylor and more!

The New Horizon Theater’s cast demonstrated outstanding musicianship that kept my feet tapping and heart pumping!! They delivered a truly moving story that both entertained and educated everyone. ~*Joanne Mule*

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We are looking for those who would like to lend a hand as Blues volunteers or join the Blues Society of Western PA’s Board of Directors..... contact us at bswpa.org



Don Luisi

RMU (Robert Morris University) TV Live Music Series: Blues Goes to College

This year, the Blues Society of Western PA partnered with Robert Morris University and Carolina Loyola-Garcia's Capstone II Media Arts class to provide the music acts for their RMU TV Live Music Series.



Dan Bubien



Craig King

We brought six acts to RMU's TV Studio for two 30-minute sets that included live performance and interview segments. These performances were conducted over three days in February and March. A collaborative effort between Robert Morris University's Capstone II Media Arts class, taught by Dr. Carolina Loyola-Garcia; RMU TV; RMU Radio host Don Luisi and the Blues Society of Western PA was a learning experience for everyone involved.



Barbara Blue



Billy the Kid

The interaction between students, audience and performers was great to see. The students and audience got an introduction to what **Blues Music** is during the performance part and what it means to the performers during the interviews with Don. All this while also getting an education on what it takes to produce a live show. The musicians got an idea of college life now and what some of the media arts students plan to do after graduation.



Jimmy Adler



Gary Antol



Charlie Barath

The dates and artists were: February 14: Dan Bubien (Solo) and Craig King Band; February 28: Barbara Blue (Band) and Billy the Kid & The Regulators (Band) and March 27: Jimmy Adler (Solo) and Charlie Barath/Gary Antol (Duo). Some of the best comments from the students included...

that they have a better idea of what the Blues....they have heard it in movies and commercials but did not know they were listening to Blues...AND they liked the music and will try to listen to it more. **Mission accomplished: Blues education at its finest!!!** ~Don Luisi, RMU Radio

10.





***Blues Nite Out with Bail Jumpers on June 1 at Moondog's, Blawnox, PA!!!
Join us as we gather to be with our Blues friends to enjoy an evening of music!!!***

DANIELLE NICOLE



The Love You Bleed

Danielle Nicole 'The Love You Bleed

Following a five-year hiatus, Grammy nominated blues powerhouse vocalist, bassist and songwriter, Danielle Nicole returns with her new album *The Love You Bleed*, a concept album with love as the single thread in all its glorious and inglorious forms. Helmed by longstanding blues producer, Tony Braunagel, Nicole's effort leans as much to the singer-songwriter spectrum as it does toward blues. All but one of the dozen tracks was penned by either Nicole or co-written with guitarist and multiple string man Brandon Miller. The one cover is from folk icon Steve Goodman – "A Lover Is Forever." Along with Miller and Nicole (bass and vocals), the backing unit includes Damon Parker (keyboards); Go-Go Ray (drums), and Stevie Blacke (violin and cello). The album is set to release January 26th via Forty Below Records.

The recipient of seven Blues Music Awards, Nicole has also been inducted into the Kansas City Hall of Fame. With her two brothers, she became a member of the band Trampled Underfoot and then embarked on her solo career in 2015. Her last album *Cry No More* was nominated for a Grammy in the contemporary blues category.

The opening track and single "Love on the Brain" casts Nicole in a powerhouse vocal over a pulsating beat and stinging, white hot guitar breaks from Miller as she sings about her obsession, and her persistence to stay the course. While this is the Nicole we are used to, the song doesn't necessarily set the tone for the rest of album, which plays to her favor. "Make Love," another single, is a mashup of R&B and pop with layered vocals and more searing guitar from Miller. Once again, the theme of persistence is in her lyrics – "...push it through the pain and you'll rise/Make love, gotta keep on trying." "Right By Your Side" is a vintage Stax sounding soul ballad about a painful lesson learned and vowed not to be repeated, exemplifying not just the sheer power but the emotive nuances in Nicole's vocal chops. ~ *Jim Hynes*

11.



Do it for the kids!!! We have many young people in need. If you have new or gently used instruments or would like to donate to the PITCH program (Putting Instruments in the Children's Hands), please contact: bswpa.org.

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