

# BSWPA BLUESLETTER

*Blues News You Can Use ... From the Burgh*



**BSWPA NEWSLETTER**

**VOLUME 21 ISSUE 2**

<b>‘Leave your ego at the door, love the people, play the music’..</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>‘When I Leave Home’ by Buddy Guy.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>‘Touching Lives and Leaving a Big Imprint in the Music World’.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Heritage Music Fest.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Blues &amp; BBQ Fest .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>And the Winners of the BSWPA’s 2026 Blues Challenge are....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>CD Review: Random Madness: Billy Price.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>CD Review: Osaaguena Getaway: Charlie Barath.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>The Blues Goes to College.....</b>	<b>12</b>



**Summer 2026**



**‘Leave your ego at the door, love the people, play the music!’**

It was a ‘stormy night long, long ago at Morry’s Speakeasy in New Brighton, PA. That pesky Blonde had just finished another 60-hour work week and was ready to yuk it up and party it up. Yes, she had arrived with the attitude that the night was all about her. She was busy chatting and entertaining the group with music playing in the background as a prop. Her partner soon nudged her. He leaned over and whispered, ‘Darling, there is nothing that you have to say that is more important than what that man beside you is saying.’ The blonde turned to look. There, standing beside her was a player who was deep into a melody. As

he played, his sincerity and his heartfelt rendering permeated her soul. That man and his guitar were actually speaking to her...as well to everyone else in the room. He had her attention. She listened. She digested. She absorbed. What a life changing revelation.... She found that she was actually listening and hearing the music, hearing every note, hearing every word and enjoying what was happening more than ever before. The player that night was ***Bernard Allison***.

**Jonnye:** Why did you choose Paris, France as your base?

**Bernard:** My dad invited me to record his ‘Live in Berlin’ album in 1989. After the recording, he asked if I would like to stay and become the band leader.

**Jonnye:** How has your pairing with Ruf Records lasted for over thirty years?

**Bernard:** Basically, my dad started the label with Thomas Ruf who was his agent at the time and convinced him to start the label. It basically became my dad’s record label. I toured with them both, discovering my dad’s fan base. Ruf records then signed me to keep it in the Allison family. Now, we are still growing together, bringing in younger artists to the Label.

**Jonnye:** Living in the shadow of your great father, Luther Allison, Jeff Fetterman from the Jeff Fetterman Band would like to know how the weight of that music giant weighs on you and your persona.

**Bernard:** At the beginning everyone wanted me to be a carbon copy of my dad. They would always say “Your Luther’s son. I would reply, “Yes, I am but my name is Bernard Allison. It really did not take long before they realized we are two different guitar players and vocalists.

**Jonnye:** Does that legacy make you work harder to make your mark in the music world?

**Bernard:** I always keep the Allison style noticeable and I basically grew up with my European fan base.

**Jonnye:** If your father, the one who coined the phrase, *'leave your ego at the door, love the people and play the music'*, were sitting beside you today, what do you think he would say to you? What would you say to him?

**Bernard:** Most likely he would say to keep playing what you grew up with musically and do not allow them to label you. .... I would like to say, 'Hey pops, check this groove out!! We need to record this one!' He would say 'let's do it BA!'

**Jonnye:** How do you stay inspired to continue to create and play?

**Bernard:** I like to put smiles on people's faces and take them for a ride the Allison Way!

**Jonnye:** What do you do when the spotlight is dimmed to stay grounded and fulfilled?

**Bernard:** Close my eyes and let my heart lead the way.

**Jonnye:** Matt Baranti from the Matt Baranti Band (and a Fog Hat guitarist) would like to know who were your influences on slide guitar?

**Bernard:** Johnny Winter taught me how to open tune and play his style of slide guitar. But ... I also knew the music of Elmore James, Hound Dog Taylor and Muddy Waters.

**Jonnye:** Jimmy McCoullough from Jimmy Mac & The Attack would like to know what new Blues artist{s} are you listening to?

**Bernard:** There are a lot of new young killer guitarists: Kingfish, Matthew Curry, Sean McDonald, Dylan Salfer, and plenty more that I could add to that list.

**Jonnye:** Jimmy McCoullough would also like to know what music do you listen to when you are not working ... another genre in addition to Blues?

**Bernard:** I pretty much listen to old school funk, R&B!...George Clinton & Parliament, Cameo, James Brown and Prince.

**Jonnye:** If you saw a group of young students struggling with their music, what advice would you give them?

**Bernard:** Never give up walk away and come back to it. Most likely you are over thinking it!

**Jonnye:** What do you do to encourage teens and others to play the Blues?

**Bernard:** There are so many different styles of Blues. I say learn it all. Then, use what you can to create your own style.

**Jonnye:** Besides honoring your father, Luther Allison's major footprint in the Blues, what will your intended foot print be?

**Bernard:** *Leave Your Ego, Play the Music, Love the People!!*

**The Allison Way!!**

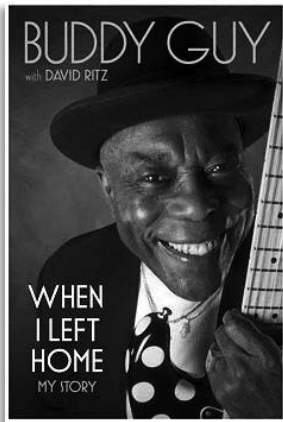


There are many young people in need of new or used instruments and musical equipment. If you would like to donate those items or make a monetary donation, please contact: [bswpa.org](http://bswpa.org) Let's do it for the kids!!!

**Jonnye:** Tell us about your newest release... what inspired you... what the highlights were and did you run into any stumbling blocks... many are curious how all of that works?

**Bernard:** All my albums are pretty much the same. I play different genres to create my style ... Mixing Blues, Rock, Funk, Soul. Really. no stumbles or hiccups to note. I am happy how they come out. That is how I visualize the outcome of my recordings.

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## When I Left Home Buddy Guy

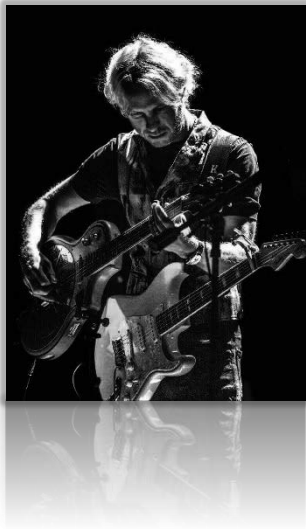
The night I left home, the air was thick with the smell of rain on hot pavement, and the cicadas were singing like they knew a secret I didn't. My mama stood on the porch, arms folded, her eyes saying more than her mouth ever could. I had my guitar slung over my back, a cheap case with a broken latch, and a heart that beat faster than the freight train that used to rattle past our house.

I wasn't running away. Not exactly. I was chasing something—though I couldn't have told you what it was. All I knew was that the blues had been whispering to me since I was a boy, and now the whisper had turned into a call I couldn't ignore.

The bus station smelled of diesel and coffee gone bitter from sitting too long. I bought a one-way ticket with the crumpled bills I'd saved from odd jobs—fixing fences, hauling hay, anything that paid enough to keep my dream alive. As the bus pulled away, I watched the only world I'd ever known shrink in the rearview mirror until it was just a smudge of light in the dark. The city hit me like a chord I didn't know how to play—loud, messy, and full of strange rhythms. I slept in cheap rooms, played in bars where the smoke was so thick you could taste it, and learned quick that the blues wasn't just music—it was a language, a way of surviving. Every note I played was a piece of home, stretched and bent until it told the truth. Some nights, when the crowd was loud and the band was tight, I'd close my eyes and feel the porch boards under my feet again, hear the cicadas, smell the rain. I'd remember my mama's eyes, the way they held both pride and worry, and I'd play for her, for the dirt roads and the fields, for the boy who left with nothing but a guitar and a hunger. And somewhere between the leaving and the playing, I realized the road hadn't taken me away from home—it had carried it with me, string by string, note by note, until it became the song I was meant to play.

~Buddy Guy





## Touching Lives and Leaving a Big Imprint in the Music World.

This Blues fan first met **Kenny Wayne Shepherd** when the Blues Music Awards were hosted in Tunica, Mississippi. Kenny and I were in the museum next to where everyone had gathered to watch Hubert Sumlin as he was awarded the prestigious Blues Lifetime Achievement award. (Hubert had asked my partner and myself to be his guests .... we had become pals during his visits to Moondog's.) Kenny and I were discussing the Delta history. We both had many unanswered questions. Weeks later, I messaged my researched response to our museum queries. I had also asked if it was possible to get the

BSWPA guitar signed at the upcoming Pittsburgh Rib Fest. My partner and I with our grandson (the Kid) in tow entered the staging tent at that fest. My grandson had his Flying V with him and shyly for a signature. Kenny asked the 12-year-old 'Kid' what he was working on. The Kid shyly shrugged...in awe of his guitar hero. Kenny took the Kid's guitar, motioned for the Kid to sit down on top of a banquet table beside him and quietly said...'this is what I am working on. How would you work it?' Kenny then handed the guitar to the Kid. The Kid did his best. They handed that guitar back and forth until it was show time. That soft spoken Kid had been wowed. Kenny had quietly given the Kid a much-valued guitar lesson. The Kid was over the top!!! The grandmother, exited the tent, and yelled to the many Blues fans in the massive audience that Kenny Wayne Shepherd had just given 'our' Kid a guitar lesson. The uproar of cheers and clapping in the crowd that followed were heartwarming. Our quiet Kid was smiling from ear to ear. That is the Kenny Wayne Shepherd that I know...quiet, unassuming, helpful and inspiring.

Rewinding to way back when into Kenny Wayne Shepherd's early life.... Kenny began playing at 3-4 years old and is self-taught. He listened to 'cassette tapes' long ago, over and over learning songs note by note on a fake Stratocaster. All the guitars that he now has led back to that early plywood one. Years later, Bryan Lee took a 13-year-old budding guitarist's (KWS) demo to a fest in Shreveport, moved mountains and KWS was signed to Grant Records by Irving Azoff. What a sendoff!!!

Kenny Wayne Shepherd, at 17 years old, had **seven singles in the top ten** on the Billboard Blues. And so, it began.... **The Kenny Wayne Shepherd** who grew up in our eyes and transformed into a multi award winning musician, known worldwide for his talent. A sit down was in order with Kenny Wayne Shepherd.

**Become a Blues Society of Western PA member today. Be one of many around the world who support the effort to keep the Blues Alive. [www.bswpa.org/member](http://www.bswpa.org/member)**

**Jonnye:** What or who was your inspiration at that young age that made you want to be a guitarist?

**Kenny:** Although I had already been playing with guitar a bit when I was very young, the real inspiration started with Stevie Ray Vaughan. I had started playing with toy guitars my grandmother had given me. When I was 7, my father promoted a concert with Stevie Ray Vaughan. I sat on the side of the stage just mesmerized by him. That was when I knew I needed to get an electric guitar and start learning how to play with that fire and intensity that I saw in him

**Jonnye:** Guitarist Cheryl Rinovato would like to know that in the following years ‘who were your later influences and how does that translate into your technique and tone now?

**Kenny:** I just started studying so many amazing guitar players and songwriters. From BB King, to Albert King to Jimi Hendrix to Leadbelly to Robert Johnson, Billy Gibbons, Eric Clapton... the list goes on.

**Jonnye:** What lessons did you learn along the way, as a young artist, that you would like to share with young musicians? What were the pitfalls? What were the triumphs? What advice do you have for those budding artists entering the music world?

**Kenny:** My advice is to always do the music you love. Do not let other people exert their influence to do music you are not passionate about, ever.

**Jonnye:** What is your favorite song(s) that you created and brought to life and why?

**Kenny:** It is hard to pick favorites because they are all a piece of me. I must say that obviously ‘*Blue on Black*’ is one of them that I am most proud of.

**Jonnye:** What type of venue or place do you find that you like to play the most? What is the most inspiring?

**Kenny:** Certain venues can be nice to play, but it is really the fans that make or break the show. You can play in a beautiful building but if no one shows up to see it, it is not special.

**Jonnye:** When playing on the Legendary Rhythm and Blues Cruise, what is your highlight of that annual event. The fans love that you mix things up for each of your three stage shows.

**Kenny:** I enjoy being able to watch the other bands play and also the jams that happen, both in my own shows and each night on the back pool deck.

**Jonnye:** You were Grammy nominated twice for your DVD-CD for your “10 Day Out” offering that depicted ‘Blues from the Back Roads’. You played with the last of the authentic Blues musicians .... Clarence ‘Gatemouth’ Brown, Byran Lee, Buddy Flett, BB King, Honey Boy Edwards, and more. What was your inspiration to bring that project to life? What did you learn while making it? Besides the nominations, what did it do for you, Kenny Wayne Shepherd.

**Kenny:** That was a very special project for me. I knew I wanted to release a very traditional Blues album. The idea of collaborating with some of the greatest players in the genre came up and then the idea kept growing. We, then, decided to film it. **6.**

The final result was a real tribute to some of the best players in the genre – some unknown and some legends. The idea was to raise the profile of some of the lesser-known players with the appearance of some of the greats. It is something I am deeply proud of.

**Jonnye:** Your work with Noah Hunt is amazing and well received. How did you find each other? How do you both find balance working together, traveling together and rehearsing together?

**Kenny:** We met through a mutual acquaintance when I was looking for a new singer and everything just clicked. We became fast friends, so working, traveling and rehearsing just came naturally.

**Jonnye:** Your band members have been with you long term.... How do they all find balance with working together, traveling together and rehearsing together?

**Kenny:** We are like brothers on the road... kind of like a traveling family. Many years of experience has amounted to professionalism and that helps keep things balanced.

**Jonnye:** Having already been asked what the highs and lows were, what would you do different today?

**Kenny:** I do not know that I would change anything. I have had a blessed career

**Jonnye:** Working so many shows and being on the road, how do find balance with your family life?

**Kenny:** We schedule our tours so we have time at home. My family is the most important part of my life, so I make sure I am never gone for too long. We may do three weeks out and then we go home for a few weeks.

**Jonnye:** Having children, are they musically inclined and are you letting them find their own paths for the future?

**Kenny:** They are all a bit musically inclined, but they need to discover their own passions. I will always support my kids in pursuing their dreams, whether that is music or anything else.

**Jonnye:** Of all the awards and world recognition, what to you is your biggest achievement? What brings you the most satisfaction, the most meaning?

**Kenny:** My family for sure. I am so deeply proud of each of my children and my lovely wife of almost twenty years.

**Jonnye:** What are your aspirations for the future?

**Kenny:** To keep producing great music, both of my own and with other artists. I have been producing other artists albums and helping them write their songs. It has been very exciting for me.

**Jonnye:** Guitarist Jeff Fetterman asks... Did you ever think when starting out that you would be so successful and a legendary player?

**Kenny:** My hope was that I would be able to make the best of an incredible opportunity and hopefully touch some people's lives along the way.

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ALLY VENABLE • BUFFALO NICHOLS  
GRACIE CURRAN & THE HIGH FALUTIN' BAND  
ADRIAN NILES TRIO • MARC RIDGE & THE REVELERS  
MISS FREDDY'S ROOTS OF THE SOUL • SENECA  
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*And the winners of the BSWPA's 2026 Blues Challenge...*

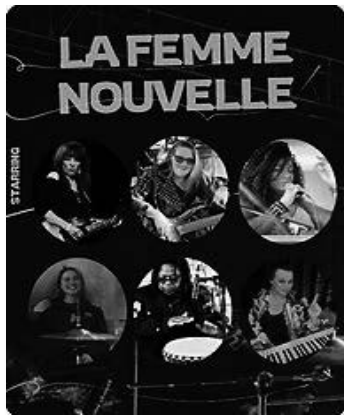
***Jeff Fetterman (Solo/Duo) and La Femme Nouvelle will represent the BSWPA and Western PA at the 2027 International Blues Challenge in Memphis, TN.***

Each entry at the 2026 Blues Challenge was very talented act, well-rehearsed and brought many interesting dimensions to the stage. The judging panel was tasked with making their choices known based on the set of criteria sourced from the Blues Foundation.



### ***Solo/duo ... Jeff Fetterman***

Jeff Fetterman is a self-taught guitarist whose influences include the likes of Kenny Wayne Shepherd, Jimi Hendrix, Lightnin' Hopkins, Stevie Ray Vaughan and many others in the blues field. He is heavily influenced in songwriting by Bruce Springsteen. Jeff has been playing locally and regionally since the age of 13. He has traveled nationally playing every show from back yard barbecues to Blues festivals and every show in between. He has been an opening act for Joe Louis Walker, Kenny Wayne Shepherd, Robert Randolph, Jimmie Vaughan, Ana Popovic, .38 Special, Molly Hatchet, Chris Duarte, Davey Knowles, Poppa Chubby and many others. Jeff continues to write his own music and travel wherever the Blues may take him. When not playing with his Blues power trio, the Jeff Fetterman Band, he likes to keep on his toes doing acoustic solo shows spreading his love for the blues music genre.



### **Band ... La Femme Nouvelle: An Evolution of the Blues**

When powerhouse vocals meet a rhythm section that hits like a freight train, you get...La Femme Nouvelle. Far from your standard Blues ensemble, this six-piece, all-female powerhouse is redefining the genre's landscape with a sound that is as sophisticated as it is soulful. The name—French for "The New Woman"—is not just a title; it's a manifesto. Bringing together some of the most respected veterans and rising stars in the scene, La Femme Nouvelle delivers an original high-octane blend of deep-pocket grooves, soaring gospel-influenced harmonies, and razor-sharp instrumentation. The Lineup: The band's strength lies in its diverse musical DNA, featuring a front line that rivals any soul revue and a backbeat that never quits.

- Stevee Wellons (Lead Vocals): A true force of nature, Stevee brings a lifetime of soul and grit to the stage. She is the 2026 Honoree for "Black Blues Her Story." As a member of the touring award-winning duo, "Soulful Femme", received the 2024 Award for Best Blues Song of the Year. Stevee continues to be a teacher and recording artist in the Pittsburgh area. Her range and emotive power provide the band's melodic heartbeat.
- Lori Russo (Lead Vocals & Bass): The "anchor" in every sense of the word. Lori pulls 9.

double duty, providing the foundational low-end while delivering commanding lead vocals that add a rich, blues-rock edge. Lori has toured and shared the stage with Ray Charles, Kenny Rogers, James Earl Jones, Spyro Gyro, Nelson Riddle, Tommy Dorsey Orchestra and 1997 on #1 Jazz CD, Paris, France, also performing in two tours to the Vatican with Pope John Paul.

- Cheryl Rinovato (Guitar): An award-winning blues guitarist known for her tasteful phrasing and stinging leads. She is the 3-time recipient of the “Jim Weber Guitarist of the Year” Award. She tours with the award-winning duo “Soulful Femme,” who won the 2024 Award for Best Blues Song of the Year. She has toured with Tommy Castro and shared the stage with Mavis Staples, Robert Cray, Shamekia Copeland, Ana Popovich, Bernard Allison, Samantha Fish, and Blood Brothers. Cheryl’s fretwork is the “voice” that ties the band’s vintage roots to a modern sound.
- Shelley Insko (Keyboards & Vocals): Whether it is churchy B3 organ swells or honky-tonk piano runs, Shelley adds the essential textures and lush vocal harmonies that fill the room. She has toured Canada and the US with “The Four Kinsmen” of Australia, The Brooks Paxton Show, performed on Norwegian Cruise Lines, shared the stage with Connie Francis, KC & the Sunshine Band, Johnny Tillotson, The Jagers, The Vogues, Freddy Fender, Jim Stafford and Williams & Ree. She currently performs locally with the Lenny Smith Project and “Let’s Groove Tonight” an Earth, Wind and Fire Tribute Band.
- Kelly E. Parker (Percussion): The secret weapon of the rhythm section. Kelly is a published poet, a drum maker, has studied drumming in West Africa, and is the founder and director of the wimmin’s drumming group, Abafasi. This group has opened for Maya Angelou, played for Nikki Giovanni and Angela Davis, performing at the Benedum Center and August Wilson Center. She currently performs with Lori Russo and the Uppercuts. Kelly’s intricate percussion work adds layers of movement and “spice” to the band’s driving arrangements.
- Emma Dawson (Drums): The engine room. Emma is a full-ride Collegiate Music Scholarship recipient from the University of Tulsa, and NAMM’s President Innovation Award recipient. Emma provides the steady, unshakable pocket that allows the rest of the band to soar, playing with both finesse and undeniable fire.

**The Sound:** La Femme Nouvelle does not just play the Blues; they celebrate them. From the smoky late-night vibes of Chicago to the upbeat, funky strut of Memphis soul, their setlists are a masterclass in dynamic performance. By blending multiple lead vocalists and a full-spectrum instrumental attack, they create a wall of sound that is both elegant and raw.

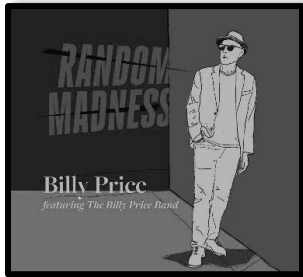


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## **Random Madness**

**Billy Price**

**Get Hip Recordings**

Just two years after his album, *Person of Interest* – which was nominated for four 2025

Blues Music Awards, including Album of the Year – Billy Price is back with a swinging, soulful new album, *Random Madness*. Blaring horns sashay into the swaying ode to love gone wrong, 'I was a Fool', which opens the album. The song features Price's soaring vocals backed by sweet harmonies on the resonant chorus. Crunchy guitars introduce the funky Memphis soul stew, 'I Got That Dog in Me', a down-to-the-bone and wry take on the singer's wandering eye; the call-and-response refrain conveys the back and forth of the singer and a singer whom he is warning about his philandering ways. 'Hungry Ghost' unfolds languorously over sparkling layers of keys, guitars, and horns, delivering a tale of a lover driven by an insatiable spirit, while the simmering 'I Said What I Said' funks along with its defiant spirit of no regret and no looking back for words uttered in a lover's spat. The New Orleans vamp, 'Rent Free', features cascading piano in this smoky lounge song in which the singer cannot get a former lover out of his mind, where she lives 'rent free.' Price's soul-drenched vocals carry us higher and higher on the gospel-inflected 'Dirty Knee Revelation', a stirring and evocative song that sonically recalls Bobby "Blue" Bland and Van Morrison. The title track closes the album; it is a slowly unfurling jazz blues with Price cataloging the many little random events ('tomorrow's loss/ is yesterday's gain/ when the noise dies down/ all that remains is random madness') that take life in different directions that we might have expected. *Random Madness* showcases Price's command of a variety of styles- jazz, soul blues, blues- and Price's often playful songwriting delivers wry and lucid insights about the nature of life and love. ~ Henry L. Carrigan, Jr.



## **Issaquena Getaway**

**Charlie Barath**

*Issaquena Getaway* is harmonicist Charlie Barath's second full length recording. Johnny Burgin and Andrew Sherer handle the guitar work. Mark Yacovone plays on piano and organ. Mike Law is on upright bass. Danny Banks is on the drums. Shari Richards sings on the album's closer, "Honey I Got No Money."

The record was expertly engineered and co-produced by Gary Vincent at The Clarksdale Soundstage in Clarksdale, Mississippi. From the opening grooves of the mid-tempo starter "I Gets Around" the listener knows that they are in for a good ride. Charlie has long been one of the hardest working, soulful, and versatile harp players in the **11.**

country 1and has surrounded himself with musicians that share the same pedigree on the 14 track Issaquena Getaway. The recording includes twelve originals, a bouncy and danceable cover of Ike Turner's "Cuban Getaway" and a warm chromatic harp rendition of Stanley Turrentine's beloved classic, "Sugar." The CD features Johnny Burgin on lead guitar. Both he and Charlie shine throughout. The veteran Bluesmen fit the varied moods of the songs, play with passion, and never sound like they are screaming at you during their solos. Charlie's versatility also extends to his vocals and lyrics. The funky, "I'm Gonna Let You," is far more optimistic than most breakup songs and on "Waiting for the Queen," "I Might Fall in Love," and other tracks Charlie has some fresh takes on standard blues tropes. From swing to honky tonk, Chicago Blues and more, Charlie covers a lot of territory without anything sounding stale or dated. The record seamlessly moves from style to style and the outstanding musicianship make it a great listen all the way through. Definitely, a necessary addition to any blues aficionado's collection. While our modern media environment has changed how we listen to music, among many other attributes, Issaquena Getaway also serves as a reminder that albums are meant to be listened to from start to finish. Overall, an outstanding effort from Charlie Barath and crew. ~Stu Braun



## **The Blues Goes to College**

This winter, the Blues Society of Western PA partnered with Robert Morris University's Academic Media Center and RMU Radio to bring Pittsburgh area Blues Artists to their Moon Township campus. Working with students from Dr. Tim Jones's Capstone Media Arts Class, the artists were filmed performing and being interviewed in the University's TV Studio. On February 17<sup>th</sup>, Jason Born and Soulful Femme (Cheryl Rinovato and Stevee Wellons) performed. Unfortunately, Cheryl became sick that morning and was unable to make it. A big shout out to Jason



for stepping in to play guitar and work with Stevee to put a set together for the project. On March 3<sup>rd</sup>, Big Bay Allen and Andy Widger/Hernan Brizuela/Brad Doczkat from River City Blues performed. The setup for both days had the students from Dr. Jones's class working the cameras, sound and lighting and the control room. I handled the artist introductions and interviews. The students also edited the final video as part of their class assignment. The students were assisted by RMU Media Arts staff members Joe Hale (sound), Ray Zaparoni (video and editing) and Dr. Jones (control room). On both days, the students were eager to ask questions and talk to the artists. River City Blues even had the students dancing during their sound check. ~Don Luisi, *Damn Right I Got the Blues RMU Radio*

**Find them at:** <https://www.bswpa/video> or <https://www.youtube.com/@BSWPA>