



**BSWPA NEWSLETTER**

**VOLUME 17, ISSUE 3**

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*WINTER 2022*



## Making music and being himself!

Some would say it happened on the Blues cruise. However, our first meeting was long before that at a festival hours from my home. I found myself being loaded into the car with little rest after an extremely grueling work week. I grumbled as I trudged to the car. I whined the entire way. My partner just chuckled and said, 'Darlin' I am taking you to see a well-dressed man like you like and he is going to 'knock your socks off.' Rolling my eyes, I said that I was not wearing socks. I was skeptical as we finally arrived at the venue. We ran into many blues friends who were singing their praises about the headliner. The lights started to dim. Out 'strolled' a fine dressed man. Yes, fine dressed, and good looking. He looked out into the audience and let loose with a mischievous grin. Hmmm, what was I in for? The crowd was in an uproar as he strolled back and forth. Yes, he loved the attention. His band soon followed him onto the stage. The crescendo of applause and screams from the audience was deafening. Okay, maybe, just maybe.... I might like this guy. Then all hell broke loose. Impressive theatrics, the witty wording of songs, searing guitar and heartfelt harp...Yes, he was winning me over, note by note, smile by smile. I felt energized and totally immersed in the Rick Estrin experience! His words were clever. His movements were a marvel. His smiles were engaging. His antics while on stage had everyone including me on my feet, dancing and digging the music. I had a 'told you so' coming from my partner. Whew! They should have issued seatbelts. Many miles, many shows, many festivals and yes, many cruises, I call Rick Estrin a superb, engaging performer and.... friend.

Fast forward to the Blues cruise, I finally had a chance to sit and chat with this dynamo. We found ourselves at 4 am gathered around the piano in the Piano Bar on the last night of a cruise. The joint was packed! Rick Estrin joined Mitch Woods as we sang ditties around the bar. A guitar player was laying across the baby grand playing his guitar. A clarinet was heard playing in the wings. A drummer was tapping his sticks on the corner of the bar. Things were at full tilt!!!! Soon, Rick and Mitch were asking us to add lines to their suggested topics...the ten worst bars, the ten worst dates, the ten worst ex-wives. Yes, they went around the large circle letting everyone fill in the verses. When it was my turn, Mitch said...'No, she is a lady' and skipped me. On subsequent spins around the bar, Rick would also say....'No, she's a lady' and kept passing me over. (Rick does not remember this!) I finally had to find my voice and state 'I am not a lady!' and I have lots to say on all those topics. Rick broke out in uproarious laughter. Rick gave me a thumbs up. We all laughed. Yes, Rick Estrin has a keen sense of humor and always ready for fun.

Further down the road, Rick took time out of his very busy and demanding schedule to sit down for a talk. His story was amazing. The more that I thought about his

describing how music saved him.... this Blues fan wanted to share Rick Estrin's back story and his thoughts about what he does as a musician.

The following is what Rick Estrin had to say.... in his own words. True to his style, he does it his way. True to his style, he brings the zest. True to his style, he is a real deal Bluesman with many thoughts to share.

**Jonnye:** You have a very rich back story leading to your musical journey. Please share that with us.

**Rick Estrin:** I have a sister that's about 6 years older than me and I can remember when I was about 6 or 7 years old, spying on her and her friends when she was having a party. They were playing records by people like Little Richard, Chuck Berry, Fats Domino, Elvis and stuff like that. I was just diggin' the scene, 6 years old, feeling that music, checkin' out all those fine, sophisticated 12-year-old chicks dancing and lookin' good, and I think somewhere deep down, even way back then, I knew what I wanted to do with my life. Later, when I was maybe 11 or 12 (by that time my sister was something like a beatnik), she started having records by people like Jimmy Reed, Big Bill Broonzy, Champion Jack Dupree, Mose Allison, Nina Simone, Miles Davis, Lee Morgan. She was always leading the way for me with some hip stuff. That was my first real exposure to blues and jazz. For my 12th birthday, she gave me this Ray Charles album, "The Genius Sings the Blues". I remember a guy she was dating at the time, asking me about this one song "I Believe to My Soul" – like asking me what did I think he was talking about in that song. It was like he was wondering how a kid could even be attracted to that kind of music. Way back then, I was already fascinated by the power of that feeling and fantasizing about being able to make people feel the way that music made me feel.

**Jonnye:** Who or what was the moment when the 'lights went on' and that music was your 'escape' plan?

**Rick:** Like I said, the seeds were already planted. When I was about 15, there was a band - kinda like a faux British Invasion type band - they all lived together in a house down the street from where we grew up in San Francisco. My father had just died, so I was pretty lost and grief stricken and stuff. There was no one left in the house who could kick my ass, so I started hanging out at that house a little bit - smoking weed and just diggin' being around the scene. I had always been trying to sing ever since I started checkin' out my sister's records. One day, a guitar player from that band, heard me trying to sing, and gave me a harmonica. He told me I oughta learn to play it. Like I said, I was pretty lost at the time, and I latched onto that harmonica like a life raft. I started teaching myself by trying to copy what I heard on my sister's Jimmy Reed records.

**Jonnye:** Looking back, what about being in the music field has given you the most satisfaction? When you put your head on the pillow at night .... what thought or what event would make you smile and say.... 'I made music'?

**Rick:** Well, there are a few things - First of all, I get to make my way in this world by doing something positive. I get to help make people feel good, and hopefully

provide a little relief from their day-to-day troubles. It also makes me feel good that I invented my own job. It's like once I'm gone, the gig's gone. I dig the fact that I'm basically making a living by just being myself. I have no education and no practical marketable skills. I learned what I could from the great artists who preceded me, and I've applied those lessons to create my own thing. I'm also grateful that I get to be a part of this community. As far as I'm concerned, I know, and have known, some of the greatest people, and some of the greatest artists in the history of the world.

**Jonnye:** What personal goals did you set for yourself over the years? How difficult was it to achieve those?

**Rick:** I never had any real concrete goals. Mostly, I've just been lucky that I'm naturally a little different. When I was first starting to play, I wanted to be able to make people feel what I felt inside. I knew how hearing that music on the harp, when it was being played by the greats, just reached inside me, and took me to another place. I wanted to be able to do that to people. As I songwriter, I've always tried to deliver a memorable message that people can identify with. And as a professional entertainer, I always wanted to avoid the labor pool. 😊

**Jonnye:** You are known for your witty lyrics that have great impact for the listener. What do you draw on for that type of keen creativity?

**Rick:** Like I said before, I've always been a fan of songs and the power that a good song can have. I think I naturally have a pretty reliable inner compass for writing songs, but for me, there's also usually a lot of work involved trying to get the lyric and the phrasing just right. As a kid, I used to listen to music and just trip. Plus, I told you, my sister had those records by people like Jimmy Reed and Mose Allison ... And for writing the kind of stuff I like, those are two of the very greatest, right? So, I was trippin' off that stuff from a real young age. Also, Leiber and Stoller, the stuff they wrote for the Coasters ... the way the songs would be almost like little movies ... I loved that stuff. Sad songs can really get to me too. I like to try to write songs that're relatable but with a slightly different perspective, sometimes with a twist, or a little surprise. When I was starting out, I also got a lot of valuable coaching in songwriting, performing, and show business psychology from Rodger Collins. He was a great all-around entertainer ... singer, dancer, guitarist, comedian, impressionist, and, he was also a real songwriter. He wrote and made the original record of "She's Looking Good." It was a number one record in a lot of markets, and later on, Wilson Pickett did a worldwide hit version of it. Rodger encouraged me to write and showed me by example, the kind of discipline required to be a real songwriter. I'm working on stuff right now for a 2023 release. It's work, but once you're rolling, it's exciting! There's a quote that I love from an old-time songwriter, Yip Harburg. He wrote "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" and a lot of other classics. This quote pretty much describes the way the process works for me most of the time: Evidently, someone asked him how he thought of all that stuff. He said something like, "Nothing to it - I just sit down and stare at a blank piece of paper until blood comes out of my forehead." Sometimes, it takes me a lot of work to get something to sound like it's just flowing naturally.

**Jonnye:** What is your favorite song... and why?

**Rick:** I can't possibly answer that. I love songs and I marvel at the stuff some people have come up with. I couldn't even count my favorites. Among my own songs, I cannot even pick just one either. I've probably written about 250 songs. Some of them, when I hear 'em now, I wonder how I ever thought of that stuff. Even the ones that I feel like are just ok, are just fine. I don't usually bother finishing the weak ones.

**Jonnye:** When it is all said and done, what do you do in your down time?

**Rick:** I just be myself - laugh, talk sh##, f### off, and f### around with my friends. I don't really have any official hobbies.

**Jonnye:** How has your new grouping of players shaped your musical destiny?

**Rick:** Well, the only semi-new guy is Derrick Martin, AKA, D'mar. He's been with us for about 3 1/2 years. The other guys, Kid Andersen and Lorenzo Farrell have been in the band the whole time. Kid joined in '08 when Little Charlie left. He's the absolute Heavyweight Champion of the guitar. Additionally, he's one of the most in-demand recording engineers in Blues today. Lorenzo, our keyboard player, has been with me over 20 years. He was the last bass player in Little Charlie and the Nightcats. Now he plays keys and covers the bass simultaneously. He is a monster musician. I always thought I was a pretty good entertainer and a good showman, and I was.... BUT D'mar's from another league of showmanship. He played drums on the road with Little Richard for the last seventeen years of Richard's career, and he brings a whole other level of contagious energy and professionalism to the band, and we all responded by upping our game. Post-pandemic, we're just enjoying the hell out of every gig. We've definitely got renewed drive and enthusiasm. I am about halfway through writing a new album, and we're all excited about getting back on the road with a new album.

**Jonnye:** Charlie Barath, a Western PA harp man, asked the following: which harps do you prefer and why? Are they stock instruments? Have they been customized/optimized? Do you do the work yourself?

**Rick:** I play Hohner Marine Bands and Hohner chromatics. I guess I prefer them because they just feel right. They are also all I've ever played. Even though we do our own songs, and a lot of what we do isn't exactly '50s and '60s style Blues, I absolutely think of myself as a traditional blues harmonica player. Hohners were what the greatest players in history used. That's the sound I love, so those are the harmonicas I've always used. In the '90s, I started using Joe Filisko's customized Marine Bands. On the bandstand, I still mostly play Joe's custom harps. Recently I've been real encouraged and impressed by the quality of the new, stock Marine Bands. The ones I've played lately are really excellent! I carry a file for occasional emergency attempts at tuning, but that's the extent of me trying to work on harps myself. I've got about a 50%, temporary success rate. I'm lucky enough to have Joe willing to do work for me. He is the absolute best and knows more about diatonic harmonicas than anyone on earth.

**Jonnye:** Brandon Santini asked ... what is the importance of being true to yourself when learning or playing harmonica: whether that be pushing envelopes or playing a more traditional approach?

**Rick:** Well, you always want to be true to yourself ... tell your own story and express how you feel, but everyone wasn't meant to reinvent the wheel. I hear so much beautiful detail and nuance in traditional Blues harmonica playing, that pushing envelopes was never a big priority for me. I've always been fascinated by the way small, sometimes barely audible details, and subtle rhythmic supportive chords, can make a huge difference in what's being "said," musically on the harp. I think I try to utilize the techniques and musical devices from the traditional blues harmonica palette to express my own ideas. Guys like Jason Ricci and Howard Levy are amazing. Both those guys have incredible skills and a real vision for what they want to do. But... outside of a few people, much of the so-called "envelope pushing" that's being done on harmonicas today, may be technically impressive, but the emotion seems to be missing, and the real strengths of the instrument seem like they get ignored in favor of stuff that would be better suited for another instrument - like maybe a sax or a guitar. That said, I'm a believer in "serving the song," so I'm willing to do whatever fits, but in general, I'm basically a traditional Blues harmonica player. I alluded to this earlier - all I ever wanted to do was sound like the official sh## and make people feel something like what I felt when I first heard guys like Little Walter, Sonnyboy (numbers 1 and 2) James Cotton, and Jimmy Reed. I'm old enough to have gotten approval and affirmation from people like Muddy, Robert Lockwood, and Eddie Taylor .... and that was all I ever really wanted anyway.



**Jonnye:** John Delleara: I love your stage presence and style. Where does your love/style of clothes come from.? (John added during our talks that off and on the stage that Rick is the most dapper man in the Blues!) We both agree that you must have a list of laundries all over the world. Even on the Blues cruise in the middle of the ocean in the morning, you had a perfectly pressed suit.

**Rick:** I always tried to dress. As a kid, my favorite uncle dressed real sharp, like a member of the rat pack or something. I had another uncle who ran a high fashion men's clothing store on Mission Street in San Francisco. Plus... when I began my career in music, I was always working with guys who dressed. During that time, playing black clubs, you had to dress. There was almost like a fashion show element to the music back then. What I was taught was that people didn't want to pay their money to see someone who looked just like them. That's no longer totally true, but I'm not about to change too much.

**Jonnye:** G.K. Dickenson would like to know.... Why does and how does Rick Estrin "have such an authentic sound" and how has he managed to stay 'so young at heart'?

**Rick:** If I sound authentic, it's intentional. I always loved it so much, that's how I always felt it. And like I said earlier, all I really ever wanted was approval and affirmation from the giants of the genre. That traditional Blues harmonica sound

and sensibility is what moves me the most when I hear it, so to some extent, that's always what I'm going for. Regarding staying "young at heart," I think it's mostly about loving the gig, loving the music, loving the fact that I'm still in the game, and loving the guys in the band. That stuff gives me energy, and makes me want to keep it going as long as I can.

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## Harptoberfest



To the delight of all in attendance, this year's headliner, Tony Holiday, turned in an impressive set of music, in spite of being under the weather. Our local featured Harmonica players brought their best as well! Johnny Rooster delivered the goods with his third Harptoberfest appearance, as did Hernan Brizuela in his first. Big shout-out to both! Once again, the house band, led by

my buddy Jimmy Adler on Guitar, exceeded expectations, which was no surprise to anyone! And how could they not with John "The Junkman" Burgh on Keys, Mike Law on Bass, and Gordon Grottenthaler on the Drums?!? HUGE shout of "Thanks!" to each of those very special cats! Along with everyone else, I certainly appreciate the hospitality and professionalism of the management and staff at Club Cafe on Pittsburgh's Southside! And of course, my warm appreciation to the Blues Society of Western Pennsylvania for sponsoring this event! I am already laying the groundwork for Harptoberfest 2023, so stay tuned! ~Charlie Barath

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### Blues History Trivia:

*Born Lizzie Douglas in Algiers, Louisiana in 1897, she made her first Blues record, "Bumble Bee", in 1929. She would continue to record into the mid-1950's, her biggest hits coming in 1941 with "Me and My Chauffeur Blues" By what name is she known to the world?*

THE BLUES SOCIETY OF WESTERN PA PRESENTS

# 2022

## NEW YEAR'S EVE BLUES BASH

THE NICK MOSS BAND WITH  
DENNIS GRUENLING

*With special guests*  
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Please note: If you have three or more in your party (whether purchasing your tickets as a group or separately), please contact: 724.888.6183 or [bswpa.org](http://bswpa.org) so that your party may be seated together.





**The Blues Society of Western PA is honored and thrilled to have Lori Russo and the Uppercuts (1<sup>st</sup> Place BSWPA Blues Challenge winner) and Damien Knapp (1<sup>st</sup> Place Solo/Duo) represent 'us' at the 2023 International Blues Challenge (January 24-28, 2023) in Memphis, TN. Join us in wishing them a memorable and rewarding experience at that very global event!**

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### **Talking Music - Augusta Heritage Center**

For the past six summers (minus the year of Covid), I have traveled to Elkins, W.Va. to attend the *Augusta Heritage Center* music camp. I attended the week dedicated to Blues and old-time music. They also have weeks dedicated to cajun/creole, country, bluegrass and vocals. It is located on the beautiful campus of Elkins College. It is a week of classes during the day and organized/unorganized jamming in the evenings.

My focus was Blues harmonica. You have various choices on the classes you want to take. There are classes geared to beginners and classes for intermediate/advanced players. These are taught by world class musicians, some whose names you may be familiar with and others you may not. Besides harmonica, there are classes for guitar, vocals, keyboards and bass. These are all oriented to the Blues genre because it was Blues week. Just like any school, you must choose subjects/time periods. There are three time periods with an optional fourth. It can, at times, be frustrating to choose one subject over another in the same time period. The classes themselves are well organized and thought out. Be prepared to be challenged- in a good way! The classes are held in the classrooms scattered throughout the campus. The hub of all activity is Halliehurst Mansion, an impressive former private residence that now contains classrooms and administrative offices. More importantly, it has this huge porch that completely wraps around the building. This porch is the center of a lot of activity including demonstrations and seminars during the day and lots of great jams at night. Those jams are a highlight for me and probably many other attendees. You just never know who will show up to play or what direction the music will go. It doesn't matter what level you are at on your instrument- it is a welcoming, non-judgmental environment. Everyone is there to have fun!

Besides classes and jams, there are other music related activities galore. There are two nights that showcase the teachers' musical prowess in the comfy air-conditioned auditorium (it's July!). I have seen many amazing performances there. We are talking about world class musician giving it their all! It is quite humbling to see them just kill it on stage at night and then have them teaching you in the classroom the next day.

On the nights with no concert, there are dances at the roofed, open-air pavilion. Once again, the teachers play for the dancers, but not in any organized way. You do not know who is going to come up on the bandstand or what they're going to play. Adult refreshments are available for purchase, but you are free to bring your own. Since some of the students are there to study dancing, it's a lot of fun just watching them - no need to participate if you don't want to.

There are other optional classes in the evening that you can sign up for. There is also a night where the students perform. That is optional, but I have taken classes where we played with guitarists and worked on a song together to perform. Do not worry - you have all week to work on the song and there is so many of us that no one will notice if you make a mistake.

Most days after lunch, there is a lecture or demonstration of some aspect of the Blues culture. It may be about a certain artist or a certain style or some Blues history. All in all, it is a busy week full of music. It is a completely immersive experience.... And it is only three hours from Pittsburgh. *Highly recommended!!!!*

*~Tuck Majeran, Vice President, BSWPA*



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**Be one of thousands around the globe that belong to a Blues Society to continue the effort to keep the Blues alive.**

**~Blues Society of Western PA. Join online today at: [bswpa.org](http://bswpa.org)**



## Blues in the Square

Saturday September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022 was a good day for the Blues!

The Blues Society of Western Pennsylvania (BSWPA) in conjunction with the Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership's Saturday Night Markets series, hosted an evening of Blues in Market Square. Four local Blues acts would perform from late afternoon (5:00 PM) until after the stars were out (10:00 PM). The weather gods delivered a spectacular day, plenty of sunshine with enjoyable temperatures all day that turned into a beautiful last weekend of the summer evening. Market square was bustling early as set up and preparations began in the early afternoon.

First on the scene was BSWPA was board member, Spike Miller. Spike arrived in the square towing his trailer packed with the Blues Society's tents, tables, and merch. Not far behind Spike were board President, Jonnye Weber, Vice President Tuck Majeran, Treasurer Cyndi Fink, as well as board members Sue Mayer and Barbara Gangone. While Spike and the gang got the BSWPA set up, other vendors were also busy getting their stores for the day built.

The Downtown Partnership crew also were hard at work erecting the outdoor tent and lights that would serve as the stage and amphitheater for the day. No sooner was the tent in place than the backline arrived courtesy of the Bluesdrivers. Sound engineer Spencer McNeill got to work orchestrating and directing the hours long setup of the stage and sound equipment. Completion came just in time and a final sound check was performed as the 5 o'clock hour approached.

As she has done many times, BSWPA President, Jonnye Weber was first on the mic, kicking off what would be a wonderful evening of Blues music. Jonnye welcomed the crowd, previewed the day's musical lineup, describing the mission and activities of the Blues Society and introducing the first performer Kip London to the stage.



Kip London



Bubs McKeg & the Aces

Kip represented the BSWPA at the National Blues Challenge in Memphis earlier this year and as always delivered a great performance combining vocals and his unique acoustic and resonator guitar sounds. Following Kip, Rick Proudfoot and the Jack of Diamonds Trio took the stage and provided some classic Blues tones and sounds to an ever-growing market square audience. As the evening wound into the 7 o'clock hour, a Pittsburgh blues staple Bubs McKeg and the Aces featuring Alan Muckle (Drums), John DeCola (Keyboard and Accordion), Frank Giovì (Guitar) and Don Czaplicki (Bass) delivered 90-minute upbeat crowd-pleasing performance. As evening turned to night, The Bluesdrivers, newcomers to the Pittsburgh Blues scene, led by Rob Williams

(Vocals and Guitar), Erik Zettelmayer (Guitar), Nick Sarno (Bass) and Ben Skinner (Drums) took the stage under the stars at 8:30PM. The wonderful day of sunshine, shopping and most importantly Blues Music in downtown Pittsburgh ended just before 10:00 PM with Market Square still full of smiling faces. The only thing left to do was to pack everything up and look forward to the next night of Blues on the Square.



*~Erik Zettelmayer, BSWPA Board Member*



PITTSBURGH  
DOWNTOWN  
PARTNERSHIP

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## Cooper's Home Brew n Blues

On the weekend of October 7th Coopers Lake Campground hosted **Home Brew n Blues**; three days of frosty brews and smoking blues. The event was put on with the Blues Society of Western Pennsylvania, the Butler Area Society of Home

Brewers (BASH) and Shady Lady Productions.

Eleven of our region's best Blues bands (Bubs McKeg & the Aces, Charlie Barath Band & Friends, Blues Attack. The Grubbs, The Blues Drivers, The Stevee Wellons Band, The Gordon James Band, Lori Russo & the Uppercuts, The Jeff Fetterman Band, and the Bail Jumpers) filled the air from Friday evening and all-day Saturday. The finale was the Sunday brunch when Miss Freddye's Home Cookin' Band electrified attendees with her charm and powerful voice.

Beer was also centerstage for the weekend with local Craft breweries serving beer for Friday and Saturday evenings shows. Saturday saw the Homebrew competition with over 30 homebrewers competing for the top prize.

Everyone involved agreed that the Home Brew n Blues was a great success for a first year event and are already planning how to improve it for next year.

*~Tom Metcalk, Cooper's Lake*

**12.**

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## Join The Team



The Blues Society of Western PA needs your help. We are searching for those who would like to be **Board members** to help guide our operation and keep the Blues alive. We are also looking for **volunteers** to work events, help secure donations and/or sponsorships, etc. to enable events.



### The BEST Self-Produced CD ...

The Blues Society of Western PA is thrilled to announce that **Pierce Dipner's CD, Goin' Back**, will be 'our' entry in the **Best Self-Produced CD** competition that will be a part of the International Blues Challenge in January 2023. Join "US" as we wish Pierce well.

*~The BSWPA's 2022 entry from Soulful Femme place third in that global contest. Western PA oozes with talent. It is our pleasure to share it with the world.*



## Goin' Back

### Pierce Dipner and Shades of Blue

Pierce Dipner's first full-length record – "**Goin' Back**" - has a seasoned vibe of a musician whose passion and talent intertwine to take listeners on a cool journey of seven originals and three choice cover songs that will beckon you to add Pierce to your list of favorite artists. "**Goin' Back**" was highly anticipated after the success of his 2019 EP debut – "**Get Out of Your Life**" – which had considerable airplay. Pierce took his time with this full-length album and it shows. There's a beautiful leap of musical and lyrical sophistication. The range of traditional styles and beautifully blistering solos are a testament to Pierce's prowess and commitment to the Blues. His tasteful opening - "Fools Gold" – is a strong, crowd-pleasing shuffle with a beautifully understated, but satisfying, solo. He follows with Stevie Wonder's "Higher Ground" showcasing his range as he makes this song his own. It takes guts to cover Stevie, and Pierce has the goods to carry it, delivering the message with bluesy tints.

Throughout the record, Pierce's band fittingly supports him, whether it's cover songs or the originals. Pierce's lyrics explore the gamut of love, self-reflection, and steadfast mournful Blues themes with a nice variance of tempos and styles. The band includes Arnold Stagger- bass, Joe Munroe- piano/organ, Blaise Lanzetta – drums, Rick Matt – saxophone, JD Chaisson - trumpet, and Reggie Watkins - Trombone. Of Pierce's originals, "Nobody But Myself To Blame" and the title track "Going Back" are stand-outs. While his own songwriting is front-and-center on the album, the other two covers are special selections from artists gone-too-soon. Both Sean Costello and Justin Townes Earl were spectacular musicians and songwriters who died of accidental drug overdoses. (This is a good time to mention that Pierce's mindfulness extends beyond his playing as he is donating from the sale of each record to the National Alliance on Mental Illness.) Pierce stays true to both of their covers with robust delivery. There's a poignancy in the lyrics on Sean Costello's upbeat-andeerie "No Half Steppin" about needing to get going and stay focused, shining a light unto the world. The final cover, and final track to **13.**

the record, is Justin Townes Earl's "Memphis in the Rain," which is a beautiful closer for this solid album. Pierce, whose talents extend beyond the guitar, also plays bass, cello, and drums on top of his searing and sensitive guitar chops and strong – but evolving – vocals. Pierce's gifts are easily recognized by many and that's why he's a regular on Blues festival stages with his own band – Shades of Blues. He's also been a guest with many of today's top Blues performers. He's certainly a favorite around Pittsburgh, PA where he lives. For more information about Pierce, and to find out where he's performing, check out his website: ([www.piercedipner.com](http://www.piercedipner.com)). If you purchase his record, which is available on all the usual platforms, you're also supporting a charity that helps bring awareness about mental illness. That's a beautiful thing. We'll certainly be poised to hear more from Pierce as his music and performances continue to evolve.  
~Ilana Katz Katz (musician, singer, artist.... [www.ilanakatz.com](http://www.ilanakatz.com))

# 565 LIVE

## SPEAKEASY & STAGE

DOWNSTAIRS AT GRILLE 565

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## Silent Partners

*Changing Times*

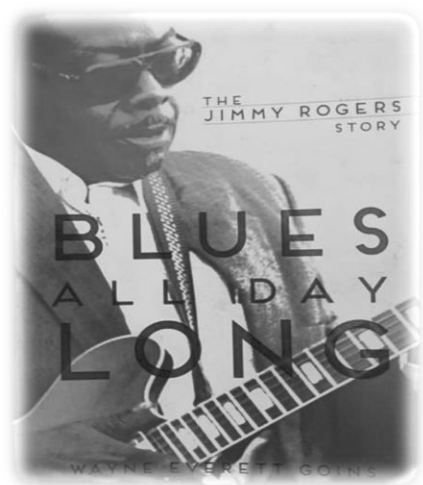
Little Village

Little Village unerringly brings us genuine Blues and soul once again with Silent Partners and their album *Changing Times*, yet another example of sidemen reaching the bright lights. But these aren't just any sidemen. Between the three of them, they have over 100 years of experience on the road and in sessions that include B.B. King, Bobby "Blue" Bland, Johnnie Taylor, Albert King, Otis Clay, Matt "Guitar" Murphy, and Denise LaSalle, among many others. In fact, these Silent Partners debuted on Antone Records in 1989, having backed tours of Otis Clay and piano great Katie Webster. Guitarist **Jonathan Ellison**, bassist **Russell Jackson**, and drummer **Tony Coleman** aren't here to necessarily prove anything because this music courses through their veins. All three are vocalists. Theirs is the natural expression of real deal blues and soul, just as the aforementioned pedigree suggests. Of course, they are aided and abetted by the Little Village core team – producer and keyboardist Jim Pugh, guitarist Kid Andersen, backing vocalist Lisa Lueschner Andersen, percussionist Vicki Randle and in this case, violinist Don Dally and more expansive string arrangement by Aaron Lington. You guessed it. It was recorded, engineered, mixed, and mastered by Kid Andersen at his Greaseland Studios. They deliver nine originals and one cover of B.B. King and The Crusaders' "Never Make Your Move Too Soon." As readers of these pages know, it is the mission of Little Village to bring lesser-known, authentic artists to the recording studio. So, almost literally out of nowhere The Silent Partners have issued one of this year's strongest Blues and soul efforts. They begin with "Ain't No Right Way to Do Wrong," a slow Blues about life's lessons, never overplayed but yet builds drama and wisdom in both lyrics and delivery. This song is a statement that speaks to the confidence of this trio as most bands would start with a rocking tune rather than a slow blues complete with a full string arrangement. The chorus lingers – "*Ain't no right way to do wrong, ain't no wrong way to do right.*" "Post Traumatic Blues Syndrome" seem like a straight-forward Blues number until one focuses on the fear of police brutality or the difficulty voting for Black Americans. Ellison's guitar line flows with just enough anger to reflect the lyrics. Coleman's pleading vocals on "Road to Love" speak to a deep southern soul lineage of the like of James Carr and O.V. Wright. Yes, there's some of that "Dark End of the Street" in this one. The cover begins with a description of a birthday party in Chicago for B.B. King attended by Otis Clay, Albert King, Otis Spann, and Bobby "Blue" Bland. Of course, it's filled with B.B.'s riffs set off by Pugh's backing B3. They can get fiery when called for as evidenced by Ellison's Albert Collins-like licks in "Dancin' Shoes" while such tunes such as "Love Affair with the Blues" evokes that Malaco sound of Bland and Denise LaSalle, peppered with stinging guitar jabs from Ellison. The group claims to be most centered on the "rhythm of the song," likely best reflected by "Proving Ground" where Jackson lays down a sturdy bassline over Coleman's insistent beats and Ellison is content to play rhythm guitar until he solos where no notes are wasted.

While that tune nods to B.B. in the lyrics, the guitar patterns in "Teasing Woman" are more in synch with Albert King. "Good to Myself" is the kind of crowd-pleasing song where it's easy to envision an enthusiastic audience joining in on the chorus and dancing to Ellison's swinging solo. Another shuffle follows, the closing "Beale Street Shuffle" with the band getting down and greasy, Memphis style as if answering the famous blues anthem "Sweet Home Chicago" ... their way.

The **Silent Partners** have more than enough to say. Listen up. ~*Jim Hynes*

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If you consider yourself a fan of Chicago Blues, even mildly, you owe it to yourself to get a copy of *Blues All Day Long - The Jimmy Rogers Story* by Wayne Goins! This biography shines a spotlight on one of the men who literally created the sound now loved by so many people worldwide. It not only demonstrates how amazing Jimmy Rogers was in terms of his musicianship, but what an upright human being he was throughout his life during the good times as well as the difficult.

Thank you, Dr. Goins, for your efforts in writing this wonderful biography!

~Charlie Barath

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## Nice Ain't Got Me Nothing Billy Evanochko

Next year, Billy Evanochko gets inducted into the **Beaver Valley Musicians' Hall of Fame...** Though the Sewickley guitar slinger won't rest on his laurels.

On Oct. 18, Evanochko and his Blues band, Billy the Kid & The Regulators, released his new album, "Nice Ain't Got Me Nothing," showcasing the Hopewell Township native's blazing guitar paired with no-holds-barred lyrics.

The single is "B.S. Barbie" (my abbreviation), a fiery tune throwing verbal darts at a blue-eyed, mascara-sparkled liar. An anthem about ending a toxic relationship, the song's Barbie character is inspired by a real person. Asked to elaborate, Evanochko simply says, "I don't write books, I don't write essays, I write songs."

The "Nice Ain't Got Me Nothing" title track rides a J. Geils-ish organ riff supplied by Ghost Hounds' keyboard wizard Joe Munroe, who produced the album in his Center studio. The three Billy the Kid & The Regulators originals include the sassy "Say You Want a Woman" and smoldering "Sweet Honey Child," with guest slide guitar from another Beaver County six-string ace, Dan Bubien. A separate, acoustic version of "Sweet Honey Child" closes the album.

"I'm very honored to be inducted," Evanochko said. "To be included with so many of my peers and heroes is exciting and humbling." ~*Scott Tady, Beaver County Times*

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## As the Song Goes, 'I might have made my move too soon!'

A Blues cruiser friend from Germany sent a Rick Estrin video about **Masters of the Harmonica**. After watching it, I had to agree that it was an excellent piece. Of course, I had to tell Rick my thoughts when listening to his work.

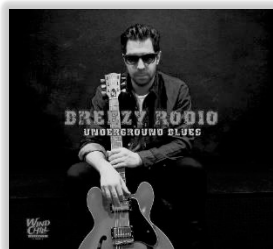
**Jonnye:** I loved your approach to realness and nonsense. A memory came to mind about one *Blues in the Schools* project (one of several harp series) from long ago that the Blues Society of Western PA sponsored. I had sat in on all the classes done by various players in our area. I finally asked for a harp to try like the other kids. I wiped off my lipstick to try it. Afterwards, I put my lipstick back on (it is so difficult to be a pretend diva). A while later the kids asked if I would try a new harp move. I was really getting into the swing of things!!! I wiped off the lipstick once again. I reapplied afterwards. I went to take another turn and started the lipstick process once again...

apply, remove, reapply. One young lad tugged on my arm. He turned his fresh young face up towards me and innocently said, 'Miss Jonnye, this ain't for you. You got too much stuff going on with your trying to be pretty.'

The instructor walked over and confiscated my harp (all in fun, smiles all around). I laughingly protested. The instructor did, however, breathe a sigh of relief, saying that he was saving mankind from music abuse. I indignantly replied (again laughing), 'HA!' It was a fun day. I really was trying to be serious about the lessons. The kids were always so eager. We went to many school districts where the students were financially challenged. Our mission, "**Blues in the Schools**" is to give a kid an instrument (harps, drums, guitars, saxophone, clarinets, flutes, bagpipes, pianos, and yes, a harmonica) to give them hope that they could do something positive, flourish and keep out of trouble. To date, the Blues Society of Western PA has given hundreds of instruments, amps, sound boards, cords, etc. to students. We were able at times to put on Grand Finale shows (to showcase their results) at the schools with the young players mixed in with 'our players' ... it was all music to 'our' ears. (Hopefully, we can get back to those positive and enriching visits in the future.)

**Rick's response:** You gave up too easily. Harmonica cannot be too difficult if I can do it!!! Seriously, doing that program with school kids, might really help some of them. In hindsight, I can see that playing the harp was a **life saver** for me. As a kid, I was badly in need of something positive to focus on. Without me spending all the time trying to figure out what was going on with the Blues and harmonica, I know I would have gotten in even more trouble than I did. ~Jonnye Weber, President, Blues Society of Western PA

If you have a new or gently used instrument or music equipment, please consider donating. Many young people are musically inclined and in need of our help. Monetary donations are also welcome to fulfill the mission to 'play the music forward.' Contact: [bswpa.org](http://bswpa.org)



## Underground Blues

### Breezy Radio

#### Blind Raccoon Records

Underground Blues is the sixth Blues release Chicago Bluesman Breezy Radio and it is the third that I have had the pleasure of working with. For this project Breezy, on guitar and vocals, is joined by Johnny Bradley on Bass, Daniel C. Tabion on piano and organ; Lorenzo Francocci on drums; and Josh Fulero on harmonica. Also appearing as a guest guitarist

on a couple of tracks is the album's producer, Anson Funderburgh. All fourteen of the disc's tracks are Breezy Radio originals.

The title track, "Underground Blues", features a well- balanced vocal presentation as Breezy partly sings and partly talks the lyrics that describe his thoughts and experiences on quarantining. With fabulous harmonica leads by Josh; rich rhythm from Johnny and Lorenzo, hot keyboard work by Daniel; and killer guitar leads and vocals from the boss, this smoker does an excellent job of highlighting everyone's musical talents.

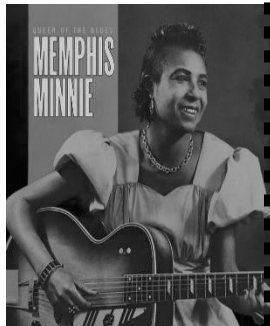
Ever since first seeing Anson Funderburgh and the Rockets, featuring Sam Meyers, a large number of years ago, I – like most of us- have been a huge fan. Listening to his dynamic playing on a rhythm driven track titled "Playing My Game Too," is exactly the reason why. Maybe you're someone who has spoken lyrics similar to these to a dear friend or perhaps you're that dear friend who they were spoken to. If you are the former, you are indeed a good friend and if you're the latter, I hope you realized that, and followed the very good advice to stop using "That Damn Cocaine". Just like every track on the disc, Johnny, Lorenzo and Daniel are dishing out their usual monster rhythm, and Breezy, with his sincere and heartfelt vocals and accompanying guitar work, is doing his best to make this the first ever Blues Song public service announcement. As quick as getting hit by a "Lightening Strike", it took hearing all of three seconds of this one for me to think "oh yeah, slow Blues". That being said, ya gotta know what's coming next... yes, it is my favorite track of the lot and yes, it does feature some of Rodio's best guitar work.

With no words to explain it, I am wondering what was going through Breezy's mind when he called this instrumental "The Asymptomatics." Musically, it features: Josh once again flowing harp, and that's always a good thing; the usual masterful rhythm work from Johnny and Daniel; and midway through it, Breezy morphing into quite a snazzy, jazzy guitarist causing him to giggle and coyly say.... "Ahhh, you like it!" Yes, Breezy, I did.

This one is called "Hello Friendo" and I'm going to take the liberty of saying 'let's dance' would have nicely, and appropriately, fit into the title. So, with me praising this rhythm section as I have, you're definitely going to want to hear this one once I tell you that Daniel, Johnny and Lorenzo are at disc's best on the piano, bass and drums on this dance floor filling instrumental. And while all of that is going on, ya got the boss and Josh wailing away on smoking guitar and harmonica leads. Wow! Another killer track. "If I see your house is on fire, and there's no one around; I will mind my own business and let your little shack burn down." Oh yeah, on a song called 'Sugar Daddy,' Breezy is one upset dude. On this powerful vocal performance, there is no questioning **19.**

his anger. Even his guitar reeks of it. Lyrically, vocally, emotionally, and musically, this is real deal Blues. Additional kudos to Daniel for those masterful high end, right hand, Blues piano leads. Closing out the disc is the cleverly title track called "Bluesoned." Except for this twelve-word sentence- "When I was a young man, I got poisoned by the Blues"- which explains the title, it is another killer instrumental with the usual strong rhythm. On another track, Breezy and Daniel once again going toe to toe on Blues guitar and piano. Other tracks on the must have release from Breezy Rodio include: "Half Way in the Devil's Gate"; "C.H.I.C.A.G.O."; "The Murder"; "Let Me Go", "Gerry Told Me"; and "Why Did You Go?" ~Peter "Blewzzman" Lauro, Blues editor @www. Mary4Music.com

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**Blues Trivia Answer:** Memphis Minnie was paid the ultimate compliment by other blues players – that she could “play guitar like a man” – and was considered by most of her contemporaries to be the greatest women Blues singers. Unlike most of the ‘classic’ Blues women of the 1920’s who came out of the vaudeville/music hall tradition, Minnie’s Blues came straight from the country. She toured the South with the Ringling Brothers Circus before settling in Memphis, where she caught the ear of a Columbia Records talent scout. ~Cary Wolfson



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