

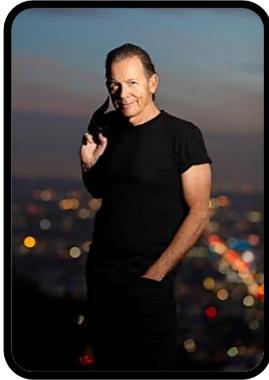


**BSWPA BLUESLETTER** **VOLUME 15, ISSUE 2**

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BLUES SOCIETY  
of  
WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

**Winter 2021**



### **A Bluesman Came to Town....**

#### **Tommy Castro adds a new dimension to his brand of music.**

The sun was shining. The skies were a brilliant blue. A slight breeze was in the air. The sea water was calm. What a tranquil and serene setting! HOWEVER, .... The Blues cruise gang was quickly gathering on the top deck of that mighty ship. SOON .... Things broke loose in quick time as the crowd began to move and groove to Tommy Castro and the Painkillers for 'our' sail away party. Armed with a smoking guitar, romping vocals and an engaging smile, Tommy Castro whipped the cruisers into a frenzy. That boat was definitely rocking!!! We soon heard cheers coming from the other boats that were also waiting to set sail. We looked around and saw the decks of the other ships (snooze cruises) lined with passengers trying to get a glimpse of our engaging send off. Tommy was deliberately weaving his way through our massive crowd. He took his music to the top deck. He travelled up and down the steps, playing to everyone. (And this was only the first hour of a week-long cruise!!!!) Finally, Tommy made his way back to the stage. We were all waving to the other ships. A smiling Tommy Castro called out to the onlooking cruisers... 'plan your vacation better the next time'. Of course, all the cruisers in the port went crazy! Yes, we were definitely on the most happening boat at sea! We were 2000 strong and were pirating Tommy Castro away with us. We, the Blues fans, were soon sailing into uncharted musical waters!

Fast forward .... many shows, many fests, many Blues encounters. Tommy has often brought his soulful, rich, heartfelt Blues to our local Blues club, Moondog's. One night, the joint was so crowded that we needed a shoe horn to move around. WE, the Blues fans, were once again ... 'ALL IN'. Tommy was calling out to the crowd. The fans were responding in turn. This fan was sitting on the side of the stage on a large speaker. I almost fell off in my excitement. Tommy, mid song, turned to ask if I was alright. Heh Heh! Perhaps ... seat belts should be issued at all Tommy Castro shows! That joint was at full tilt. Big stages, small stages.... the Tommy Castro experience is always well received. Never, I repeat, NEVER, expect to sit still or to lose interest at a Tommy Castro show!!!

Recently, word was out that Tommy Castro had a new album being released. He was claiming that his newest creation was a 'Blues Opera' entitled "A Bluesman Came to Town. In resulting interviews Tommy Castro had stated that his newest body of work takes the listener on a 'hero's journey'. It is a melding of many Bluesmen's stories; all woven together and taking the listener on the journey with the 'hero'. My interest was piqued. I had to know more.

One Castro song, 'Can't Keep a Good Man Down', exemplifies his hard work, his tenacity, his dedication to bringing the music to us. Another Castro song, 'What You Gonna Do Now' came to mind many times in the last year. What did Tommy Castro have in mind for now and the future?

**Jonnye:** How do you describe your music in the past and what is your description of your sound now?

**Tommy:** It is Blues with soul and many other elements mixed in. My sound is the same now as then. It is a part of me. It expresses how I have grown with the music.

**Jonnye:** Who has influenced your career the most? Who is the one person that you credit the most for helping you to develop as a performer?

**Tommy:** That is hard to answer. I have learned something from everyone. My Older brother Ray taught the basics when I was ten. I owe a lot to Ronnie Baker Brooks. We worked together when I put together the Legendary Rhythm & Blues Revue. I watched him every night. He's a master. Also touring with B.B. King and Buddy Guy was quite the schoolin'. Early influences like Elvin Bishop and Taj Mahal who are now friends of mine. The leader/drummer of the Dynatones, Big Walter Salwitz, taught me to work the stage. It was a soul band with a great show. He said, 'Tommy, when you take a solo. I want you to go right to the front of the stage!' I've been doing that ever sense.

**Jonnye:** Being restricted from live shows and concerts, what has it been like getting your 'travel legs' back?

**Tommy:** (chuckling) We now have a few big shows under our belts. We have been working out the kinks and trying to get our 'rhythm back'. It feels great to be back in front of live audiences. The fans energy and appreciation has us feeling very grateful. It's like having an amazing meal after being hungry for a good long while.

**Jonnye:** What have you discovered about yourself, Tommy Castro, and your music during the past restrictions?

**Tommy:** Like everyone else, there was an adjustment period. I just kept working on my music. I kept writing and playing. It was a tough time for everyone, adjusting to difficult times. But I actually liked being home for a stretch. I never had the chance the last 30 years so that was nice. I spent more time with family and friends once we figured out how to get together safely.

**Jonnye:** What brings energy and creativity to your life?

**Tommy:** The Blues cruise is a great way for me to connect, to create and to work with a diverse group of artists. I have time while sailing to listen to other acts that normally I would not have time to see or hear. I watch and listen to what they play and how they present their shows. Taking a minute to talk over a bite in the Lido dining room...As you know it's like a cafeteria with really good food. Grab a plate, look around and sit near someone you want to talk to. That's how I got to be friends with Taj. One the most interesting cats I ever met. I got to know so many other players that way. It's a very long list at this point. When I was a kid, I listened to records and the radio. Some of the artists would just blow my mind. These days I get inspired by documentaries, books and videos listening to playlists or BB King's Bluesville on Sirius XM.

**Jonnye:** You developed a new Blues Opera. What is your definition of an opera?

**Tommy:** It is a story. It is piecing together chapters of a story. This story was about a man's life.

**Jonnye:** How did you develop this concept and why?

**Tommy:** To my knowledge, there has not been a Blues opera. There have been rock operas created. Not one was dedicated to the Blues. The songs were designed to be listened to in sequence. People, today, listen to songs randomly in their home and in their car. I wanted to develop a story that leads the audience through this man's life. There was a time when you went to the record store, purchased a record and listened to the whole thing. (We both laughed remembering those days). I wanted the listener to want to hear the next song, the next, and the next. I wanted the listener to be left with a story set to music that has an impact.

**Jonnye:** Does your Blues Opera/story mirror your life?

**Tommy:** (softly chuckling) Actually, it is not my story. It is the story of a thousand Bluesmen making their way. We all have a story that could be told. So, I gave my producer Tom Hambridge an outline of the story I had in mind. Drawing from stories told to me by friends, stories I've read about the great bluesmen I admire and some of my own story as well.

**Jonnye:** What discovery have you made as a musician as you re-emerge.

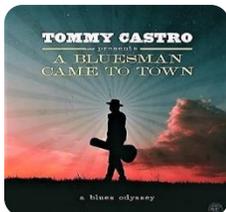
**Tommy:** (Quietly and with great sincerity) One thing I found out during the last number of months is that I am not a very acoustic player or solo performer. I can play acoustic at home while tooling around or while writing. But ... I've always been a guy in a band playing electric guitar. I practiced on my acoustic guitars at home during that time off. I really tried to get to the point where I could perform solo shows. I love it when other artists do it. I'm afraid I need a few more years to get any good at it. It was humbling.

**Jonnye:** What do you feel that your role is in "playing the music forward" to the next generation of players and bringing people to the music?

**Tommy:** That is a good question. (He was thoughtful for a moment. I could almost see his brow furrow as he gave the question some thought. He finally answered honestly and passionately.) I want to honor those that came before us...the 'real' Blues. It seems that everyone including me is trying so hard to do something different that we sometimes lose track of that. It is all about the guitar now; loud, heavy-handed guitar. I find that disturbing and I'm a guitar player! The emphasis on guitar driven blues leaves little space for the artists that aren't guitar players. There are many voices in the Blues.

*Tommy Castro has a story to tell and music to share. Catch a show when he comes to your town.*

*Photo credit: Veronica Smith*



## A Bluesman Came to Town

Internationally beloved soul-blues rocker, Tommy Castro is ready to release *A Bluesman Came to Town: A Blues Odyssey* on September 17, via Alligator Records, produced by Grammy-winning producer and songwriter, Tom Hambridge. It's a special project created by the multi award-winning blues, rock, R&B, and roots musician, Tommy Castro.

Castro and Hambridge composed 13 songs (with contributions from Richard Fleming, Terry Wilson and Ron Alan Cohen) that chronicle the journey of a young farmhand in the country who learns guitar and falls in love with the blues. Each of the tracks are pivotal points in this young musician's career. Concept albums work when each track can stand on its own merit, and here that's true. The album is packed with all-star musicians including Tommy Castro (guitar and vocals), Tom Hambridge (drums, percussion, background vocals), Rob McNelley (guitar) Tommy McDonald (bass), Kevin McKendree (keyboards), Jimmy Hall (harmonica, vocals) and various other musical heavyweights on select songs.

You can't go wrong with any album by Tommy Castro, and live he is one of the best. He's been awarded multiple Blues Music Awards for Blues Male Artist of the Year, Contemporary Blues Album of the Year, B.B. King Entertainer of the Year, and with his band The Painkillers, Band of the Year.

On *A Bluesman Came to Town: A Blues Odyssey*, Castro's vocals are authentic and real, sung from the heart of storytelling. His guitar chops are reminiscent of Albert Collins and Freddie King, and that tells you all you need to know right there. Always one for heart-stomping groove and soul-testifying, Tommy Castro opens the album with "Somewhere," an inviting blues track about the main character of this opus who dreams of hitching a ride to escape the mundane yet demanding life on a farm. Tommy's slide guitar riffs weave around Jimmy Hall's expert harmonica—a fiery conversation indeed.

Tommy Castro says about the album, "It's based on a classic hero's journey—the odyssey of a musician's life." It's almost as if Tommy Castro, with his expressive, gritty voice, beckons you to lean in close and listen because he's got a good story to tell. And listen you will because there's few like him who can fire up his guitar and vocals and instantly have an audience's attention.

Title track, "A Bluesman Came to Town," is a scorching blues rocker riding a funky groove with Castro's blistering guitar chops and powerful vocals. "Once he heard that guitar, it shook him to the ground." And here the young man's love of the blues launches him on a musician's pursuit of a professional music career that succeeds, only to crash and burn in the darkness of loveless romantic encounters, indulgences in drugs and alcohol, and a dark aftermath. The rebirth comes when he hits bottom and realizes the errors of his ways and returns home with a renewed sense of what is truly important in life. A gospel-esque, blues boogie number, "Child Don't Go" has Terri Odabi sharing the vocal spotlight with Castro. What a voice. Mike Emerson slays it on piano with Castro displaying some fine picking on guitar. Another standout, "Hustle" is a funkier-than-funky, horn-infused ditty that simply must be listened to loud. Talk about in the pocket bass, guitar, and drums. Horns by Keith Crossan are an absolute joy—clean, present and punchy. Castro has a way with rhythm, and he ushers in this old-school rhythmic blues tune from a place of true confidence, completely at home in this genre.

The album shifts to a heavier vibe with songs about the temptations and challenges of a professional musician on the road. "Blues Prisoner" is a slow blues about feeling trapped in a life of one's own design. It's a moving number with Castro at his most soulful on vocals, organic and sincere. Kevin McKendree's piano is beautiful—a maestro on keys. Heavy on guitar, there's plenty to savor for guitar fans with Castro's six-string wizardry.

After catching a lucky break and gaining traction in the music industry, the story of the young bluesman continues as he trips and falls in "Women, Drugs and Alcohol," a blues rocker about addiction. The lyrics are authentic and speak painful truths. Castro's crunchy guitar adds to the grittiness of the story. "Bring It On Back" is the awakening amidst the rubble for the young bluesman, clothed in a spirited blues rock number with a Led Zeppelin feel to the catchy guitar hooks. Castro's wailing slide guitar fuels his vocals as he sings about finding the way back to one's spirit. "What you're looking for, you already got." *A Bluesman Came To Town* returns to the beginning with "Somewhere (Reprise)," a rootsy, acoustic blues number about circling back to a simpler, more gratifying life with a renewed focus on the joy of the present. The song harkens back to early Delta blues with acoustic slide guitar. A delight. ~Martine Ehrenclou 6.

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*Charlie Barath*

## HARPTOBERFRST 2021

In 2015, I received a call from Tuck Majeran expressing his intention to put together a Blues Harp Showcase featuring three Harmonica players from the Pittsburgh/Western PA region, all backed by a talented house band, and that he wanted me to be one of the featured players. I agreed to help in any capacity needed. I must admit that I had my doubts as to whether or not the idea would be well received in this market. I was pleasantly surprised to find out just how unfounded those doubts were when, in October of that year, folks filled Moondog's for the first ever Blues Harp Blowout/Harpapalooza, which was by all accounts a resounding success in spite of a brief power outage. (Ask me about that sometime ...) As successive shows came and went over the following years, I moved into a more administrative role in organizing this annual event. It is now known as Harptoberfest, occurring each October, (excluding 2020 of course). I am also acting as the Emcee each year. It is truly a labor of love, and has become a much-anticipated event each and every year.



*Clint Hoover*

That brings us to this year's event, Harptoberfest 2021. For starters, it was the first event to occur at the newly refurbished Moondog's Pub since March 13, 2020. This event has been held at several different locations. Most likely it will continue in that direction as a means of keeping added variety as part of what makes it special, along with bringing in different talented folks as our featured Harmonica players. The 2021 show brought back two alumni, Clint Hoover and Erie's Ron Yarosz. Our very first bonafide headliner, Mr. John Long, originally from St Louis, now living in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, was a great addition. All players were backed by an exceptional house band this year featuring the extraordinary rhythm section of Gordon Grottenthaler on Drums, and Mike Law on Upright Bass. Both of these cats have lived a portion of their lives in the 'Burgh, and made the trip back for this event from New Jersey and Connecticut respectively. The Keyboards were expertly handled by John "The Junkman" Burgh, and the band was led, as it has been every year, by Pittsburgh's own Jimmy Adler on Guitar.

As has been the tradition for the last few years, I kicked things off with a couple numbers, making introductions and warming up both the band as well as the crowd. (To be perfectly honest, they did not need much warming up!)

Clint Hoover, a world class Jazz Harmonicist from the Twin Cities, relocated to Pittsburgh many years ago, and has established himself as one of the most versatile players for miles (and miles) around. After a solo piece or two to open his set, the band of all-stars joined Clint on stage as he wowed the room with his singing and playing, bringing an energy and exuberance that had everyone grinning ear to ear, both on the

bandstand as well as in the audience. His unrivaled skill on the Chromatic Harmonica is something to behold, and he did not disappoint!



Ron Yarosz

Next up was Beaver County native Ron Yarosz, who has been delighting crowds while fronting his own Erie, PA based band, The Vehicle, for many years. Taking command of the excellent house band, he rocked, rolled, and captured the attention of the entire room with a selection of classic covers and original music as he sang and played his set in his own unique and entertaining style. In addition to his vocal and Harmonica talents, Ron possesses a great presence on the bandstand. What a treat!

It was a true stroke of luck to be able to get my dear friend, John Long, on this show. While chatting with his lovely wife, Carrie, I learned that John was scheduled to make a few festival appearances on the East coast, the last of which at the

Lancaster Blues Festival the week before our event. After working out the details, the die was cast, and I was SO glad that we were able to make it happen! I know for a fact that



John Long

John Long gained more than a few new fans during his first ever performance in Pittsburgh, made even more notable considering his grandfather worked in the local steel mills after emigrating from Poland many years ago.

John typically plays as a solo artist, displaying authentic finger-style Blues Guitar skills, and playing Harmonica in a homemade rack. Now, when I say authentic, I am not one to throw words like that around loosely. You see, aside from spending his formative years in Chicago alongside his brother Claude, hanging out and playing with some of Blues music's most revered royalty – think Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Jimmy Reed, etc. - John Long was mentored by Homesick James. Those influences sounded out loud and clear, and he quickly captured the undivided attention of all those fortunate enough to be present. Two thirds of the way through his set, John was joined by Gordon and Mike on Drums and Bass, and man, what a sound! His set finished up as I humbly joined my friend for a Harmonica Duet on the classic Gospel number, Climbing Higher Mountains, which was such a treat for me.

As usual, Harptoberfest finished up with a couple finale tunes with everyone on the bandstand, trading licks and smiles, all to the delight of the near-capacity room.

A sincere and heartfelt "Thank you!" to all involved in making this event what it is! Certainly Clint, Ron, and John, the featured Harmonica players, plus the outstanding house band of Jimmy, John, Mike, and Gordon, who all brought their A-Game, played a giant role. This year's venue, Moondog's, along with Ron Esser and all his excellent staff, all did their part as well. I send my deep appreciation to the Blues Society of Western PA

for continuing to sponsor and support this awesome event. And of course, thanks to each and every person who attended this year's event!

Keep your ears and eyes open for details of next year's event. Even though the bar continues to be raised, I have a feeling Harptoberfest 2022 will be every bit as fantastic, if not better! Peace! -Charlie Barath



**And the local winners are:**

The Blues Society of Western PA is honored to sponsor the winners of our latest Blues Challenge as they start their musical journey to represent Western PA at the International Blues Challenge in Memphis, TN. It is 'our' opportunity to showcase a portion of the amazing talent that resides within Western PA. It is also an opportunity for our acts to savor the many flavors and styles of the Blues from around the world, to mingle and learn from many International artists and to network within their craft beyond our Western PA borders. Join us as we wish them a safe journey and many musical adventures. January 18- 22, 2022



**1<sup>st</sup> Place Band winner - Pierce Dipner & Shades of Blue**

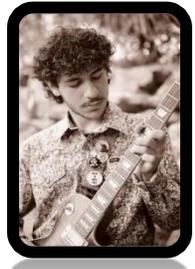
Multi-instrumentalist, vocalist, and songwriter, Pierce Dipner and his band, Shades of Blue, have been bringing their tight and high energy guitar- driven sound to clubs and festivals locally and nationally. Pierce has also performed internationally as a solo act, allowing him to hone his resonator and cigar box guitar playing. Their original songs run the gamut of hard driving shuffles, low down grooves, slow blues, and everything in between. The band's dynamic sound is led by Pierce Dipner with powerful and emotional, grit and growl vocals and tasteful, strongly phrased guitar riffs. The heavy hitting rhythm section of Arnold Stagger on Bass and Kevin Hinds on drums delivers a deep-rooted base for the songs to grow from. The first EP from the band, Get Out of Your Life, in a short time has received international airplay, rave reviews, and ranking on many Blues music charts.



**Blues merchandise makes great year-round gifts. Check out the merch page at [Bswpa.org](http://Bswpa.org)**



**1<sup>st</sup> Place Solo Winner** -Kip London has been performing folk, rhythm and jump Blues since the age of 17. Influences such as Bob Dylan and Tom Waits instilled the song writing bug early on. While performing cover material. Kip has always included originals as the primary focus of his performances. Accompanying himself an acoustic and National Resonator guitars, his singing is raw and powerful, his songs authentic, gritty and thought provoking. The Boston Globe called Kip’s music “straight ahead cool”. His first CD was listed in the top ten of new releases from Blues Review Magazine, in company with Kim Wilson, Susan Tedeschi, BB King and Bob Dylan. Kip has shared the stage with a number of national performers over the years. While getting back into live performances this summer, Kip London opened for Tommy Castro and also performed at the Pittsburgh Blues and Roots Festival.

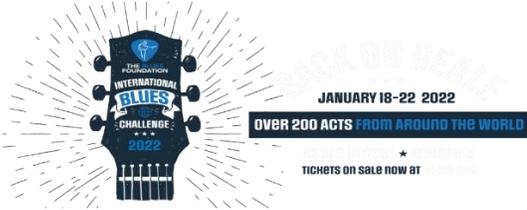


**Youth Representative – Amico DeMuzio**

Western Pennsylvania’s Amico DeMuzio is a 17-year-old musician that has been playing drums since age 3, guitar since age 5, and most recently the bass, was born to play music. Amico has studied under and played with award-winning rock, classic rock, blues and rocking blues guitarists since he took the stage at age 7. Amico’s influences are derived from a variety of styles like Duane Allman, Jerry Garcia, Eric Clapton, and Jimi Hendrix, just to name a few, while creating new sounds through infusing his interests in music and art. Amico’s goal is to inspire young listeners to keep music alive.

*(The Blues Youth representative was chosen by the BSWPA for his exemplary skills.)*

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# About the Challenge

The **International Blues Challenge** represents the worldwide search for those blues bands and solo/duo blues performers ready for the international stage, yet just needing that extra big break. Each affiliated Blues Society of The Blues Foundation has the right to send a band and solo/duo musician(s) to represent its organization at the IBC.

The IBC is judged by blues professionals from across the world who have years of experience in listening to, producing, and creating blues music. The Blues Foundation has established a set of criteria by which all competing musicians are evaluated throughout the five days of the IBC.

Affiliated Blues Societies are required to stage a live regional preliminary IBC competition, with the winner of that event representing the organization in the International Blues Challenge held annually in Memphis, TN along historic Beale Street. While affiliated Blues Societies are encouraged to follow The Blues Foundation’s structure and rules during their local challenges, each organization is free to structure its preliminary rounds as it sees fit, as long as a true challenge between multiple musicians takes place resulting in a single band and/or solo/duo artist(s) being identified.

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**It Is What It Is!**

**Billy Evanochko**



‘It Is What It Is’ was released in 2020 and is Billy Evanochko’s most recent studio recording. Billy and his band, the Regulators, created a well-polished recording that they recorded at Studio Joe here in Western PA. Billy’s vocals on this CD have progressed to the elite level and the versatile guitar sounds are truly amazing.

The first track, ‘I cannot help myself’, is Billy’s self-autobiography. It is a great look into his soul as he explains who he is. The third track, ‘It Is What It Is’, is a social commentary about life in the 2020 political scene. Billy details how he deals with all the tension in the world. It is a very catchy tune with a strong message. The fifth track is a slow Blues with a great melody that is presented in a traditional blues story style dealing with relationships. The seventh track is a live recording of one of Billy’s oldest originals, Slender Man. It was recorded in West Virginia at the Blues festival. There are four covers on the CD that I like more than the originals. Billy puts his own spin on ‘Slave’, a Stones classic. ‘Stepping Stone’, a 60’s hit for the Monkees’ showcases Billy’s version that is full of energy and is timeless. Billy has brought ‘Stepping Stone’ into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The eighth track is a rhythm and Blues song, ‘Everyday People’ from Sly and the Family Stone. It is a beautiful version of life and showcases the band’s harmony and vocals. The last cover is self-explanatory. Billy uses a J Geils song, ‘House Party’, that just gets you up and dancing!

Billy’s band is second to none with John B on bass, Bennie Davie driving the beat on drums and Ublai Bey on keys. They all sing harmonies. ‘It is What It Is’ is a perfect CD for any music lover. ~Tony Lang



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## Broke Down in the Fast Lane

### Red's Blues

Sherry and Ray Music

“Broke Down in the Fast Lane” is the third release for Sacramento, CA based Red's Blues. The Band is fronted by the husband-and-wife team of Richard “RW” Grigsby on bass, vocals and harmonies and Beth Grigsby on vocals and harmonica. Filling things out are Doug Crumpacker on guitar, vocals and harmonica; and Tim Wilbur on drums, percussion and vocals. For this project, RW and Beth enlisted the help of some recognizable special guests: Johnny Burgin on guitar; John Cocuzzi on piano; Rick Estrin on harmonica; Sid Morris on piano and organ; Kyle Rowland on guitar and harmonica; Kid Anderson on Wurlitzer and harmony vocals; and Grub Mitchel on piano and harmony vocals. The album contains eleven tracks of which ten are originals and/or compilations.

The opening and title track- “Broke Down in the Fast Lane” (RW & B Grigsby) – is a tale about being in one of those ‘where in hell is a cop when you need one?’ situations. As Beth says, “I’ve never cared much for the CHP, but now I’m praying for the blue lights to rescue me”. With horns blaring as cars whiz by and radiator fluid leaking and mixing with the rain, Beth’s hoping for an agnel with a tow bar and a chain. This slowed down shuffle features an appropriate chug-a- long type rhythm by RW and Tim; a melancholic harmonica and guitar vice by Doug and Johnny B and somewhat of a lively – I think help is here kind of feeling – piano lead, by Sid.

Had this been the very next track it would have been somewhat of a segue. It’s titled “Road Scholar” (RW Grigsby) and it’s a song about musicians who spend too much time on the road working for too little pay. Sadly, I think I personally know a few dozen of them. Musically, it’s an up- tempo shuffle featuring Tim spinning tales from the road with hot tandem guitar leads by Johnny B and Doug, intertwined by more good piano highlights, this time by Grub.

Yet another fine piano presentation, by yet another fine pianist -this time it’s Sid Morris – giving “Howlin’ Winds” (Joe Turner) somewhat of a N’awlins Dixieland Jazz Vibe. You know – that kind of wailing you hear while walking down Bourbon Street that ya just gotta follow till you find a bunch of people partying at the jook joint at the end of a courtyard. Yeah, that! Along with multi-Blues Music Award winner Rick Estrin doin’ some howlin’ of his own on the harmonica and Beth sounding like she’d have been a force to be reckoned with back in the days of those sultry jazz lounge singers, this is indeed one of the disc’s best.

Five songs in and I’m seeing several interesting patterns. Most importantly, it seems as if all the tracks feature killer piano leads- this one is again by Sid and a lot of the songs have road themes.... go figure! This one’s called “Jackknifed” (RW Grigsby & M Hummel). The truckin’ rhythm is the perfect vehicle for this hard drivin’ song about the

perils that sometimes come with hard driving. Additionally, Mr. & Mrs. Grigsby have the lead and harmony vocals in high gear and Johnny B is living up to that “Rockin’ Johnny Burgin” moniker he has come to be known.

As many times during this track that you might want to shout out “Wooly Bully” – and there will be several – don’t. This one is titled “40 Years of Trouble” (RW & B Grigsby) and musically, Sid’s organ led rhythm is a bit reminiscent of that Sam the Sham and the Pharaohs classic and this time, with the lead and harmony vocals reversed, it’s Mrs. And Mr. Grigsby belting out the fun filled, dance floor filler for sure.

I’ve already mentioned about how impressed I am with the many pianists (four) performing on this release but equally as impressive is the way the lead vocals get very effectively passed around as well. That said, “G.O.N.E.” features another outstanding piano solo and this time it’s at the hands of John Cocuzzi. It also features Doug C taking a song he wrote and running with it. In addition to a fine vocal deliverance his strummin’ and pickin’ give this one a cool country feel. Nice Stuff!

So, this Grigsby’s original has me thinking RW must be pretty hot stuff. As Beth tells it, the ladies are constantly telling her that her man is so fine. Although appreciative of the compliments, her take is “Hands Off” he’s mine!” As a matter of fact, he’s sounding mighty fine right here with some of his best work on what sounds to me like a stand-up bass. That along with John C laying down a polished jazz combo sound on the piano, sets just the right mood for Beth to do that sexy jazz singer thing she seems so comfortable with. Damn, she even closes it out with some stylish scat. Having been a jazz buff in my younger days, I’m loving this one. Not having their first two releases makes me wonder what I have missed out on. - By Peter "Blewzzman" Lauro, Keeping the Blues Alive Award recipient



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## Long as I Got My Guitar Zac Harmon

**Prelude:** As is known, when Zac Harmon jumped into the Blues pool back in 2005, he didn't just make a splash- he created a tsunami. His debut release – “The Blues According to Zachariah”- not only won “Best New Artist” in the XM Radio Awards, but the release also brought home the gold in the “Best New Artist Debut” category at the 2006 Blues Music

Awards. With that said, it was well before all that when he blew the Blewzzman away. That happened on May 1, 2004, at the Beale Street Music Festival during Memphis in May festivities. As the 2:00 pm opening act in the Blues tent, with a lineup that also featured: Delta Moon, Robert “Wolfman” Belfour, Renee Austin, Ellis Hooks, Eric Sardinas, Bernard Allison, Zac Harmon & Mid-South Blues Review put on a powerfully energetic and incredibly entertaining performance that I actually believe may have stolen the show. As the set ended, I'll never forget the tribute he paid to his then right-hand man- harmonica player Jeff Stone. After the last song, Zac walked over to Jeff and put his arm around him as he told the crowd, “This man is to me what Junior Wells was to Buddy Guy.” What a classy compliment from and to a real class act. From that day, until this day, I'm still a big fan of these fine artists and gentlemen.

**Review:** That was seventeen years, hundreds of shows, and a lot of albums ago. Now, Zac is back with what I believe is his ninth release- the one he says “is probably the most memorable record of my career’ – “Long As I got My Guitar”. Eight of the disc's ten tracks are originals with seven being penned by Zac and label owner, executive producer, and bassist, Bob Trenchard: and one written by Zac and Corey Lacey.

On nine of those tracks, Zac Harmon – on lead guitar and vocals – is joined by Bob Trenchard on bass; Richy Ruga on drums; Jimmy McGhee on guitar; and Dan Ferguson on keyboards. Collectively, they are known as the Rays. Appearing on the other track are Zac's touring band: Chris Gipson; Jamil Byron on drums; and Corey Lacey (on other tracks as well) on keyboards and background vocals and Munyungo Jackson on percussion. Just hearing the name of the opening track kind of lets you know there isn't much explaining to do here. The song is called “Deal with the Devil” and anyone who knows anything about Blues folklore knows how that turned out. Musically, it's a rhythm fueled Blues rocker with Bob, Richy and Munyungo in a progressive groove on the percussion and Zac – who while flirting with a falsetto vocal style-nails a handful of stinging guitar licks. Nice opener.

Simply because of it is old school fifties style R&B type presentation, “Crying Shame” is surely one of my personal favorites. Everything about this toe tapping., head bobbing song just reeks of smoothness. Had I been seeing this one done live, I'd be stretching 15.

my neck lookin' all around the stage for the accordion player. Since none was credited, I'm going to assume that Dan is baffling me with some masterful organ work.

Before I get to the real title of this one, its alias could very well be "The Axman's Anthem", and here's why....

"I had to pawn my watch, I had to pawn my ring; I don't care what time it is, it don't mean a thing....

"I lost all my money, there went all my friends; They didn't care for me, it was all just pretend...

"They cut off my cable, and repossessed by car; and repossessed my car; Knocked on my door, I can't take it no more...

"But I'm still a star, "Long As I Got My Guitar."

Now that you know some of the title song's lyrics, it's the song's guitar work you really need to hear. After all, Zac still has his guitar and is still indeed a star.

"New Year's Day" – it's not just the song's title but it's a day that most of the world thinks will suddenly and magically change everything. Break it to them gently, Zac: "It's New Year's Day and nothing's changed; everything remains the same. I got no New Year's resolutions.

And there you have it.

On the other hand, the song does make some cool musical changes: with Zac's scorching guitar intro – and several times throughout the song as well – it's got a strong traditional Blues vibe: and with the rhythm and percussion groove the rest of the band have going on you'll surely feel the funk.

The disc closes out with a ballad on which Zac pretty much lays out his own epitaph. Wanting to be remembered for his good deeds more than his sins, since he won't be passing this way again, he's requesting to scatter his "Ashes to the Wind" From Zac's somberly sung opening lines; to his mid dong spoken words; to the song's powerful crescendo; and addition of SueAnn's heavenly sounding background voice, as well; this one is all about the vocals. [www.zachharmon.com](http://www.zachharmon.com). -Peter Blewzzman, Keeping the Blues Alive Recipient

