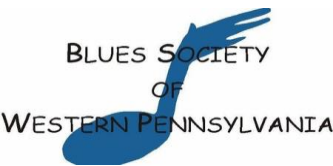




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Winter 2023



Two suddenly became one.... What a pairing!!!!

The word back in 2016 You gotta see the band playing down the street!!!! That street was Beale Street in Memphis, TN during the 32th International Blues Challenge. The band... **The Paul DesLauriers Band!** Over and over, this Blues fan heard 'that cat is on fire'! People were awestruck while witnessing his amazing sound on guitar and vocals. Paul, a confirmed Blues Rocker, had garnered an amazing global following that weekend. The uproarious cheer on the night of the finals when the Paul DesLauriers Band was awarded the 2nd place award in a field

of over 200 acts from around the world was deafening. Hailing from Canada, Paul is no stranger to winning awards.... the Maple Blues Awards (Canada's national Blues Award program) for Entertainer of the Year (2016, 2017), Electric Act of the Year (2016), Guitarist of the Year (2013, 2019) and Acoustic Act of the Year (2013). Paul has successfully globe trotted his music in the years since!

Another powerhouse to hit the scene was, Texas native **Annika Chambers**. This Blues fan first listened to Annika's story at the Big Blues Bender. It was an eye-opening discussion. As the story goes, Annika developed her chops singing as a child in the Southern Baptist church. She soon found that the Blues was her true calling! Awards, she has also been piling them up! Annika was awarded the 2022 Blues Music Award Winner for Soul-Blues Female Artist of the Year. She also was the winner of the Blues Music Award for Soul-Blues Female Artist of the Year in 2019 and 2020 Living Blues Award for Best Southern Soul album. She too has been performing near and far, wowing crowds with her amazing enthusiasm and voice.

Paul DesLauriers and Annika Chambers became 'one' in 2019 and now work as a couple playing and singing the Blues. Separately, they are amazing! Together.... They slay the audience with their over-the-top energy. Simply put, they bring the house down!!!!

It was time to share the Annika Chambers and Paul DesLauriers story with our readers.

Jonnye: Your Texas roots led you to a southern Gospel background. What was it that brought you to the Blues?

Annika: I was raised by my grandparents, and gospel music filled my childhood. Secular music rarely graced our home. It was not until I was around 18 or 19, during my time in the Army, that I truly discovered the Blues. While on my first deployment in Kosovo, a guitar player overheard me sing gospel at a talent competition. He approached me afterward, offering to introduce me to Blues music. My initiation? Bonnie Raitt's "Love Me Like a Man." From that moment, I was captivated. I immersed myself in the genre, eager to learn and absorb all I could. That is how my journey with the blues began.

Jonnye: What brought you, as a Canadian, to the Blues or your preferred rocking blues.

Paul: When I was a little kid learning guitar, I loved anything that sounded even a bit bluesy. I listened to a lot of Jimi Hendrix and other famous guitarists from back then. I found out they were inspired by legends like Buddy Guy, BB King, and Albert King, the list goes on and on. There was a blues radio show broadcast from Ottawa that aired every Sunday night, hosted by a guy named Brian Murphy. The signal was powerful enough to reach my hometown of Cornwall. I would tune in regularly and discover many blues artists through his show. It was an exciting world I got lost in, and I eagerly awaited each Sunday to learn more.

Jonnye: Before teaming up, what were your goals in music? How have they changed working as a team? What is your strongest point that you bring to your collaboration with Paul?

Annika: We tied the knot in 2019, each of us flourishing in our respective careers. The idea of merging our talents never crossed our minds; we figured we would pursue our individual paths and come together whenever time allowed. However, the pandemic ushered in an unexpected twist. With live streams becoming our main platform, our on-screen banter hinted at a unique synergy between us. We contemplated what it would be like to collaborate beyond the digital space. Joining forces turned out to be one of our best decisions. While Paul a blues-rocker with his guitar, I bring a mix of sass and soul to the mixing bowl. We both shine in our own right, but I feel my modern, digital-era flair complements his classic touch beautifully.

Jonnye: What were your initial goals before becoming a family band? How has that changed now? What is your strongest point that you add to your collaboration?

Paul: Before we teamed up, I was touring internationally with my trio from Canada, while Annika was traveling the globe with her band. We thought our careers were set, but the pandemic changed everything. Stuck together all the time, we discovered our musical chemistry. We chose to combine our careers, benefiting both our personal and professional lives. I contribute a rock vibe and my guitar skills, as well as my extensive touring and studio experience. Our combined flavors create a unique and exciting mix that's fresh and intriguing for both of us.

Jonnye: Is it stressful being the wife and the singer in the band? How did you mesh your talents with Paul's?

Annika: I would not describe it as stressful; in fact, it feels simpler. Having someone on stage who genuinely cares for you creates a sense of safety. We do not feel the strain of constantly being on the road because we have each other, making wherever we are feel like home. While there are challenges, we view them as adventures. That is how we navigate our journey together. When it comes to blending our talents, Paul has a distinct and incredible approach to music, evident in his playing. Similarly, I have my own unique style each other beautifully, and the synergy we create together is truly special.

Jonnye: What were the challenges in your mind about blending your two styles? Was there apprehension involved or was there a thrill for the unknown?

Paul: There was a real thrill in facing the unknown together. It felt like Annika and I were holding hands, leaping off a cliff, eager to see where the journey would lead. I **3.**

used to play in a guitar-focused trio, and now we are merging into a bigger sound and blending our vocals. It is all new and different for both of us. It truly feels like a shared adventure, diving into the unknown hand in hand, and that is exhilarating.

Jonnye: Stevee Wellons and John Deller both asked: What are the challenges that you now face working as a couple in the music industry?

Annika: Regarding industry challenges, given the current climate in the USA, the racial element is ever-present. However, we mostly encounter positivity. Most people have been accepting and supportive of our presence and performance on stage. Our passion is evident in everything we do, both on and off the stage. And when we are on stage, the magic is palpable. While we do not perceive significant negativity from the music industry, we jokingly say it would be great to be on the level of Taylor Swift or Beyoncé in terms of earnings. But truly, we are in it for the love and passion we both have for music and bringing joy to people.

Jonnye: Who decides on the set list and which events to work?

Annika: Paul and I decide on a set list, and we usually play off a loosely established framework, tweaking it depending on the event and crowd reaction etc. We always ensure it remains dynamic so our performances do not become repetitive. Even if we perform the same songs across multiple shows, our rendition changes every time. My vocals vary, and he will impress with a unique guitar solo or vocal flair each night. We always try and push one another to a higher level hoping to get that wink, smile or "Yeah!" from across the stage. Our approach guarantees a fresh experience for our audience. Regarding work, we are represented by Intrepid Artists International. When the offers come in, we discuss if it is the right fit for us. Most times, we all need to be on the same page. If we are ever in disagreement, we consult Gary, our bassist and tour manager. He serves as our "second opinion," helping us decide if an offer is worthwhile.



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Jonnye: Paul, you recently talked about being hospitalized. How have those issues impacted your daily life and your performing?

Paul: Five years ago, I suffered a traumatic brain injury from a fall while on tour. It changed almost every part of my daily life. I now deal with chronic migraines, balance issues, and so much more. Touring is not as easy for me anymore, and my life needs adjustments to maintain my work pace and performance quality. Planning is different now, but with Annika by my side, I feel secure. We care for each other, ensuring I am in the best condition to deliver my best possible performances.

Jonnye: Paul, you recently stated that you had five years of sobriety. What was the ah-ha moment when you decided to make changes in your life? What is the upside of what used to be down?

Paul: After my brain injury, I stopped drinking entirely. Waking up for months feeling like you have the worst hangover of your life makes the thought of alcohol unappealing. Plus, head injuries and alcohol are not a good mix. Choosing sobriety has been rewarding, especially since I am married to someone who has been sober even longer than I have. I finally put my happiness and well-being first. It is wonderful having a partner who understands and shares this journey. We enjoy life to the fullest, and laugh a lot every single day.

Jonnye: I sat in on an industry talk at the Bender where you joined a panel talking about depression and mental illness. What made you decide to bare your soul to defy being stigmatized and to tell your story? What strides have you made to conquer those issues to find peace and happiness in your life?

Annika: When it comes to mental illness, I've undergone extensive therapy, poured my heart into music, and sought solace in self-reflection. I believe, as an artist, it is my responsibility to uplift others. The hardships we face are not random; I view them as lessons, meant to show resilience and hope to others. I have battled childhood trauma, endured molestation, survived abusive relationships, and faced the challenges of serving in the army with two deployments under my belt. Music has been my lifeline. Whenever I have the platform, I share my story. While my life might appear glamorous from the outside, I have weathered many storms. It is essential to emphasize that overcoming is possible. Therapy and maintaining sobriety have been crucial for me. After being diagnosed with complex PTSD by the VA, understanding, and navigating this condition became paramount. I rely on antidepressants to ward off suicidal thoughts, a necessary measure to protect my life. I will always champion seeking help and, when ready, sharing personal stories. Sharing can be transformative, not just for oneself but for others who find strength in our journeys. Regarding my journey to finding peace and happiness, choosing the right partner has been transformative. Being in love with someone who ensures you feel secure, who helps you process your past, and reassures you that we all carry burdens is invaluable. We all have stories and baggage; it is about finding someone willing to help navigate through it. I am grateful for having such support in my life. Moreover, finding solace in life's simple pleasures has been therapeutic. Living in Florida, taking strolls and absorbing nature's beauty is a source of tranquility. Whether it is observing ducks, iguanas, or even the occasional alligator, 5.

or just watching baby ducks grow – it is a serene experience. Walking around the lake, soaking in the surroundings, and enjoying a little sunshine can truly uplift the spirit.

Jonnye: Annika and Paul.... With all your awards achieved separately, what are your goals for the future?

Annika and Paul: We have both received numerous accolades independently, but we recently celebrated winning our first joint award: the Blues Blast Soul Blues Album of the Year for our “Good Trouble” record. We are enthusiastic about our future and are gearing up to record a new album, aiming to hit the studio in early 2024. We are eager to give it our all, as we always do. Our aim is to create the best music we can, blending our talents effectively. We hope to produce songs that thrill both us and our listeners. We aspire for our audiences to embrace our work, allowing us to flourish and journey through this new musical adventure together.

Jonnye: Annika and Paul.... How do you each want to leave your footprint in the music world and how to be remembered?

Annika: In terms of my musical legacy and how I want to be remembered, I am a fervent advocate, particularly within the blues and soul genres. It is essential for young black women and girls to recognize and appreciate the music of our ancestors and see its evolution through time. I am deeply committed to supporting and inspiring young women of color. My aspiration is that when they listen to me, they not only hear my voice but also the resonances of legends like Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey, KoKo Taylor, Big Maybelle, Big Mama Thornton, and countless others. On a lighter note, I also want to be remembered for my spectacular high kicks, often joking that I missed my calling as a Rockette! That is the essence of my mission in the music world.

Paul: I aim to create the best music I can and humbly give back to the world some of what music has given me. I strive to be a skilled guitarist and singer of course, but most importantly music is the soundtrack to all our lives. It is there with us through happy times and gets us through dark times. Music is medicine for the soul. I am trying to be a good doctor and spread joy, love, and healing. I hope that by the end of my journey, I have fulfilled a fraction of that dream.



Jonnye: As a young player in the business, what was the best advice that you received?

Paul: *Don't quit.*

Jonnye: As a young singer, what was the one piece of advice that you received that has remained with you?

Annika: The most impactful piece of advice I received was when I was nearing the end of my duty in Baghdad, Iraq, and contemplating leaving the military to pursue my music career. I confided in my commanding officer about my decision, and to my surprise, he wholeheartedly supported my choice. He told me that if anyone had the potential to leave the military and chase their dreams successfully, it was me. In a military environment where retention is often the primary goal, his belief in my unique path was truly special. To this day, he continues to express his pride in me for following my dreams and turning them into reality.

Jonnye: Annika and Paul.... If you both were not doing music, what would your ideal jobs be?

Annika: If you were to ask my grandmother about an alternate career for me besides singing, she would promptly say journalism. Growing up, I aspired to blend the personas of icons like Barbara Walters, Oprah, and Maya Angelou. I have always had a passion for conducting interviews and being the one asking the questions. Additionally, I have always been drawn to sharing news. So, in another life, I would see myself as an anchor, news reporter, or journalist.

Paul: I always joke that my mother wished I had become a doctor. I might have tried in another life but music has always been my one true passion. There was never anything else that could get in the way. It feels like my life's calling.



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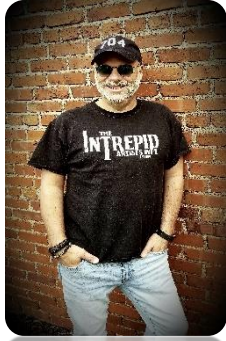
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A Look Behind the Scenes....

After years of watching many Blues musicians and talking with those in the business, the name Intrepid Artists came to the forefront again and again. Their roster has continually been filled with amazing talent. Curiosity set in. This Blues fan wanted to talk with the founder of Intrepid Artists, Rick Booth. The quest: to learn about the methods, the ideology and the determination behind Intrepid Artists that consistently has offered a solid, full-bodied product.

What is being said about Intrepid Artists:

*Intrepid Artists International, what can I say, professional, great to work with, great agents and always willing to go the extra mile for you. It is always a pleasure to work with Rick and his great team. Nothing but praise.

~Paul E. Benjamin – N Atlantic Blues Fest, Former President of The Blues Foundation Board

*I have been booking exceptional blues talent with Intrepid Artists for over 25 years. They really get the job done! Always prompt, friendly and very effective.

~ Charles Ross – President, Tampa Bay Blues Festival, St Petersburg, FL

*We love the fact that Intrepid Artists represent four of our label's bands. They are terrific working partners, true professionals who provide lots of gig offers, watch every detail of contracts and riders, and keep our artists' tour calendars very full. Plus, they are really dedicated to the musicians as people, and are true fans of every act they book. We look forward to many more happy years of working with Intrepid Artists.

~Bruce Iglauer -President, Alligator Records – Chicago, IL



Yes, a sit down with Rick Booth of Intrepid Artists was in the works.

Jonnye: What was it at an early age that made you identify with music?

Rick: At the age of about 7, I started listening to AM radio in Charlotte NC, "WAYS" 610 AM, "Big Ways!" The morning disc Jockey was the late great **Jay Thomas** who went on to star in Cheers and many other TV sitcoms. I loved listening to him spin records. At age 10, my Godmother gave me **Elton John's Greatest Hits** for my birthday, and I was hooked. Kinda' funny, I would not find out 'til many years later that Elton's last name was taken from British bluesman, **Long John Baldry** as they were bandmates in the band **Bluesology** while Elton was still using his given birth name, Reg Dwight.

Jonnye: After a series of jobs in the music industry, what made you 'choose' to create Intrepid Artists? What were your goals, then and now?

Rick: I worked originally for a regional agency booking mainly college cover bands, and some original artists as well. The Agency had been around for 35 plus years, but the owner started mixing business with pleasure and he started bouncing checks to both 9.

me and other employees. I gathered my stuff and slid out literally in the middle of the night. I then went to work for a blues agency, Piedmont Talent. After 4 years felt I needed a change. I also felt I could make a difference in the industry if I did my own thing, so the week of Christmas 1994, I gave my notice. I had been setting up my office space for a month or so before and all I had to do was move in and start booking. My original roster of artists included **Jimmy Thackery & The Drivers**, **Chubby Carrier & The Bayou Swamp Band**, The Late Great **Skeeter Brandon & Hwy 61**, and a local band, **Rank Outsiders**. It was a great time in my life, and my Adrenaline was pumpin'! I was only 29 years old and I can remember Jimmy Thackery asking me, "*Are ya scared?*" And my response was, "*Well, yeah, a little.*" He said, "*Good, Cause if you weren't, I would be.*" My goals were pretty small at the time. I never expected it to turn into what it did and certainly never expected to really be here almost 30 years later answering your questions. I am flattered!

Jonnye: How has the Blues scene changed since the 90's (Max Schang)?

Rick: Wow! Lots, that's for sure!!! Back in the early 90's, I could take just about any band and tour them around the country. People came out to Blues Clubs or Jazz Clubs expecting good entertainment. It was almost like a built-in crowd in many places. When I started out in the business working for Piedmont Talent, we had a phone with 2 lines, and a fax machine with that scroll of paper and a matrix printer. There was no internet, no social media, no email and all promo, product and contracts were sent by mail. Speaking of product, when I first started out, we were still sending out LP's, Cassettes and eventually, VHS tapes. Ha! Festivals were few and far between. It has been 30 plus years now since I got in the business (Oct 1990) but I do not remember that many blues festivals until the mid to late 90's. The ones I specifically remember though were NOLA Jazz & Heritage Fest, Chicago Blues Fest, San Fran Blues Fest (RIP), Beale Street Music Fest (RIP), Tampa Bay Blues Fest, Jacksonville Springing the Blues Fest, Poconos Blues Fest (RIP), King Biscuit Festival and North Atlantic Blues Fest. I guess there were probably a few others but these are the ones I recall. I am sure to take S#it for leaving someone off the list. Ha! Today, many of these are still big ones!! Many others have followed in their footsteps though, and today there are literally festivals Everywhere. There are also so many Music Themed Cruises today. Starting in the early 90's I believe, there was only one that I knew of, Roger abor's *Legendary Blues Cruise*. I think back then, it was the *Ultimate Rhythm & Blues Cruise*, if I recall correctly. Roger started it all.

Jonnye: What are your projections for the future of the Blues?

Rick: Honestly, I do not know. I believe, just like anything else, The Blues needs to keep up and evolve with the times, while respecting, honoring, and preserving its history. The Blues Community needs to develop young bands and work on getting younger people to participate in the genre. **The International Blues Challenge**, held every year in Memphis is a good thing and helps with this but there needs to be more done. **Blues in the Schools** programs also help with exposing kids to the blues. The Pandemic changed the entire music landscape, and while business is good, I feel like we all need to keep pushing to make it better and better. I also think that it is important to offer fans a mix of traditional and contemporary music. So many great young stars today that I want

the world to see, such **Selwyn Birchwood, D.K. Harrell, Toronzo Cannon, Annika Chambers, Kingfish, Eric Gales, Albert Castiglia, Mike Zito, Danielle Nicole, Mr. Sipp, Nikki Hill, Damon Fowler, JP Soars, Zach Person**, and the list goes on and on.

Jonnye: In this crazy world, you have stated, “I am a people person. I believe in treating people the way that I would like to be treated.” Is that mantra still achievable? Has it become more difficult?

Rick: Most of the buyers and artists that I work with are good people. There are certainly people that try my patience, but I am blessed to work with a lot of great people all over the world. I do believe in the *Golden Rule* and it has worked for me for 33 years in this crazy business and I ain’t ready to abandon it yet... But do not mistake my Southern Charm for a weakness. I can still get across my point and be polite and courteous to people at the same time. It is my secret weapon!!! I rarely have to show my fangs, but when I do, you will know it. I insist on my agents treating buyers and artists with the utmost respect as well, but I have surrounded myself with good people and they know how to treat people with respect as well. My office manager, Michelle Kiser, has been with me for 22 years. She was God Sent! Jake Lankheit, my senior agent, has been with me for 18 years and has really made me proud by his leading by example, especially coming out of the pandemic. I am a lucky guy to have them and everyone else on my seven person staff at Intrepid.

Jonnye: I also understand that your father used to say, “What comes around, goes around.” How has that affected you? Do you hear that voice when weaving your way through various issues in your life?

Rick: Oh, I hear my father’s voice ALL the time when I am dealing with customers and clients.... But he did not teach me the “*What comes around goes around*” statement. I have just seen a lot of people in this business get bitten by KARMA. Be careful what you wish for, you just might get it! Karma’s a Bitch! Respect is a two-way street. My Dad did teach me my work ethic though and taught me by example how to go to work hard and earn a living every day. That is what he did for 40 plus years in the hardware business. Sadly, he never taught me how to get rich quick. With that said, I credit him with my being in business for almost 30 years now. I must be doing something right. I hope that I have made him proud! I hope that I have made both of my parents proud. I am fortunate enough to have both still in my life. He was hard on me and critical of me, but I think that after all these years, I have earned his (their) respect.



If you have new or gently used instruments to donate or would like to make a cash donation, we ask you to support the BSWPA’s Pitch program (Putting Instruments in the Children’s Hands). Young people are waiting for assistance to explore their music aspirations. Please help us to make a difference!!! Contact: bswpa.org

Let’s do it for the kids!!!

Jonnye: Your agency has won many awards and has received many nominations for the music that you represent. What in your mind (we all have a favorite event/happening in life) has been your biggest achievement/award over the years.

Rick: Awards are all fine and dandy, and I am humbled by them, but honestly, my biggest achievements have been holding the fort down when things got tough, like losing an agent and managing to replace them with someone with equal or better ability. Also, navigating my employees and artists thru the pandemic and coming out of it relatively unscathed. It was tough on every one of us but we all stuck together and got thru it.

Jonnye: Your stable of artists is ever impressive. What are your requirements for taking on a new act. Max Schang and Bill Evanochko both asked what do you look for when signing an act to your roster. Do you look at their record sales and reviews in Blues magazines (Max)? What does it take to stand above the others to get noticed?

Rick: Thanks, I appreciate that. Lots of things come into play when signing an artist to Intrepid. First off, we have to like what they are doing, like their music, and like what they do on stage. It is hard to represent someone if you do not care for their music and their live performance. Secondly and certainly VERY important, we look at record sales (SoundScan), legitimate social media followers, record label support, Spotify monthly listeners, and tour history/numbers. We then try and determine if we can better their career and what type of ceiling they may have. While I may have the final say, I listen to my other agents in the office and generally it is a group decision.

Jonnye: How has the internet and digital affected your bookings (Max Schang)?

Rick: In Every Way you can imagine. I kinda covered this in an earlier question when you asked me about changes in the business since the 90's, but the digital age has made it much easier on me to send someone information quickly on an artist or send out contracts and get them back quicker. Back in the day, we had to print up press kits all the time on a copy machine. I wore those suckers out, seriously! They were expensive too, but they were a must. We have not used a copy machine now in the past 12-15 years for anything. Today you send a link with a press kit, website, music, etc.... with a click of a button. It certainly saves a lot of time and money. Deposits and balances are now generally sent via wire instead waiting on a check to come in the mail and waiting for it to clear.

Jonnye: What is it that you promise to deliver to your artists?

Rick: Honesty, Integrity, Respect, and Accountability. PERIOD!

Jonnye: What is your take on young guitarists dominating the industry and the sound?

Rick: Isn't that kind of the way it has always been? Young or old, I mean the guitarist and/or front man or front woman generally get most of the attention in any band going back to the beginning of time. I guess there are exceptions to the rule, but I think the guitar will always dominate Rock Artists and Blues Artists. If a frontman also happens to play guitar, they are kinda considered to be the total package, so to speak. I think the guitar will always be a focal point on any stage.

Need more music???
Check out the Blues event calendar at bswpa.org.

Jonnye: In your opinion, what is the current state of the Blues in the Blues genre community.

Rick: The current state of the blues is good but could be much better. Club attendance can be up and down but there are more festivals than I have ever known there to be. I think this will continue to grow. We lost some over the past few years due to the pandemic but I see them continue to pop up all the time and do not think this will change anytime soon. I do worry sometimes that, just like in any other business, Band prices continue to go up which causes ticket prices to go up and, in many situations, people must make choices and cannot attend all the shows they would like to. This is not a Blues problem though as much as it is a music industry problem. Prices are up everywhere in all industries though whether it is the grocery store, Lowes, Home Depot, Dept Stores, etc. ... You name it.

Jonnye: Why are there so many new white Blues artists dominating the Blues festivals?

Rick: Sadly, like it or not, the blues is supported by a predominately white audience. I think many white kids back in the 70's and 80's would go to see someone like **Muddy Waters, Buddy Guy, Albert Collins** or one of **The 3 Kings** and want to play like they did. As **Keith Richards** would say, *"If you don't know the blues... there's no point in picking up the guitar and playing rock and roll or any other form of popular music."* Back then, I imagine most young black kids were more into Funk, Soul, and R&B. Back then, I also would imagine it could have been scary for an all-black band to be traveling thru areas in the deep south. Having a white guy in the band did not hurt when it came to the way they were treated in restaurants, hotels or by the police. I was obviously just a kid back then, but I have heard stories from many of the artists I have worked for and know it must have been tough at times. Hell, I still hear disturbing stories today! Sad! I also think many black folks probably would like to forget about the Blues as it reminds them of tougher times. After all, the music came out of the cotton fields of the deep south. With that said, there are still many Great black blues artists out there today such as **Kingfish, Lil Ed Williams, Mr Sipp, Keb Mo, Sugaray Rayford, Annika Chambers, Selwyn Birchwood, Shemekia Copeland, Eric Gales, Toronzo Cannon, Ruthie Foster, D.K. Harrell** and **Kenny Neal**, just to name a few. You will find all these artists playing Blues Festivals around the world. "Most" of the respected blues Festivals out there offer a variety of Blues, from traditional to contemporary, black, and white, male, and female. I think most fans want a mix. I know I do. I mean, do you want every band to sound the exact same way? Every genre of music evolves, whether it is country, rock, blues, jazz, whatever. I think that is a good thing. I like to offer my buyers a variety of music as everyone is different and all have different likes and different ways of programming their event.

Jonnye: What will you want your footprint to be years from now in the industry?

Rick: I'd like to hope when it's all over that people will say, *"He did things his way, he did it with Integrity and Honesty, and he was a good guy!"*

13.



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Blues in the Square

Saturday September 30th, 2023

Saturday September 30th was certainly 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. Three local blues acts, the Max Schang Band, The Blues Drivers and the 2023 BSWPA Blues Challenge champions, The Bail Jumpers, would perform from mid-afternoon (4PM) until after the stars were out (9PM).

The weather gods delivered a spectacular day, plenty of sunshine with enjoyable temperatures all day and into the evening.

Market square was bustling early as set up and preparations for all vendors began at 1:30PM. Not surprising, first on the scene for the BSWPA was our current President and fearless leader Jonnye Webber, followed by past President Jim Hamel.

Minutes later, board member, Spike Miller arrived in the square towing his familiar trailer packed as always with the Blues Society's tents, tables, and merch. Not far behind Spike, were Vice President Tuck Majeran, Treasurer Cyndi Fink and board members Sue Mayer and Barbara Gangone.

While Spike, and the Blues Society gang got the tables and merch set up, the other vendors were busy as well readying their displays. Lastly, The Downtown Partnership crew were hard at work signing in vendors, directing traffic in Market Square and erecting the tent and lights that would serve as the stage and amphitheater for the day.

Also early on the scene, courtesy of The Blues Drivers, was a white U-Haul van packed with the backline, including PA speaker tops, subwoofers, monitors, drums, amps, mixers, microphones, cables, cords, stands and plenty of electronics to run the entire operation.

Jim Hamel, along with board member Erik Zettelmayer and sound engineer Spencer McNeill worked unloading the van and setting up the mountain of equipment that would soon carry the wonderful sounds of the blues to Market Square. Completion came at 3:30PM just in time for a sound check with The Max Schang Band.

As she has done many times, BSWPA President, Jonnye Weber was first on the mic, kicking off what would be a wonderful afternoon and evening of Blues music. Jonnye welcomed the crowd, previewed the day's musical lineup, and welcomed Max Schang's band to the stage.

Max along with Terry McDonald on bass and Steve McMurray on drums got the crowd on their feet early with an upbeat, jumping performance of blues classics combining



Max's vocals and masterful guitar tone. Mid-way through the set, Max welcomed a surprise guest, Tuck Majeran to the stage. With a case of harps in hand, Tuck grabbed a mic and added a new dimension to the mix by delivering plenty of great sounding harmonica lines.



Next up were The Blues Drivers. The band is led by Rob Williams (Vocals and Guitar) and features Erik Zettelmayer (Guitar), Nick Sarno (Bass) and Bill Henry (Drums). The Blues Drivers, dialed up their edgy blues tone for 75 minutes of unique versions of blues fan favorites along with several new originals.



As evening turned to night, The Bail Jumpers kept the party going, the crowd on their feet and showed why they are heading to Memphis in January to represent the Blues Society of Western Pennsylvania in the International Blues Challenge. Jeffrey Claypool's harp rang out through the square and his strong vocals were complimented by Joseph Riskosky (Guitar) and Ron Leard (Bass). While Jeff, Joe and Ron sang and led the tunes, Joe-Ben Mattos held down a solid, steady blues beat on drums.

The wonderful day of sunshine, shopping and most importantly blues music in downtown Pittsburgh ended just after 9PM 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



Harptoberfest 2023

I must admit, when Tuck Majeran told me he was planning to do a Blues Harp showcase back in 2015, my reaction was skeptical at best. My doubts were assuaged, however, when the first two editions of what would eventually become the annual event, we now know as Harptoberfest were well attended and well received. After the torch was passed to me in 2018, I had a goal of continued growth, eventually wanting to be able to bring in a headliner from out of the area to supplement the fine Harmonica talent we have here in Western PA. That goal came to fruition over the last few years, and this event which is near and dear to my heart, continues a path of growth in quality as well as popularity. Thanks for getting the ball rolling, Tuck!

Landing back at its original location, Harptoberfest 2023 took on a slightly different approach from years past. Since the local players who I had planned to invite to take part in this year's event were not available - I believe it is important to rotate the local players to keep things fresh - I decided to bring in two pro level Harmonica front men from out of town. In addition to doing my usual duties as the event's emcee, I would also do a set of music with the excellent house band led as always by Pittsburgh's Jimmy Adler, something I have not done since 2017.



First, let's take a look at that house band. As mentioned, Jimmy Adler was at the helm with his authentic Blues guitar stylings, making sure the band was on point as they played solid support roles behind the three featured Blues Harmonica players and singers. In addition to my pal, Jimmy, this year's band was composed of "Sudden Steve" Binsberger on Piano and Organ, Bob Insko on Upright Acoustic Bass, and Youngstown's JR Richley behind the Drums. In this neck of the woods, it does not get much better than that!

Although I typically warm up the band with a song or two to get things underway, I was thrilled to be able to play a larger role this year with a set of mostly original Blues tunes along with a couple well received classics. While I am not willing to comment on my own performance, I can say that the band was rock solid, and the energy coming from the crowd was the perfect fuel for the fire we ignited within the walls of the legendary Moondog's Pub. Nuff said!



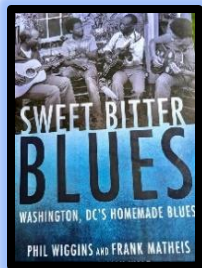
After a brief respite for the house band, up jumped Jake Friel from Central Ohio. Jake is no stranger to stages large or small, and has been blowing harp and singing the Blues at a high level from a very young age. Man, can this young cat blow, and he has been doing so to much acclaim across the country as well as overseas, performing and recording with some of the genre's greats. Did I mention Jake's vocals? What a strong vocal presence this dude has – dripping with soul and a hint of grit and gravel that many singers would kill for! When I asked Jake if he would like to be a part of this event, there was no hesitation in his very enthusiastic, "Hell yeah!" It was his first time performing in the Pittsburgh market, and I would hope it will not be his last!



Another short break, then Connecticut's Ryan Hartt took his place at center stage. Ryan and his band, The Blue Hearts, have been burning up the stages of New England since the turn of the century. Vocals, Harmonica, Guitar, Songwriting – Ryan's got the complete package! Just like Jake before him, his first time on the stage of Moondog's exceeded my already high expectations. The energy that he brought to the stage was matched not only by the house band, but the attending crowd as well, especially when he broke out the Chromatic Harp for some heavy-grooving Jump Blues. Ryan has been hearing about this annual event from fellow New Englander, Bass player and Harptoberfest alum, Mike Law, and we were finally able to work out the details that enabled his trip to Western PA for the weekend.

Of course, the evening would not be complete without an encore featuring all three Harp players on the bandstand. Sharing vocal duties and passing the microphone back and forth, this special finale featured some Sonny Boy Williamson II, Jimmy Reed, and the audience was even treated to a Jimmy Adler number as he belted out his much-loved hit, Cordelia. The crowded room was not disappointed, and it showed in their very enthusiastic response.

A huge shout of "Thanks!" to all the talented musicians, Ronny "Moondog" Esser, the Blues Society of Western PA, and of course, everyone who made it to this epic show! Hope to see you all next year for Harptoberfest 2024! ~ Charlie Barath



Bitter Sweet Blues

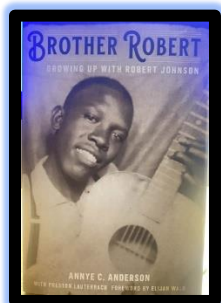
Phil Wiggins and Frank Matheis

A while back, I received a copy of the book “Sweet Bitter Blues” from my great friend, Phil Wiggins, and I added it my pile of books to read. If you are a real fan of American Blues music, this autobiographical of the East coast Blues scene over the last few decades, specifically in the DC region, is one that you most DEFINATELY put on your must-read list!

Phil is extremely open, honest, and forthcoming in his accounting of his personal experiences- both positive and negative. Together with co-author Frank Matheis, Phil shares his experiences not just as the vastly experienced musician and Harmonica innovator that he is, but also gives the reader a glimpse of his heart and mind. This book does not read like a finely polished novel, it is closer to a word for word transcript of an honest conversation between two friends, which I found quite refreshing.

I consider Phil to be a good friend and a mentor, and I think that you would be doing yourself by obtaining this book and reading this story of his life up to the present day.

~Charlie Barath



Brother Robert- Growing up with Robert Johnson

Ann C. Anderson

I finally got a copy of Brother Robert – **Growing up with Robert Johnson** by Ann C. Anderson. I have mentioned this before... I was opening for Muddy Water’s Blues Band at Paul’s Mall in Boston, probably around 1977ish. It was a week-long residence there next to the jazz workshop- The Heath Brothers were playing there. One night a lady walked in the ‘green room’ or the backstage hangout (!) and wanted to talk with Mr. Waters. Her name was Ann C. Anderson. I happened to be sitting right next to Muddy when she presented herself and pulled out a previously unknown photo of Robert Johnson. Muddy looked at it and exclaimed, “That’s him. That’s him!” The room all of sudden got as quiet as a tumbleweed blowing across a cotton field. We were across a cotton field. We were all dumbfounded at being witnesses to this historic revelation. ~Anthony Geraci

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ATTITUDE SOULFUL FEMME

Stevee Wellons and Cheryl Rinovato, the two soloists in the dynamic duo Soulful Femme, are more than just a dynamic singing duo. They are seasoned artists in themselves, each with tremendous experience in the music business, who happened to join forces and found an ideal chemistry. Stevee Wellons has been singing in various bands since the late 1970s, including The Rhythm Machine, Jumpstreet, Shaker, The Cruisers, The Elmonics, The Real Deal Band and The Stevee Wellons Band. Over the course of her career, she shared stages with the Dazz Band, Cameo, Peaches and Herb and Howard Hewett. She has released two solo albums with 'Stevee' and 'All Natural Ingredients'. In addition, she recently wrote and provided backing vocals for the artist known as Sun King Rising, A.K.A John Blangero. She previously taught at the Afro-American Music Institute and is currently an adjunct professor at Allegheny County Community College. Cheryl Rinovato brings an equally impressive resume to the table. She has been a guitar student since she was nine and later became a graduate of the prestigious Berklee School of Music. She received the prestigious Jim Weber Award for blues guitarist of the year three times and claims extensive studio experience while quoting early influences such as Jimi Hendrix, Duane Allman, Tower of Power, and Burt Bacharach. In addition, she is a Delaney Guitars approved artist who has two signature models, designed with her in mind. The two met at a Blues Society event in 2014 and it clicked right away. A year later, they participated in the International Blues Competition in Memphis. Their first album 'It Is Well with My Soul' was released in 2021. They then consistently toured, shared stages with Tommy Castro and opened for acts such as Robert Cray, Mavis Staples, Ana Popovic, Samantha Fish, Shemekia Copeland, Joanne Shaw Taylor, Bernard Allison, Mike Zito, Albert Castiglia and Jeremiah Johnson. Their latest album 'Attitude' was recorded by Grammy nominee Dave Gross at the Fat Rabbit Studios in New Jersey, with guitar virtuoso Albert Castiglia as producer.

Stevee and Cheryl open their new album with the title track 'Attitude,' an energetic funky song. With tight percussion, drummer Michael Bram provides a pounding beat. Bassist Matt Raymond provides the delicious groove with his deep funky bass line. Stevee Wellons has a powerful and good voice and sings the song with great conviction. Producer Albert Castiglia's excellent guitar solo fits like a glove in this handsome opener. The rhythm goes into heights for the raw boogie rocker 'Not Like You'. With energetic percussion, Michael Bram determines the tempo of the song. Thanks to Albert Castiglia and Cheryl Rinovato, a lot of tearing guitar work can also be heard here. The first of two covers is the 'Insane Asylum' written by Willie Dixon. In 1968 Willie Dixon and Koko Taylor released this beautiful duet on record. Now in 2023, Stevee Wellons and Kevin Burt breathe new life into this nearly five-minute duet. It is a heartbreaker that is sung by both Stevee and Burt with a lot of passion and emotion. Then it gets funky again with the midtempo song 'Can't Get There from Here'. With his deep funky bass line, Matt Raymond once again provides a nice groove. Guitarist Cheryl Rinovato is the entire song explicitly and excellently present with handsome Wah Wah sent guitar work. It is like Cheryl's guitar having a conversation with singer Stevee Wellons. **18.**

With two beautiful Wah Wah-controlled solos, the guitarist puts her excellent instrumental even more in the spotlight. 'Breathe Again' is a dreamy soulful ballad, which evokes memories of Sade's music. This time Cheryl Rinovato colors the song with no overworked guitar work, but with very fine and sensitive guitar fillings and ditto solo. Dave Gross enriches the entire song with fine work on the Hammond. The soulful ballad 'Loser's Game' is again sung in a beautiful way by Stevee Wellons. Here too, Cheryl Rinovato's guitar work is a feast for the ear. Both Albert Castiglia and Tommy Castro are present in the James Brown cover 'Talkin' Loud and Saying Nothing'. 'Talkin' Loud and Saying' Nothing is a funk song written by James Brown and Bobby Byrd. Recorded in 1970 by Brown and the original J.B.'s with Byrd in backing vocals and updated with a new melody, it was released twice as a two-part single in 1972. It also appeared on the album 'There It Is'. Soulful Femme remains close to the groove of James Brown's original version. In this nice and grooving and very danceable duet, Tommy Castro and Stevee Wellons provide a strong vocal part. They feel good about each other, their voices match well with each other and you can feel the fun splashing off like that. Matt Raymond is once again brilliant on the bass guitar. Cheryl Rinovato with clever riffy guitar work and Albert Castiglia with a sublime string solo complement each other in an excellent way. 'Talkin' Loud and Saying Nothing' is a song where you cannot sit still.

Cheryl Rinovato kicks off the excellent 'Walk Out' with psychedelic guitar sounds. She continues to eagerly sprinkle the entire song with Wah Wah-controlled refills and her Wah-controlled solo will once again appeal to many guitar lovers. With energetic and compelling percussion, Michael Bram determines the pace of 'Walk Out' and with her powerful voice Stevee Wellons sings the song with great conviction. 'Walk Out' is one of the highlights on this album. In 'Dysfunction Funk' we get to hear horns on this album for the first and only time with trumpeter Doug Woolverton and saxophonist Mark Earley. Contrary to the title, 'Dysfunction Funk' is not a funk song, it rather has a lazy reggae vibe. The soulful 'Crazy' is a very personal song, which Stevee Wellons wrote when she was in a very dark period. Fortunately, she now lives in the light and enjoys life to the fullest. There is therefore a lot of emotion in Stevee's voice when she sings 'Crazy'. Cheryl Rinovato spices up the entire song with piercing guitar fillings. The album concludes with the radio-friendly 'Time to Walk', in which Cheryl Rinovato once again shines with a jazz-tinted solo on the guitar. 'Attitude' is an album that will certainly appeal to the taste of the funk and soul lovers. Stevee Wellons has a powerful and very beautiful soul voice and Cheryl Rinovato is a very good guitarist. In addition, both ladies also write strong songs. Soulful Femme is currently still an unknown duo here, but that could change after 'Attitude'. ~Walter Vanheuckelom

Trivia Corner: Colorful nicknames have always had an important place in the Blues. Match each artist with his assumed moniker!

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|-------------------------|------------------|-----|
| a. McKinley Morganfield | 1. The Iceman | |
| b. Albert Collins | 2. The Black Ace | |
| c. Iverson Minter | 3. Muddy Waters | |
| d. B.K. Turner | 4. Louisiana Red | 19. |



Congratulations to Billy Evnanochko for his being the 2023 inductee into the Beaver Valley Musicians Hall of Fame and being honored for his contributions to music.

Trivia Answer:

***A-3: Mud Morganfield** was dubbed 'Muddy Waters' by his maternal grandmother, Delia Frant, because he was always playing in the water of marshy Issaguena County, Mississippi.

***B-1: Albert Collins'** first single, in 1958, was titled "The Freeze." The concept quickly caught on and he went on to record instrumentals called "Sno-cone" and "Icy Blue" before coming up with the million- selling single "Frosty" in 1962. Most of his album titles played on the theme as well as Ice Pickin', Frostbite, Frozen Alive, etc.

***C-4: Iverson Minter** was born in the South, Louisiana Red was orphaned at an early age and grew up with his grandmother in Pittsburgh. Just as he experimented with various Blues Styles, Red also tried out a variety of stage names before settling on this one, allegedly because of his love of Louisiana Hot Sauce.

***D-2: Babe Turner** was a Texas acoustic guitarist who had a radio show in Fort Worth in the 1950's and who recorded an album for Arhoolie in 1960. His nom de Blues came from his 1936 single, "Black Ace".



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contact us at Bswpa.org

'WE' need you! The Blues needs you!

"The Blues are the true facts of life expressed in words and song, inspiration, feeling, and understanding."

~ Willie Dixon

