

BSWPA BLUESLETTER

Blues News You Can Use ... From the Burgh



BSWPA BLUESLETTER

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Wowing the Crowd! One Day, One Song At a time.... Enjoying what she does!!!

It had been hours since we first hit Memphis to attend our first International Blues Challenge. The BSWPA's acts had played their best that first night. WE, the Pittsburgh entourage, were wandering up and down Beale Street, catching as many as acts as we could. I soon found myself breaking away from our Pittsburgh pack of Blues fans. My steps were taking me down the street to see none other than my friend, **Barbara Blue**. Hailing from Pittsburgh, she has been

crowned the **Queen of Beale Street**. That title was hard earned playing five nights a week at Silky's on Beale Street.

I found a seat and took in the boisterous, rambunctious crowd. Everyone was at full tilt. The joint was jumping to the max. I, too, was caught up in the moment. The crowd sang along with her songs. They high fived. They called out to her. Suddenly, I had an idea!!! I called the waitress over. I gave the waitress a tip for her to take another tip to BB Blue. I scribbled my song request on a cocktail napkin. Dutifully, the waitress presented it to Barbara. BB looked at the paper, looked up and looked around. She threw back her head. Twisted her neck a little. Loosened up her throat. It was impressive to see her warming up. Then she let loose with the most impressive rendition of "At Last".

The joint immediately became so quiet that as they say, you could hear a pin drop. Everyone stopped midsentence. Their attention was riveted on none other than Pittsburgh's songstress, Barbara Blue. Afterwards, BB made her way to my table. She asked what I had been thinking, asking for that song. I said that I wanted them to hear you sing, really sing. It was an awesome awaking. The applause was thunderous. Yes, Barbara Blue showed them what she really had!!They begged for more of the same.

Fast forward to several Blues Music Award gatherings later. Barbara graciously shared a seat at her reserved table. The year that she emceed and received her 'star' on Beale Street, Barbara in true regal, queen-like form had the entire entourage (many from Pittsburgh) arriving with a flourish at the big shindig in horse drawn carriages. WE definitely stopped traffic that night. Barbara made her presence known and that she should. Heads turned. Barbara Blue had arrived!!!! As always, Barbara Blue had left her mark, wowing the crowd. Deserving her many awards and rewards, Barbara Blue played five nights a week on Beale Street for twenty-three plus years.

Jonnye: Who or what inspired you to first sing the blues?

Barbara Blue: This first thought that comes to mind is MY LIFE! Especially the first 6 months. I was born with the blues. One could even say that I was singing the blues. I was born with 6-month colic where a baby cries constantly for 3 or more hours at a time. (Experts are not sure what causes colic, but here are some possible explanations... Acid reflux, gassy baby, food allergies and tobacco smoke can all be causes of discomfort.) I credit this to my strong and powerful voice. My parents always had music in the house Elvis, Peggy Lee, Sinatra, Dean Martin, Johnny Mathis, Johnny Cash, Eddie Arnold, Ray Charles and the Beatles, either on the record player, radio or TV. Music was always playing. My father would sing barber shop quartet songs with my Uncle Dave Glavin (Yes, the father of the Great Pittsburgh Baritone singer, Kevin Glavin), or they would sing Irish songs, Patriotic songs and, at times, pop songs. There was always music. My beautiful sweet mother would hum all day while she did chores, either along with the radio or just acapella. I don't think you realize

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how much your surroundings influence you as a small child until you get older. Other blues inspirations... I was always the tallest and biggest all of my life (tough when you are growing up). Church was also a great inspiration. I grew up in the Catholic church where there was not much room for gospel but ... it was a start. I was then blessed to be taken downtown to St Mary's of the Point for the Sunday Folk Mass. That experience was so enlightening that I started to listen to more. I soon found the sounds of the Staple Singers and Sister Rosetta Stone. What an eyeopener!! Along the way, I found Janis when I was 9-10 years old. I was mesmerized by her energy and the freeness of her performances. I then listened to a lot of Jazz. I soon found Billie Holiday. I kept going after hearing the sounds of Sarah Vaughn, Nancy Wilson, Etta James, Dinah Washington. The Bird, The Monk, Stan Getz soon caught my attention. I am a saxophone addict!! I then found Katie Webster, Carol Fran, Sippie Wallace, Bonnie Raitt. I am sure that I am missing someone. Other great finds were Willie Dixon, Muddy Waters, Charlie Musselwhite, Elmore James, T-Bone, Lonnie Brooks, Little Milton, James Cotton, Big Joe Turner, Jimmy McCracklin, Stevie Ray, L'I Ed, Room Full of Blues, John Mayall, Johnny Winter, Ronnie Earl, The Allman Bros, Dr John and just about ANYTHING NOLA!!!! I am sure I am getting outta hand here AND this is just the beginning! I have over one thousand CD's that I have kept over the years that never get old!

Jonnye: Describe your first official Blues gig.

BB: Honestly..... I can't remember exact dates, times or places. I am pretty sure my first "OFFICIAL" blues gig was in Detroit, MI. I was probably playing with the "City Limits Blues Band". I did gigs before that but it was mostly solo gigs, just me and my guitar. Crazy, I just picked my guitar up yesterday ... an Ovation made in New Hartford, Connecticut. USA. I do not play in public. It is mostly for writing songs. I work with GREAT guitar players! I am really a beginner compared to them!!

Jonnye: Who do you look to in today's world for inspiration to flourish and stay grounded?

BB: I would have to say my beautiful mother, Rose. She just went to heaven recently (April 19, 2021). She was smart, strong, kind and loving to heights most folks never reach. My Mum was 90 years young. She did not worry. She would always say just give it to Jesus, he will take care of you. And ...she was always right, never failed. My Mum was my biggest fan!! She was always in my corner.

Jonnye: What song is your go-to song for inspiration and joy? Which one do you go to when feeling low and need comforting?

BB: I have so many. It really depends on the situation. 'Sweet, Strong & Tight', one of my songs, can always make me smile inside. 'Come into My Kitchen' takes me way back to the bottom of my roots. 'Drunken Angel' because sooooo many of my friends and fans enjoy it. 'Amazing Grace' is always a go to for peace and strength. Now, since my sweet mama went to heaven, one of her favorites was "Me & Jesus". It will stay in my top 10.

Jonnye: How did you land in Memphis, TN?

BB: FATE That is all I can say! I had been there almost a dozen times. One May night in 1997 changed my life forever. My good friend, Becky, and I had been in NOLA for Jazz Fest. I read that Tracy Nelson was going to be in Memphis for the *Memphis In May Beale Street Music Festival*. Becky loved her. I wanted to see what all the fuss was about. We left NOLA a day early and headed to Memphis on a Sunday Morning in May. We made it just in time to see Tracy. That evening, I went into Silky O'Sullivan's. I knew that I could pay the dueling piano players money to sit in and sing a song. I sang 'Me and Bobby McGee'. The room was filled to capacity. The crowd went wild! It was cool! Silky came up to me with this wild look in his eyes and said 'can you do that again?'. My reply...

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'I sure can. You buy me a beer.' He did and I sang again. I believe it was the same song. The same thing happened. The growing crowd went to standing room only. When I finished, they went wild!!!! Silky said 'can you wait here a minute and do that again? I'm gonna call my wife.' I said sure, another beer please!! When Joellyn, his wife, arrived, I did sing it again. They offered me a job right then and there! I came back to Pittsburgh and told my mama and daddy that I was going to Memphis, Tennessee to sing for six months. That gig turned into **23 plus years**. Crazy, 10 more records (11 total) and 4 trips around the world. It has been a **GREAT** ride so far!

Jonnye: You have toured in Australia and in Italy, what are your thoughts about your experiences and how you were received. How do the Blues fans across the pond differ from the American fans?

BB: I have also performed in Norway, England, Tasmania, Spain and fourteen Blues Cruises. I must say that traveling abroad and having '**The Reigning Queen of Beale Street**' as your title has its perks. BUT... no matter where I have been as a U.S. Blues performer, the respect level has been very high. We are always treated like royalty. I LOVE to travel abroad and perform, representing my country and The Blues!! It is always a high honor.

Jonnye: What are your plans now that you are back in Pittsburgh?

BB: I am working on some new material and a new band of sorts, "Barbara Blue With Mark Felger & Friends. We have a debut date on Thursday, August 19th at On the Lawn ... Season Finale Closer for the Westmoreland Cultural Trust. Also, we are taking gigs all over. We head to the Gladstone, MO Blues Festival, June 18, with my friend and special guest Johnny Rawls. We have a few gigs in Memphis TBA ... soon!! So.... one day at a time. I have lots on my plate at the moment. Hopefully, I will be in full swing in 2022!!! YEAH!!

Jonnye: As a female performer in a male dominant genre, what is your advice to those up-and-coming artists? Was there ever a time when you wanted to quit? If so, what motivated you to move on? What have you learned that you wish someone had told you long ago?

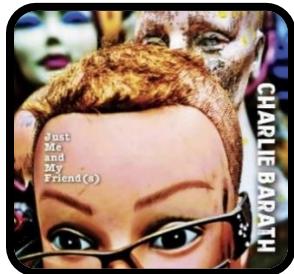
BB: Stay true to yourself, do your homework and practice everything! Do not head down this road for the \$\$\$\$\$\$. No, I am not a quitter!!! Yes, you have some bad days, take a few financial hits, get passed over. That is the way the cookie crumbles. It is sad. The best do not always get recognized, male or female, in ALL genres. I do it because I love it. I know I am very good at it and give lots of folks love and joy. What else is there??? Only the devil's work, in my book. Folks that lie, thief, claw and sacrifice their souls to live a lie ... never has been my way. I sleep really good at night!! AMEN!!! My regrets are few. I have learned that it takes all kinds to make the wheels go 'round. Not everyone out there is 100% skilled but if they give 110% to their craft, there is something to be said for that. I wish I would have learned this earlier. I do not believe that it is something someone can tell you. It must be taught through experience and walking down the road of life with your eyes and heart wide open. I will perform till the day I die even if it is just at the old folks' home where I will be living!! HA!!! A good positive attitude all the way around is a gift you can give yourself. It will radiate out through your performances and that takes the cake!

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Charlie Barath - Just Me and My Friend(s)

Co-produced by Al Torrence and Charlie Barath

Recorded and mixed by Al Torrence at Music Garden Studios in New Brighton, PA. Mastered by Garrett Haines at Treelady Studios

I remember a song from my youth with lyrics about “a little bit of country, and a little bit of rock and roll.” Variety is truly the spice of life, and Charlie Barath’s new album, **Just Me and My Friends**, delivers. Blues? Check. Rock? Check. Jazz? Check. Country & Western Swing? Check. Folk & Americana? Check. And at 17 songs, *Just Me and My Friends* has something for everyone, making it a compilation of American music at its finest.

Charlie Barath is a Hohner Harmonica artist and known as one of the best harmonica players in the area, earning him several wins as a solo/duo artist at the BSWPA Blues Challenge (2016 solo & 2017 with WV guitarist Chris Sutton) followed by trips to Memphis for the International Blues Challenge. Charlie has several band projects and performs frequently in the area with his own blues band and with the Americana trio the Millbillys.

As Charlie’s first full length studio release, it is truly a collection of “him and his friends.” In addition to Charlie’s diverse harmonica chops and vocals, this album features a fine selection of musicians from the southwestern Pennsylvania region and beyond. The musicians chosen for each song were carefully selected to highlight their individual styles and talents on their respective instruments. Some highlights include local favorite Jimmy Adler on several of the rockin’ blues tracks, bringing his unique guitar style to the selections which will have you on your feet in no time. Sam Stucky, local bluegrass/Americana guitarist, highlights his picking talents on several tracks. No country or Western swing song is complete without some pedal steel guitar, which is brilliantly added by Pete Freeman. The acoustic blues fingerstyle and slide guitar master Chris Sutton of Huntington, WV lends his talents to several tracks. The jazz-tinged “Heart of Mine” includes Bob Banerjee on violin and Max Schang adding some gypsy-style guitar licks. Local piano wizard John “the Junkman” Burgh highlights his talents on several tracks. The rhythm section is also well represented with a lot of talent, including long-term collaborator Gordon Grottenthaler on drums and fellow Millbilly, Jeff Scheller on acoustic bass. Former Pittsburgher Mike Law adds both upright and electric bass to several tracks. Fiddles by Ray Bruckman enhance several tracks. Even Roger Day’s tuba is featured, including the well-orchestrated instrumental “Briar Hopper,” which gives the image of a bunny hopping through a briar patch! With 19 musicians and over 13 instruments represented on the album, hearing all this talent come together on each track is a pleasure for the ears!

The variety of songs styles and musicianship on this release makes every track entertaining, but the real key that makes this album so enjoyable is the imagery in Charlie’s songwriting. Charlie’s knowledge of diverse musical styles shine on every tune. Straight-up harmonica-driven blues about women, love, life on the road and juke-joint parties is well represented on “Travelin’ Woman” and “Have Ourselves a Ball. “No Smoking,” another blues rocker, gives a humorous twist to the recent establishment of no smoking laws in Pennsylvania. Early country blues is also well represented with the instrumental “Mississippi Bound” and “Sweet Nadine,” highlighting Charlie’s talents on harmonica with Chris Sutton’s fine guitar work. Western swing is well represented on “Losing’ my Mind Over You,” with some fine guitar work by Sam Stuckey and Pete Freeman. The intense opening track, “The Forgotten Man,” is a traditional blues work song about Chinese laborers on the Transcontinental Railroad, complete with gritty vocals by Chris Sutton. The clever lyrics in “Highball

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and a Covered Dish" will make this bluesy tune the theme song for babushka-headed grandmothers everywhere. Written about Charlie's mother, the imagery in this tune is timeless: "golumpki and haluski, kielbasa filled the air....." You'll be wanting a big plate of pierogis after spinning this tune.

The Americana tune "Ollie, Ollie" will bring back images of small-town childhood with fireflies, hide and seek, fishing and watching the clouds roll by. Charlie's humor is clearly evident in the country tune "She Drives me to Drink." And "Little Turtle Nightlight" is a real country tearjerker about a lost love. Make sure you have a handkerchief ready for this one! The Appalachia-style tune "Ohio" is a fantastic story about an early settler of the Ohio valley and will instantly bring you back to the forests of the frontier.

Finally, the last song on the album, "One Way Gal," is a touching tribute to the late acoustic blues guitarist Bill Weiner, who specialized in pre-war blues tunes. Recorded about 10 years ago with Bill on guitar, this performance featuring the duo is a great remembrance to the good friends we meet (and sometimes lose) along the way.

All this album has to offer is further enhanced by the production by Charlie and Al Torrence at Music Garden Studios in New Brighton, PA with mastering by Garrett Haines at Treelady Studios in Pittsburgh. The sound is clear and well balanced, with vocals out in front of the music and not muddied by excessive low end, making the lyrics easy to understand and enjoy. Despite the variety of musicians and instruments on this album, they have all been mixed well, giving each instrument space and clarity.

The songs, musicians, recording and diversity of styles presented on this release are a testament to Charlie's skills as a musician, songwriter, historian, and sometimes even a comedian! You'll be humming these songs in your head and tapping your toes even after the music has stopped. This fine collection of American music is meant to be shared and enjoyed by you and your friends!

The release date for the album is scheduled for this spring. Songs can also be previewed and downloaded in various file formats (even high resolution!) at Charlie's Bandcamp page, including several tracks that have already been released. Once released, CDs can be obtained directly from Charlie at any of his live shows. ~Cyndi Fink

Check out Charlie's pages for more news on the album and live performances:

<https://charliebarath.bandcamp.com/> <https://www.facebook.com/charliebarathharmonica>





Her Star is Shining Bright

The *Ruf Records Guitar Caravan* had just rolled into Moondog's. The music was sizzling. Mike Zito, leading the Caravan, soon welcomed a young lady to the stage. Quietly, demurely, she sauntered front and center. On the first note, her guitar came alive. She let loose with her amazing vocals and ever amazing music. The crowd roared their approval. **Ally Venable** certainly had made an impression, a big impression. She was just coming into her own back then. Her name, Ally Venable, was imprinted in our minds. Her name and her music have been soaring the world ever since. As a shining new star in the Blues world, she is one to follow.

Jonnye: You were a featured artist on Ruf's Blues Caravan tour a while ago. Tell us how that came about.

Ally: Yes, I was very excited to tour in Europe with other amazing musicians as well as my drummer, Elijah Owings. WE got to play in some beautiful places, and I actually grew as a guitar player because I performed my new songs as well as Kat & Ina's songs!

Jonnye: What opportunities have they provided?

Ally: I have enjoyed working with Ruf Records. Having their help and having help touring overseas and being able to put out music I love making is amazing.

Jonnye: You started playing guitar at such a young age (12). Do you feel that you have missed some of your childhood and youth? There are a lot of sacrifices that come with being a musician.

Ally: I think I did have an awesome childhood. I was involved with so many activities as a kid. My heart drew me towards music and that is what I stuck with.

Jonnye: You have been called an 'old soul guitar gunslinger' and yet you are still in your early twenties. Explain why your CD, Heart of Fire, is termed as defiant, passionate, raw and honest. What struggles did that CD help you to come to terms with/overcome?

Ally: Well, when I write songs, I try to write about what goes in my life. WE all go through things and it is okay to feel a certain way. I want my music to be a release for people. I loved how this 'Heart Of Fire' Album turned out.

Jonnye: You have worked with Kenny Wayne Shepherd, Devon Allman and Mike Zito. How has each shaped your way of defining your music and your songwriting?

Ally: I am very grateful to have such amazing musicians in my corner and I really love working with each one of them. I learn so much from watching them perform on stage and how they connect with their fans. It is really amazing.

Jonnye: What has been the biggest challenge as a young artist emerging onto the music scene?

Ally: Really just grinding it out. I so live for the grind. I work hard for everything that I do.

Jonnye: What is it that you envision for your future?

Ally: To continue making music and traveling the world, meeting new people, and to grow as a person.

Keep Movin On Bill Toms



Reading the Album Credits on Bill Toms new release, “**Keep Movin On**”, I thought, this is going to be good. I put on my headphones and sat back and listened ... again, and again, and again. I was not disappointed. (Here I am a few days later, still listening, and playing along with it on my guitar.) Bill, a fantastic singer, songwriter and guitarist, shines on his latest release, and the musicians on this album are some of Pittsburgh’s finest, the best of the best.

Produced and recorded by Rick Witkowski at Studio L in Weirton WV, this Album features Steve Binsberger, Tom Breiding, Jim Spears, Simone Masina, Tom Valentine, Phil Brontz, George Arner, Stephen Graham, Bernie Herr, Will Kimbrough, Stevee Wellons, and Bubs McKeg. All of them great players, and great people! Rick Witkowski, who did a masterful job as producer and engineer, also lent his talents on Drums, Bass, Keyboards, Vocals, and of course Guitar.

All songs were written by Bill Toms with the exception of “American Dreamer”, which was written by Bubs McKeg. Bubs also painted the album cover. If you haven’t seen Bubs’ paintings, you are missing out!

As a musician, I am not only impressed with the individual performances of all the musicians, I am equally impressed with their tone. This album captured every musician at their very best. Just listen to the opening track, “I Still Got Love”. Play it loud... listen with head phones. The vocals are strong. The drums and bass are tight and crisp. The guitars were perfect (I would know), the horns strong and tasteful and the organ is the icing on the cake, holding everything together. It does not end there. This Album is strong. Every song on this Album is strong. Each song majestically moves along, telling its own story. Song after song, as the emotion builds, the passion of each musician shows in every note they play. This is some of the best music I’ve heard in a very long time. Bill, Rick, Steve, Tom B, Jim, Simone, Tom V, Phil, George, Stephen, Bernie, Will, Stevee, and Bubs, Well Done! I do have a personal favorite. “I Keep Moving On”. www.Billtoms.com ~Matt Barranti

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Steady as he goes...

That saying, *Steady as he goes*, came to mind as if, by chance, we were sailing with the Blues when we first entered the Blues Music Awards long ago. The first person we chanced upon, **Paul Benjamin**, dapper in dress, ready with a smile, soft spoken and very knowledgeable. Little did I know that Paul was a spokesperson/champion for the Blues. His persona was all that I had hoped for as I plunged into the Blues world. Over the years, across the miles, whether on stage at the BMAs, the International Blues Challenge, at fests.... Paul has always been steady at the helm.

People welcomed what he said. They followed his lead. I, too, followed. A sit down was in order to share the thoughts and experiences about one of the major forces behind the scenes in the Blues world.

Jonnye: You were once the “Chairman of the Board” at the Blues Foundation. Please explain what the Foundation does, what their projects meant to you and what your ongoing role is. Did you have any special project that you hosted during your tenure?

Paul: *The Blues Foundation preserves blues heritage, celebrates blues recording and performance, expands worldwide awareness of the Blues, and ensures the future of the uniquely American art form.* That is the mission statement for the Blues Foundation. But it is so much more! They host the Blues Hall of Fame, the Blues Music Awards, the International Blues Challenge, the Heart Fund, Generation Blues, the Covid 19 Fund, Blues in The Schools, Keeping the Blues Alive Award and so much more. I have been involved with the Foundation for a number of years. I was elected as president of the Board for four terms under Jay Sielman, termed out for a few years, was re-elected to the Foundation Board and served as Chair of the Board under Barbara Newman.

Everything that the Blues Foundation does is so important to the Blues world. Without the leadership of the staff and the Board of Directors and its members who support the Foundation it would be impossible for the Blues to continue to move forward. I am now termed off the Foundation Board but I will stay involved as I sit on a couple of committees and will do whatever is asked of me to help with the Foundation. It has been an honor to be involved with the Blues Foundation.

Helping raise funds for the Blues Hall of Fame, being involved when Generation Blues was started and just being involved with the Foundation were highlights for me. Helping change the format on the Blues Music Awards show is something that I am also very proud of raising the money for the Little Milton statue and bench that sits in front of the Blues Foundation.

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Jonnye: Define what the Blues means to you.

Paul: The Blues to me is life, it is the heartbeat of life. The Blues has changed my life and has helped me be the person I am today.

Jonnye: Tell us about the many fests that you organize annually.

Paul: This year I will be involved with six festivals. March was Blues Bash at the Ranch in Brooksville, Florida. July will be the North Atlantic Blues in Rockland, Maine. The Gloucester Blues Festival in Massachusetts will be in August. A new festival will be taking place in Manchester, Vermont. October will be Camping with the Blues in Brooksville, Florida. The Bradenton Blues Festival in Bradenton, Florida will be in December.

Jonnye: What are the highlights of those offerings? What are the low points? What size staff do you use at each fest.

Paul: The highlights of any festival is making sure that the fans and artists are all enjoying each other at the same time. We always want everyone to have fun. The low points are weather. Yes, things happen at any live event and you adjust so that the fans never know what might be happening back stage. Sometimes, you just have to think outside of the box to make it all work. At the end of the day and you see the fans and artists thanking you for a great time, it makes it all worth it.

Each festival is different but no festival will ever be a success without the great volunteers that make it work. Some festivals it is a handful of volunteers and at others, it is fifty to sixty volunteers.

Jonnye: I listened to your interview about Eddie Shaw being sent your way for one of your earliest fests in Maine. Tell about your working with a Hall of Fame musician. How did he inspire you to continue?

Paul: Eddie Shaw was the first Blues artist that I was involved with bringing to Maine back in 1978/79. We became friends. Through him, I became involved in the Blues world. He introduced me to many artists over the years. Because of him, I started a record label, had a Blues club and started a Blues Festival. Eddie was a great friend that taught me a lot about the Blues. Working with him was a pleasure and I will be ever thankful. We were family. It was an honor to induct Mr. Eddie Shaw into the Blues Hall of Fame. He inspired me to be who I am today in the Blues world.

Jonnye: If I waved my magic wand, what Blues shows would you like to repeat and why?

Paul: There are a few shows that come to mind. The first one that sticks out happened in 2011. I did a one-day tribute to Chicago. On the bill was Lil Ed, Magic Slim, Nellie Tiger Travis, Eddie "The Chief" Clearwater, Billy Branch and the Brooks Family Reunion with Lonnie, Ronnie and Wayne. I told all the bands that no one could play Sweet Home Chicago. Billy Branch asked why no one could play it and what was I going to do if he played it. I told him that if he played it, I would not pay him the rest of his money. He looked at me and said 'but it is a day about Chicago'. I then said ...yes, it is and where will you be when Lonnie Brooks takes the stage? He smiled and said, I get it! When Lonnie was done with his set, I walked onto the stage and said to him, 'You know we cannot leave the stage without playing Sweet Home Chicago.' Lonnie said, 'What do you have in mind?' I brought back all the artists that played that day to join Lonnie on stage for 30 minutes of Sweet Home Chicago with Lonnie going into the crowd to get everyone to sing. It was magic! When it was done, Ronnie Baker Brooks said that it was the best show that Chicago never had!

A close 2nd was James Cotton and Eddie Shaw on stage together, two Hall of Fame artists. It was James Cotton's birthday. We brought all the artists that played that day back on stage, brought out a

cake and everyone was singing Happy Birthday. It brought tears to James. There are many others but those still stick out. (I was there, Paul, for James Cotton's birthday show. I had tears in my eyes. The comradery was unbelievable. Magical, yes!!!)

Jonnye: What role does your wife play in all of this? I see you smiling. I hear your well-spoken words. I know you have to have support.

Paul: That is easy question. Without the support and hard work of my wife Jean Benjamin, there would not be any festivals. She does so much behind the scenes that people cannot imagine. That behind-the-scenes work is so important to the festivals and shows that I do. I am a very lucky man to have her with me at all these events. She is my rock and I am very thankful for her.

Jonnye: Given the challenges of the past year, what are your projections for the Blues of the future.

Paul: With Covid-19, the year 2020 was a challenge for all. But with all of us helping and supporting the Blues, we will be able to make strides forward in 2021. I do see festivals, clubs and other venues reopening slowly and getting the artists back on the road where they want to be playing Blues in front of their fans. It will not happen overnight but it will happen. The Blues will never die.

Jonnye: How do you see your role in the future of the Blues?

Paul: My role in the future of the Blues will be what I have been doing for the past 42 years. I am not going anywhere. I love what I do and will continue to support the Blues anyway I can. *We all need to do what we can for the Blues because the Blues is a gift to the world.*

Jonnye: When talking with the acts that are going to the International Blues Challenge, what is your best advice for them given your many years of being an integral part of that operation?

Paul: My advice to them is to take it all in. The full experience, the clubs, the artists and the music. Go there to learn and meet new lifelong friends. Listen to their music, talk with them and tell them about you and your music. Attitude is everything! Always listen and learn. If you are competing, it is fine to go to the jams and sit in. If you are playing the next day, think twice about it. If you are the vocalist, do not get up there and sing. Save your vocals. As for the IBC, take in all that the Blues Foundation has to offer: the master classes, the seminars, a chance to talk with people in the Blues world at the speed table talks, and so much more. Go there to be part of a week filled with people from around the world that do what you do and that is to play the Blues. Like I said above, if you go there with the attitude that you are only there to win then you are there for the **wrong reason**. The International Blues Challenge is so much more!!!

~The words from a man, a steady man, who works very hard to bring the Blues to you.



Light of Day **Vince Agwada**

Although I have never heard of Vince Agwada, I am certainly glad I was given his album to listen to and review. WOW! Vince Agwada is a great singer, songwriter, and player. This album is put together very nicely and is professionally produced. It has everything a blues, soul and even gospel music lover could want from the opening, 'Two Tons of Fun'. It has great slide guitar and a killer shuffle feel. It is sure to get you right up and moving! This whole album just shines! It is full of energy and great blues licks!

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'Hard Headed Woman' is another great track; a nice typical 3 chord blues progression but the bassline and horns add a nice feel as well. It kind of reminded me in a way of Chris Duarte's cover of Freddy Kings, 'Big Legged Woman'. Another favorite of mine is the tune, Friend. It starts off with a nice piano melody and shines with a sound and gospel-feel with the female backup vocals. This song creates the imagery of the deep South Baptist gospel church singing which is a beautiful thing. Agwada's adding a string section is icing on the cake.

'Credit Card' has a great drum that kicks into the band with a funky bass riff and a great three piece, layered vocal line singing Credit Card. It also has great slide playing in the vein of Bonnie Raitt with long sustaining lines. The tones on this song are incredible and on the whole album for that matter.

I am unable to give more than a certain allotment of words to describe this album and my thoughts. In closing, I have to say that as soon as I heard the opening track of this album that I was instantly hooked and interested. There is not a song that won't grab your attention. It is an excellent album, an excellent production from everything to blues, blues rock, gospel, funk and more. I love this guy's music. I am an instant fan and I highly recommend purchasing this album if you are into the blues, blues rock, funk and soul style of music. It has plenty of it and then some!!! *If I had to give a rating out of 5 stars, Vince Agwada would receive 7.* Most excellent!!

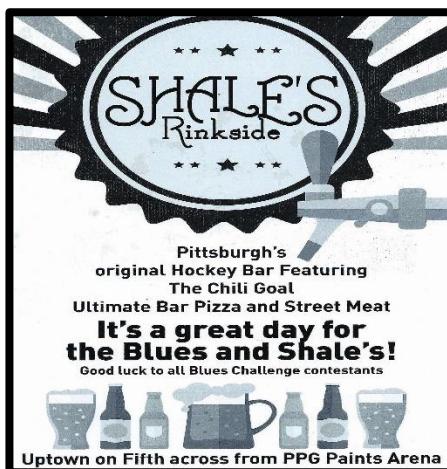
www.Vinceagwada.com

~Jeff Fetterman

Blues Triva

Pick the Blues Guitarist who is the son of a well-known West Coast Blues/R&B artist:

- a. Little Jimmy King
- b. Shuggie Otis
- c. Earl Hooker
- d. Phil Guy
- e. Melvin Taylor



PITCH -Putting Instruments in the Children's Hands

If you have new or gently used instruments or musical equipment to donate, please get in touch. There are many young people in need. Let's help them to create and flourish. Please contact: bswpa.org



The Franklin Blues and Barbecue Festival is moving forward with planning their annual Father's Day Weekend festival, scheduled for **June 19 & 20, 2021**, in beautiful downtown Franklin, PA. The Saturday headlining act will be Blues Hall of Fame Inductee and four-time Blues Music Awards winner Joe Louis Walker. Sunday will feature the Blues Foundation 'Keeping the Blue Alive' award recipient Tas Cru. Throughout both days, numerous regional Blues artists will

be featured at our city's bandstand park. The region's best barbecue vendors will also be returning to our festival. The beer tent will be open to quench your thirst.

Please visit our website www.franklinbluesandbbq.org, or our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/FranklinBluesBBQ/> for the most up-to-date information as the festival will strongly adhere to the Pennsylvania Department of Health Guidelines regarding social gatherings. The current guidelines and rules that will be enforced at our event can be found at <https://www.pa.gov/guides/responding-to-covid-19/>.

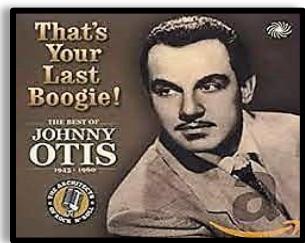
Do your part to help bring this live music event back to our beautiful city. Stay safe and we hope to see you all on June 19 & 20, 2021!!! Keep the Blues Alive in western Pennsylvania!



Blues and BBQ---Hosted by Hopewell Township
Saturday, September 11, 2021 ... 12 pm
Hopewell Community Park
2500 Larid Drive, Aliquippa, PA 15001



Shaggy Otis

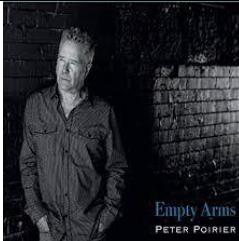


Johnny Otis

Trivia Answer: (b.) Before there were 15-year-old guitar shredders lurking at the apron of every stage, there was Shuggie Otis. Born to the Blues as the eldest son and namesake of R&B giant Johnny Otis. He burned his candle brightly as a solo recording artist for a few years before disappearing in the disco wind of the early seventies.

Shuggie, however, is neither dead nor buried. He was an integral part of the Johnny Otis show until at least the late eighties, has played in the background of numerous blue and R&B albums and now lives in Petaluma, California. He has raised a family and gigs around the area with his own band.

As a young teenager, he signed a contract with Columbia Records. When label-mate, Al Kooper, learned about it, he requested permission to record "super session" album with Otis. The result was the Kooper Session: Al Kooper Introduces Shuggie Otis.



Peter Poirier

"Empty Arms"

Peter Poirier is not one of the countless musicians who have been a part of Roomful Of Blues, but with the way he has that vintage Roomful groove down pat, he sure sounds like he could have been. Of course, assembling a band of extraordinary musicians - some of who have a connection not only to Roomful but to Duke Robillard as well - also has a lot to do with that. On "*Empty Arms*", his debut release, Peter Poirier - on guitar and lead vocals - is joined by: Brad Hallen on acoustic and electric bass; Mark Teixeira on drums; Matt McCabe on piano; and Mark Earley on alto, tenor, baritone sax and horn arrangements.

The discs' ten tracks are all Peter Poirier renditions of very recognizable classics from some of the genre's very recognizable giants. If your mission statement is old school 1950's blues and R&B, you can't ever go wrong opening with a B. B. King song and Peter's choice - an excellent one indeed - was going with the 1957 classic, "*Bad Luck*" (B.B. King, J. Josea). From a personal standpoint, although songs like this are what floats my blues boat, I find that they're tough to write about, while listening. Sitting back in my chair with my feet tappin'; my hands tappin' my knees; and my head bobbing from side to side; is not conducive to typing. That said, I have a wonderful solution - just keep hitting replay. With a melodic and soothing voice like Peter's and the band being in one of those "lock the door and throw away the key" grooves, I can do this all day long. Another song recorded by B. B. King - and just about every successful, aspiring and wannabe bluesman, and some women, as well - is Sleepy John Estes' 1938 classic "*Someday Baby*" (J. Estes, H. Nixon). Although Peter's vocal mastery is pretty much front and center on all of the songs, this track features a few very nice musical standouts. Mark T. and Brad, on drums and bass, are in one of those rhythm grooves so common for them but yet so dynamite for us; Matt's having a good ol' time laying down something between Dixieland and barrelhouse on piano; and Peter's guitar leads speak volumes for his love and mastery of these vintage blues.

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So, when you're talking fifties blues, sooner rather than later, the name Willie Dixon will inevitably pop up. Here it does so in the form of his "*I Cry for You*". Not remembering the song, I'll admit to deviating to Youtube for a quick listen and having done that, I'm quite impressed with how - more so than with the others - Peter and the guys made this one their own. Nice job! Being the maestro that he is, Peter Poirier hasn't once displayed a need to "shred", "bend" or "scorch" as a means to impress. Now don't get me wrong, all of that is fine, but smooth rules on this type of material. That said, he is totally tearing it up on "*I'm Tore Up*" (I. Turner, R. Bass). With Mark Earley blowing out some of his hottest sax leads; the rest of the rhythm section being their usual magnificent selves; and Peter being at disc's best on guitar and vocals; this is hands down my favorite track of the lot. Great stuff! The disc closes out with an instrumental track written by the "Texas Cannonball", but it's not your typical scorching Texas blues so familiar to Mr. Freddie King. With a Latin vibe, "*Heads Up*" (F. King, S. Thompson) is a very well-done dance floor filling, rhythm fueled rumba. Other tracks on this excellent debut release include: "*No More Alcohol*" (J. Liggins); "*I Wonder Why*" (B.B. King, J. Josea); "*And Like That*" (B.B. King); "*Empty Arms*" (J. Young); and "*You Know That You Love Me*" (S. Thompson, F. King). By the way, on a project with so many common denominators, there's one more worthy of mention and that's producer Jack Gauthier. In addition to doing an amazing job here, Jack's also responsible for some fabulous production work with the Knickerbocker All-Stars, an act that many of these musicians - and myself as well - have also had the pleasure of working with on several occasions. Or more information on Peter Poirier, and to take my advice and get yourself a copy of "*Empty Arms*", just go to - www.peterpoirier.com. While you're there, please tell him the Blewzzman sent you. ~Peter "Blewzzman" Lauro, Blues Editor @ www.Mary4Music.com

2011 Keeping the Blues Alive Recipient

MOONDOG'S & THE PITTSBURGH SHRINE CENTER PROUDLY PRESENT:

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Summer MUSIC SERIES

Visit facebook.com/syriashriners for weekly lineup and details

6-3	Tina Daniels Band
6-10	SOURMASH
6-17	The Borstal Boys
6-24	Soulful Femme
7-1	Recorder Bob's Birthday Bash w/The Aces
7-8	Curtis and the SHAKERZ
7-15	Jimmy Adler Band / John Gresh's Gris-Gris
7-22	Moondog's Birthday Bash w/Surprise Special Guest
7-29	Ron Yarosz and the Vehicle
8-5	Steel Mill Rising
8-12	The Bo' Hog Brothers
8-19	The Ball Jumpers
8-26	Shot O' Soul
9-2	Miss Freddy's Blues Band
9-9	Heidi and the Hellcats
9-16	Pierce Dipner and the Shades of Blue
9-23	Bobby Thompson and The Groove
9-30	Saddle Up
10-7	Nied's Hotel Band
10-14	Season Finale w/The Nighthawks

Blues merchandise is available at bswpa.org. Get your Blues on!!!



SAVE THE DATE...

2021 Blues Challenge

SUNDAY, September 5, 2021

The Blues Society of Western PA invites you, your friends and family to attend the **2021 Blues Challenge**. Plans are in the works to bring a dynamic show your way.



Pittsburgh Syria Shriners

1877 Shriners Way, Cheswick, PA 15024

***Music???** There will be plenty! Different varieties, different styles. Savor what will be served up.

***Spacious, covered pavilion**

no worry 'bout the weather.

***Plenty of free parking.**

***Great restroom facilities.**

***Food and drinks will be available for purchase.**

***One band and one solo/duo will be chosen winners by a panel of judges.**

***A Blues room rate will be available at a nearby hotel.**

More details soon.... See you there!!!!

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