



BSWPA NEWSLETTER **VOLUME 18, ISSUE 1**

Making his Way in the Blues World	2
When I Left Home by Buddy Guy, David Ritz	5
A Fan/Friend of the Blues- Bill Wax.....	5
18th Annual Blues Challenge	10
CD Review- From the Shoals by Barbara Blue.....	11
Our Journey to Memphis- Lori Russo.....	12
Congratulations to Pierce Dipner.....	13
CD Review - Long as I Got my Guitar – Zac Harmon.....	15
Trivia	16

The logo for the Blues Society of Western Pennsylvania. It features a stylized musical note with a hand-like shape at the top, and the text "BLUES SOCIETY OF WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA" arranged around it.

SPRING 2023



Making his way in the Blues World

Having just landed at a fest many miles away, I received a text asking me to check out an act. Hmm A Blues mission was at hand. After putting on my talent scout hat, I went to his first of three shows. I found myself sitting back in awe and saying, WOW! I went to his next show. Again, WOW! His last rendering before we all headed back home.... WOW! My report back to Ron Moondog

Esser was... **Solomon Hicks.... Book him!!!**

Ron Moondog Esser recently shared his thoughts about the young Bluesman,

Solomon Hicks, according to Ron, is the most genuine, nicest human you would want to know. Solomon has a unique quality. There is a feeling he gives you with his music and his manner that cannot be put into words. It is an intangible trait. While talking, Ron and I both agreed that Solomon Hicks reminded us of a young BB King. Ron continued by saying Solomon is a prominent 'up and comer' in the Blues Scene. He is green and new and has nowhere to go except up. His disposition and that look in his eye gives hope, joy, and promise.

It was time to talk with Solomon Hicks and to hear his story, his thoughts.

Jonnye: You started playing at the age of fourteen in New York City's Cotton Club and were the lead guitarist in a seventeen-piece band. Did the older players embrace you and guide you. Or...did they intimidate you.

Solomon: The musicians in the band that embraced me and gave me CDs to listen to really grounded my music foundation. One of the trombone players played with Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers and I remember him writing out diminished triads for me in my notation music book. I was intimidated, yet inspired but determined to sound like the players I was around.

Jonnye: What sacrifices did your parents have to make to move you forward musically as a young person?

Solomon: I believe all parents make sacrifices for their children. I also feel parents who are musicians and artists themselves make special sacrifices for their children. Making time for auditions, paying for lessons, traveling to the shows are all time consuming. When I auditioned for Amateur Night at the Apollo Theater, my mom and I waited on the audition line from 4 am to 12 noon just to be one out of the hundreds in line hoping to be chosen to perform. If you wanted to even get into the building, you had to get there early before the line started to wrap around the block.

Jonnye: You have said that listening to records has inspired you, helping you to grow into the music. What are your favorite 'go-to' records?

Solomon: My 'go to' records change from month to month. Right now, I am listening to Kenny Neal and Kenny Wayne Shepherd albums.

Jonnye: Many say that as a relatively young player that you are rooted deep into the music that came before you and yet, continue to develop an evolving sound. How did you develop your sound and how do you see yourself in the coming years as an artist?

Solomon: My sound comes from being around all types of music in the New York City music scene. From having a love for blues guitar and developing a clear, crisp tone that some of my favorite players have, I am looking forward to diving into my own style of songs and becoming the artist that makes the upcoming generations and current generations get out on the dance floor.

Jonnye: You have been named '*by the people*' as one of the top ten young Blues guitarists. Guitarist Erik Zettlemeyer would like to know who your top five Blues guitarists/musicians are today... and why?

Solomon: That is always a hard question... Jontavious Willis, Chris Cain, Larry McCray, Joanna Connor, Kirk Fletcher.

Jonnye: You say that your sound will evolve as you explore your potential in the coming years. Singer Ruby Red asks 'what do feel is the future of the Blues music'?

Solomon: There will be players that keep the tradition going and there will be players that will take elements of the Blues and create their own thing. I love hearing my contemporaries and their different styles. It is inspiring to be in the same time period as them.

Jonnye: Working with the likes of Jeff Beck, Ringo Star, playing at the United Nations, experiencing European festivals, working amazing venues, and winning the 2021 Emerging Artist Award from the Blues Foundation, how do you, Solomon Hicks, stay grounded?

Solomon: It has always been about the people for me. Never the accolades. After sharing the stage with both Eric Gales and Joe Bonamassa on the 'Keeping the Blues Alive at Sea' cruise... It is very easy to stay grounded.

Jonnye: You work with the Children's Aid Society in New York City, the Harlem Arts Association, and the New York Jazz Mobile, what is it that you feel that you are doing for the younger generation of players. What is it that you want them to remember you for in their journey in life?

Solomon: The same way that more experienced musicians took the time to show me and pass down knowledge. I have always liked to give back and teach whenever I can to inspire the next generation. Not every single teenager will understand Blues or be into music but the ones that '*get it*' will have that feeling with them forever.

Jonnye: What artist(s) made you stand back in awe when on stage with them?

Solomon: Beth Hart, Samantha Fish, John Oats, Dweezil Zappa & Tony Bennett.

Jonnye: If you could put together the band of all time (alive or having passed) what would be your dream team?

Solomon: Buddy Miles (drums), David Sanborn (Sax), James Jameson (bass), Billy Preston (organ), Mike Bloomfield (guitar), Bonnie Raitt (slide guitar), Bobby Bland (vocals) and Susan Tedeschi (vocals).

Jonnye: What concert had the biggest impression on you as a player?

Solomon: Two concerts come to mind! Seeing the rock band KISS when I played on their Kiss Kruise! Hearing Jeff Beck live in Holland back stage before we opened for him.

Jonnye: Fast forward years down the road, what are the top three things that you want to accomplish and to be remembered for in the Blues World.

Solomon: I want to be known for spreading World Peace, Love, but most importantly...For rocking the stage till the sun don't rise anymore

MOONDOGS

*WE BELIEVE
IN MUSIC*

378 FREEPORT RD.
BLAWNOX, PA. 15238

412-828-2040

BRINGING THE BLUES
TO THE BURG FOR
OVER 19 YEARS

WWW.MOONDOGS.US

EMAIL
MOONESSER@AOL.COM

RON ESSER--LEAD DOG

*SAVING LIVE MUSIC
ONE NOTE AT A TIME*



HOLLYWOOD

MUSIC & SOUND



megamaster Studios



Jorewicky

AMPLIFICATION
custom amps/repairs

Jim Jorewicz
proprietor

shop 724-981-2130
fax 724-981-0711
sounddoctor@live.com
cell 724-866-8234

www.jorewikyamps.com

"BLUES YOU CAN CHEW"

THE
GORDON-JAMES
BLUES
BAND

For Bookings Call: JIM 724-866-8234 /



When I Left Home ~ Buddy Guy, David Ritz

According to Eric Clapton, John Mayer, and the late Stevie Ray Vaughn, Buddy Guy is the greatest blues guitarist of all time. An enormous influence on these musicians as well as Jimi Hendrix, Jimmy Page, and Jeff Beck, he is the living embodiment of Chicago blues. Guy's epic story stands at the absolute nexus of modern blues. He came to Chicago from rural Louisiana in the fifties—the very moment when urban blues were electrifying our culture. He was a regular session player at Chess Records.

Willie Dixon was his mentor. He was a sideman in the bands of Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf. He and Junior Wells formed a band of their own. In the sixties, he became a recording star in his own right.

When I Left Home tells Guy's picaresque story in his own unique voice, that of a storyteller who remembers everything, including blues masters in their prime and the exploding, evolving culture of music that happened all around him.

**This book is funny, sad, tragic, lusty, honest, loving and insightful. Just like the Blues. Just like Buddy Guy. If you love the Blues and that it means, you should love this book.*

A Fan/Friend of the Blues



The road was always long and lonely as I traveled to and from Blues events. One night, I was barreling down that ever long highway and flipping the channels on my new XM radio. I was very excited to find Bluesville radio. Yes, the Blues was coming through loud and clear ... and at will. I was mesmerized by the host, Bill Wax, and his talking with BB King and all things Blues. That melodic, husky voice and the music history that he was sharing made my heart skip a few beats. No, the paramedics were not called. The music and what was being shared were remedy enough for what ailed me. I looked forward to those jaunts. The music and all that Bill Wax shared were soothing.

Yes, Bill Wax rode side saddle with me across the many miles. Throw in a big dose of BB King and many other players and I soon found more excuses to hit the highway.

Fast forward to a little museum in Clarksdale, MS several days after the Blues Music Awards (Blues Grammys). I patiently waited behind a group of people from the Blues Foundation who were introducing themselves to the owner. When they got to the end of the line, I spoke up and said that 'I am Jonnye Weber and I am a Blues fan'. Bill Wax, with a big smile, turned and shook my hand. He exclaimed that that is who they needed to meet.... Blues fans. We walked and talked our way through the museum. I was thrilled to finally meet the man behind the voice. Little did Bill Wax know that many times he had kept me in the 'game' with that voice 'talking to me' in the darkness.

This Blues Fan, knowing that Bill Wax had a story to tell, *needed* to share the story behind the man.

Jonnye: Terry Duffie from Georgia asked of all the music available, how did your love of the Blues evolve?

Bill: I grew up outside of Washington, DC, where I could hear three Black radio stations and a fourth from Baltimore. I naturally gravitated to the Soul and R&B music playing on those stations. As I grew older, my curiosity about the earlier forms of Black music took over and led me to Blues and R&B.

Jonnye: Being a seasoned veteran of other radio shows, you were invited to join the XM radio team. What is it that you felt that you brought to XM concerning Blues or what did XM feel that you were bringing to them?

Bill: I think there were a few factors that helped XM like me as a hire. One, I was doing a daily Blues/R&B show in the DC market as they arrived. One of the programming staff heard the show and liked what I was doing. I also had years of radio experience as a Program Director for two community radio stations -- KOPN in Columbia, MO and KBOO in Portland, Oregon and producer credits for the Iran-Contra Hearings, Judge Bork and Clarence Thomas Supreme Court confirmations and four different Presidential Convention broadcasts.

Jonnye: What format did you establish that made your show different from the rest? What was your personal stamp in bringing the Blues to life?

Bill: Our focus for the channel was to appeal to the musicians first, thinking if they liked what we were doing, the fans would follow. So we promoted their live shows and systematically added their new music to the playlist with enough repeats for the audience to respond to the new music if we gave them lots of access to our air time with interviews and live recordings. Each hour had approximately 16 songs, 7-8 were artists still active and working.

We also tried to build a sense of humor around the music with things like the Top Ten Commandments of Bluesville and other funny production pieces. Regarding my 'personal' stamp, I have always tried to represent myself as a fan of the music and musicians, not an expert or scholar, feeling that most of my audience were fans too.

Jonnye: Guitarist Cheryl Rinovato would like to know your opinion about how the Blues has developed and changed over time. Do you find it difficult to categorize artists. Ex: Joe Bonomassa is considered blues/rock. Also, has the genre become more diverse, impacting its' popularity? Do you think that all these genres/dimensions of Blues dilute the traditional Blues? (Guitarists Pete Jorewicz and G.K. Dickerson asked similar questions.... They too wanted to know!)

Bill: I feel that elements of the Blues need to be more heavily weighted than others, for example, the music coming out of the Black community experience in America. Vocals and the voice are the most important instrument of the music honoring the history and originators of the music. As other cultures have adopted it, the music has changed. These changes should be acknowledged, but I do not believe they should dominate the programming of a Blues channel. For instance, we made places for Rock Blues, but it

was not the centerpiece of the channel. I was always aware and kept track of the balance of Black to White artists and made sure we were committed to acoustic blues as a regular part of the format. I think you can present a wide range of Blues styles without 'diluting' traditional Blues, but you must pay attention to be open to the mother culture which created the music - the Black community.

Jonnye: Guitarist Jimmy Adler noted that recently the station has been playing comments from BB King with your parts edited out. Mr. Adler would like to know what played out in your departure from XM Bluesville. What do you do now in radio?

Bill: My departure from Bluesville involved a few factors. I was diagnosed with leukemia and could no longer work 70+ hours a week to run the channel. Sirius management had a different vision for the channel versus the XM (and my) vision. They felt that 700 songs in rotation were more than enough songs to program the entire channel. I had individual CATEGORIES I was programming that had 1500-2000 songs. They wanted more of a jukebox format, fewer extended interviews with artists, and specialty live broadcasts.

When I went to them to see about rearranging my schedule and hours, there were not interested in keeping my views and influence on the channel. They offered to allow me to voice-track eight hours a day, but I would have no say or imprint on the format itself. I was not interested in that arrangement, so I retired from the channel. Now I do a weekly show on the radio station WPFW-FM in Washington, DC, Saturdays at 2 PM. It is also available on the internet at wpfwfm.org, archived for two weeks, and available for listening at any time. The show is called *Roots & Fruits*.

Jonnye: Jimmy Adler also thought that your time spent talking with BB King was priceless (as do I). Were there other artists that you were happy to interview?

Bill: I would be hard-pressed to choose one interview as being the most memorable. I loved interviewing the writer Walter Mosley about the role Blues and R&B played in his novels. He talked about his favorite artists and music. At the end of the interview, I told him I would like him to come back because I wanted to ask him what his main character, 'Easy Rawlins,' would say about Easy's favorite artists and tunes. Mosley paused, looked at me, and said he would have to consider that for the next time. I knew he was seriously thinking about the question.

I loved doing interviews with as many of the artists we played as was possible. I usually asked them to give me 5-10 of their favorite songs and would start the interview by playing some of them and having them talk about why they liked the tune or the artist. I found this put them at ease, and then I could ask more personal questions about their lives, music, and the creative process. It was not unusual for an artist to spend two or three hours with me during the interview; almost all of them live.

I also loved to talk with songwriters and band members about their perspectives, practices, and interests. Again, my perspective was always as a fan, and I tried to make the experience as informal and comfortable as possible. Many listeners would tell me they felt like they were listening to two friends having a conversation and they were flies on the wall. That very much pleased me as that was the mood I was trying to create. 7.

During my 13 years with Bluesville, I interviewed all the touring musicians except Eric Clapton and Van Morrison. They were all very warm, friendly, and revealing. I consider myself very lucky to have had those experiences.

Jonnye: You mentioned in a recent talk that BB King was an avid tech fanatic. How did that 'play' into your meeting BB King. (Your response was priceless)

Bill: B. B. King felt education and the desire to keep learning were among the most important things individuals could do for themselves. Although he never graduated from high school, he continued looking to learn new things or skills, including technology. B.B. had remote equipment, recording, and playing devices as soon as they became available. He had an XM Satellite radio on his bus almost as soon as the devices came out, unbeknownst to me. When I finally had a real opportunity to meet him, he had been listening to Bluesville--and me--for almost three years. Before I could tell him how much I loved his music and appreciated his work, he said, 'Son, I've wanted to meet you for a long time.' I was gobsmacked and stood there, then said, 'Mr. King, that is all wrong. I am supposed to be saying that to you.' He just started laughing and told me about having the radio on his bus and listening to the channel. He invited me to sit with him and chat for quite a while. It was the beginning of our friendship. B.B. loved that he could hear his contemporaries from way back on Bluesville.

Jonnye: Talking about your times with BB King, how was it determined that he was the Mayor of Bluesville.

Bill: After the initial meeting with B.B., he made it clear that he would love to join me on air and do an interview at the XM studios. He joined me live on air twice at XM, each time for about 90 minutes. On the third visit to the studio, I thought it would be a great bit to present him with a proclamation making him the *Mayor of Bluesville* for life. One of my colleagues knew how to do calligraphy, and she made a lovely form that we had framed. I presented it to him when he came in for this third interview. He was incredibly gracious and honored. He loved the sentiment and was always proud of being the 'Mayor' after that. It was very sweet.

Jonnye: We, the Blues fans, have our own perspective about THE BB King. Please tell us what BB King 'taught' you in his talks. What do you carry with you today personally from your time with him?

Bill: B.B. was the most gracious man I have ever known. He really appreciated the love and support his fans had shown him. He constantly tried to let them know how much they meant to him. I carry that lesson in humility and graciousness everywhere I go.

Jonnye: BB King was a Blues ambassador who breathed life into the Blues. When his band was talking about working with him (and there were hilarious quips) what is it that they learned from BB King. Was he the man that we thought him to be or was he a fictional character.

Bill: While I do not know what others thought of B.B., his band loved him. They had differences with him at times, as any two people do, but the respect and love for him was obvious. B.B. also made sure they appreciated the music they played, no matter what format was more popular at the time. B.B. also took good care of his musicians. 8.

Jonnye: On a side note.... I stood outside the BB King Blues bus many times as we crossed paths over the years. During your recent talk, I found out that he rode in a separate bus and the band always road in another vehicle. (All I wanted to do was to tell that great man....thank you. Thank you for your kindness. Thank you for your humility. Thank you for being a role model. Thank you for the music. Why did he feel it necessary to ride in a separate vehicle? Were the boys in the band that rambunctious?

Bill: As far as having his own bus, I assume B.B. wanted his privacy while also allowing his band to live their own lives without the 'boss' looking over their shoulders. The two buses allowed both those things to happen. His dear friend and long-time companion, Norman, traveled on B.B.'s bus when they were on the road.

Jonnye: What do you, Bill Wax, want to be remembered for?

Bill: I would hope folks felt like I left this 'mean old world' a little better off than where I found it. The artists and musicians would think I helped them be a bit better off, both financially and artistically due to my work. I treated all folks with respect and dignity, and we had fun while we did our work and lived our lives.



2559, Brant School Road, Suite 101, Wexford, PA 15090

724.935.8000



**BSWPA PRESENTS
THE 18TH ANNUAL
BLUES
CHALLENGE**

**SUNDAY
APRIL 23, 2023
DOORS 1 PM | MUSIC 2PM**

**FEATURING THE REGION'S BEST BLUES
ACTS COMPETING TO REPRESENT WESTERN
PA AT THE 2024 INTERNATIONAL BLUES
CHALLENGE IN MEMPHIS**

**CORAOPOLIS VFW
412 MULBERRY ST
CORAOPOLIS, PA**

**\$18 PUBLIC
\$15 BSWPA MEMBERS**

**BLUES SOCIETY
OF
WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA**

**WWW.BSWPA.ORG
FACEBOOK.COM/BSWPA**

Join us as we celebrate the amazing amount of talent that will be showcased in one day!!!! All are eager! All are feverishly preparing! All are vying for a much-coveted slot to represent Western PA at the 2024 International Blues Challenge.

One solo/duo and one band will be chosen to represent the BSWPA. Each winner will be given a cash prize to help defray their costs traveling to Memphis for that global event. Each will be given recording time.

The big winners of the day will be the Blues fans who will be able to savor the many flavors of Blues.

Mark Alan (solo), Bobby Martin (solo), Jeff Fetterman (band), Paul the Resonator & Vince Fireball (duo), Bluesdrivers (Band), Bay Allen (solo), River City Blues (band), Lone Crow Rebellion (band)



From the Shoals Barbara Blue

Pittsburgh native Barbara Blue, aka The Reigning Queen of Beale Street, released her latest album (and lucky album number 13), titled **From the Shoals** on January 27, 2023. The album dedicated in loving memory to Barbara's late mother Rose, ironically also contains 13 tracks (11 original). The first two tracks of the album, The Shoals and Nutthouse Blues, cleverly recognize Muscle Shoals, Alabama and The NuttHouse recording studio where the album was recorded.

As expected, Barbara's dynamic and strong vocal range are present from the first lyric, "There is a powerful Magic.....". From the upbeat first track, The Shoals, Barbara tells us strength has been her weakness in the guitar driven second song, Nutthouse Blues. Wrapping up the first four songs are two remakes. A danceable cover of Etta James's 1968 hit of Tell Mama and a smooth version of Jimmy Hughes, Steal Away.

From the Shoals contains grooves for all blues fans, from traditional blues guitar tracks to a cool slide guitar track (Slide Man), to horn infused tunes. All of the songs of course, are driven by Barbara's powerful vocals. As of the writing of this review *From the Shoals* has spent the past 5 weeks, since release, at #1 on The Roots Music Report Soul Blues Chart and has steadily climbed the Roots Music Report Top 50 Blues Album to #4. ~Erik Zettelmayer, February 20



Spirits Hoodoo Drug Store

This is the fifth or sixth offering from the gang that is HooDoo Drugstore. As far as I know, they have never played a live set under that name. If you ever attended the Saturday afternoon sessions at Excuses (RIP), you know the players. Song writer extraordinaire Mike Sweeney wrote all but one of these roots-based songs. It's a great mixture of blues, gospel, rockabilly and even a Zydeco tune. There is a core band with a revolving lineup of guest musicians. The core band consists of Bubs McKeg (vocals, guitar), Robert Peckman (vocals, percussion, various

instruments), Jim Dougherty (guitar), Larry Siefers (piano, harmonica), John DeCola (accordion) and Mike Sweeney (bass). They are joined on this session by up and coming hotshot guitarist Donnie Bell, drummer Alan Muckle and co-producer Bob Briede on percussion.

Spirits is an appropriate title since most of the CD deals with the spirit of man in one way or another. The opener "Be Like Job" is a bluesy gospel with lovely vocal

harmonies. Haunting "Money, Mississippi" deals with man's evil spirit in the tragedy of Emmett Till. "The Mon, Alley and the Ohio" is a song about working on those big coal barges you see on the rivers. "Daughter of Don Ruiz" has a Spanish flavor. "Sufferin Jesus" and "Mama's Gonna Tell Me" are straight up gospel. There is not a weak song on this CD and in fact, you cannot go wrong with any CD with HooDoo Drugstore's name on it. They are all at a consistently high level of musicianship. ~ Tuck Majeran



Our Journey to Memphis.... Musical Memories were made!!!

Pittsburgh to Memphis is about 800 miles, roughly an 11-hour trip if you drive straight through (and do not hit traffic!). To say the notion of going to Beale Street to represent Pittsburgh (Western PA) at the International Blues Challenge (IBC) had us filled with eager anticipation is an understatement. Knowing Memphis' history in the Blues, its impact on the recording industry, and its significance in social justice only added to the importance of this trip for us.

We arrived in Memphis late Monday, where we were greeted by a teal, neon "Beale Street Memphis" archway that provided our gateway to the IBC's. We had finally arrived! After checking into our hotels, we took to Beale Street – either side lined with clubs and eateries. People were arriving and we could sense the energy as we eagerly waited for our performance on Wednesday. We grabbed some food at the Rum Boogie Café (and a few drinks), and listened as Tas Cru did his thing.



The week was electric – we learned on Wednesday afternoon that we would be performing at Alfred's along with a group of other acts from around the country...and one group from Australia! The stage at Alfred's was lit by a neon Stax sign, paying tribute to the record label that helped to shape the Memphis sound. As we took in each band's performance, the talent was apparent; and, 4 acts out of approximately 10

from each venue would be advancing to the semifinals. After our performance (which we live-streamed), we learned later that evening that we had advanced to the semi's! To say we were incredibly excited and humbled to advance, and continue to represent Pittsburgh (Western PA), is an understatement!

Early Thursday we learned we were back at Alfred's for Thursday's semi-finals. And we knew the competition would be stiffer with only one act moving forward. That night we left it all on the stage, digging into the music we worked hard to refine for the competition. While the finals were not in our future, we felt we put on a great performance and represented our Blues family back home with everything we had. And while we came to Memphis to perform music, we left with so much more. We met great

people from around the country/world; networked with and met so many new people; participated in fantastic IBC-led events; took in a ton of great music; ate great food; and visited historic sites including Sun & Stax records, Graceland, and the National Civil Rights Museum (Lorraine Hotel). There is no doubt we left richer as musicians and individuals than when we arrived.

Thank you to everyone that supported us along the way, and that will continue to support us and our Blues family. We hope we made you proud...you are appreciated and loved. See you soon out and about the Pittsburgh Blues scene!

All the best, **Lori Russo and the Uppercuts**



Congratulations to Pierce Dipner and Shades of Blue!!!!

Each year the Blues Foundation in Memphis, TN asks players from around the world to enter their **Best Self-Produced CD** competition that is a segment of the International Blues Challenge. Sixty-nine entries from around the world were considered by an esteemed, musically entrenched panel of judges.

Drum roll please: Pierce Dipner and Shades of Blue were in **the top five finalists** with their CD entitled '**Goin' Back**'. Way to go!

Pierce has worked hard since the day long ago when he first walked into a Blues Society of Western PA's youth jam. He has evolved and grown. His hard work and determination are paying off. Kudos!!!!



Enjoy music and like to lend a helping hand????

The Blues Society of Western PA needs your help. We are looking for volunteers to help at events, and/ or to secure donations and sponsors.

Contact us at: bswpa.org



Need to up your Blues look? Need a gift?

Check out the merchandise page at bswpa.org !!!



Music From The
412

Pittsburgh's Underground

MUSICFROMTHE412.COM

ROKU

amazon fireTV




Music From The
412



TENBAND TV

@MUSICFROMTHE412



**PITTSBURGH
Blues
and
Roots
Festival**

Save the Date!
July 29th & 30th, 2023
Pittsburgh Shrine Center, Cheswick, PA



STUDIO JOE
RECORDING

Save the date: Franklin Blues Fest, Franklin, PA June 17, 18, 2023



Long As I Got My Guitar **Zac Harmon**

Prelude: As is known, when Zac Harmon jumped into the blues pool back in 2005, he did not just make a splash - he created a tsunami. His debut release - "*The Blues According to Zechariah*" - not only won "Best New Artist" in the XM Radio Awards, but the release also brought home the gold in the "Best New Artist Debut" category at the 2006 Blues Music Awards. With that said, it was well before all that when he blew the Blewzzman away. That happened on May 1, 2004, at the Beale Street Music Festival during the Memphis in May festivities. As the 2:00 PM opening act in the Blues Tent, with a lineup that also featured; Delta Moon; Robert "Wolfman" Belfour; Renee Austin; Ellis Hooks; Eric Sardinas; and Bernard Alison; Zac Harmon & Mid-South Blues Review put on a powerfully energetic and incredibly entertaining performance that I actually believe may have stolen the show. As the set ended, I will never forget the tribute he paid to his then right-hand man - harmonica player Jeff Stone. After the last song, Zac walked over to Jeff and putt his arm around him as he told the crowd "This man is to me what Junior Wells was to Buddy Guy." What a classy compliment from and to a real class act. From that day, until this day, I'm still a big fan of these fine artists and gentlemen.

Review: That was seventeen years, hundreds of shows, and a lot of albums ago. Now, Zac is back with what I believe is his ninth release - the one he says "*Is probably the most memorable record of my career*" - "*Long As I Got My Guitar*". Eight of the disc's ten tracks are originals with seven being penned by Zac and label owner, executive producer, and bassist, Bob Trenchard; and one written by Zac and Corey Lacey. On nine of those tracks, Zac Harmon - on lead guitar and vocals - is joined by Bob Trenchard on bass; Richy Puga on drums; Jimmy McGhee on guitar; and Dan Ferguson on keyboards. Collectively, they are known as The Rays. Appearing on the other track are Zac's touring band: Chris Gipson on bass; Jamil Byron on drums; and Corey Lacey (on other tracks as well) on keyboards and background vocals. Other performers include SueAnn Carwell on background vocals and Munyungo Jackson on percussion. Just hearing the name of the opening track kind of lets you know there isn't much explaining to do here. The song is called "*Deal With The Devil*" and anyone who knows anything about blues folklore knows how that turned out. Musically, it's a rhythm fueled blues rocker with Bob, Richy and Munyungo in a progressive groove on the percussion and Zac - who while flirting with a falsetto vocal style- groove nails a handful of stinging guitar licks. Nice opener. Simply because of it is old school fifties style R&B type presentation, "*Crying Shame*" is surely one of my personal favorites. Everything about this toe tapping, head bobbing song just reeks of smoothness. Had I been seeing this one done live, I'd be stretching my neck looking all around the stage for the accordion player. Since none was credited, I'm just going to assume that Dan is baffling me with some masterful organ work. Before I get to the real title of this one, its alias could very well be "The Axman's

Anthem", and here's why....."*I had to pawn my watch, I had to pawn my ring;*

I don't care what time it is, it don't mean a thing....."I lost all my money, there went all my friends; They didn't care for me, it was all just pretend....."They cut off my cable, and repossessed my car. Knocked on my door, I can't take it no more....."But I'm still a star, "Long As I Got My Guitar".

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

"New Year's Day" - it's not just the song's title but it's a day that most of the world thinks will suddenly and magically change everything. Break it to them gently, Zac:

"It's New Year's Day and nothing's changed; everything remains the same. I got no plans; I got no solution; I got no New Year's resolutions." And there you have it.

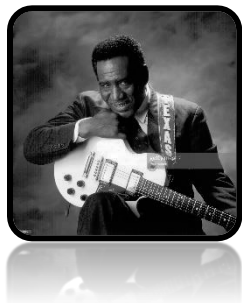
On the other hand, the song does make some cool musical changes: with Zac's scorching guitar intro - and several times throughout the song as well - it's got a strong traditional blues vibe; the soulful lead and backing vocals give it a definite soul blues vibe; and with the rhythm and percussion groove the rest of the band have going on you'll surely feel the funk.

The disc closes out with a ballad on which Zac pretty much lays out his own epitaph. Wanting to be remembered for his good deeds more than his sins, since he won't be passing this way again, he's requesting to scatter his "*Ashes To The Wind*". From Zac's somberly sung opening lines; to his mid song spoken words; to the songs powerful crescendo; and the addition of SueAnn's heavenly sounding background voice, as well; this one is all about the vocals.

~ Peter "Blewsman" Lauro

Trivia:

In 1982, this Texas guitarist did a 10 country African tour under the aegis of the U.S. State Department...



a.) Lightenin' Hopkins, b.) Albert Collins, c.) Joe 'Guitar' Hughes, d.) Johnny 'Clyde' Copeland, e.) All the above.

Answer:

Johnny Copeland was so impressed by his tour of Zaire, Gabon, Cameroon, Congo and other African countries that he went back to years later to record 'Bringin' it all Back Home' in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. This infectious blend of African and Blues roots and featured many musicians that Johnny had met on that 1982l tour.

Born in Louisiana and raised in California, Copeland spent the last twenty years of his life in New York. He always considered himself an emissary for Texas and his adopted home, Houston. He was an electrifying live performer with an Otis Redding-like vocal intensity.
