



BSWPA NEWSLETTER VOLUME 19, ISSUE 3

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Winter 2024





Piper and the Hard Times The winning Band at the 2024 International Blues Challenge

“Piper and the Hard Times has a sound with a groove and a tonality. I know this band will become a shining light if not a marquee act on the Blues Scene.” Tony Braunagel, Grammy and Blues Music Award winning drummer/producer. What an endorsement!!!

Their message... *‘we were so overwhelmed by everyone’s support, love and good vibes this past weekend at the International Blues Challenge (IBC). This was our first time attending the IBCs and WOW, what an outcome!! This is an amazing event and you are all so passionate about blues music- something we have never seen before on this scale. The band is so humbled to walk away with the first-place prize after playing with so many incredible artists! You have all filled us with so much love and gratitude.’*

After seeing this high-energy, award-winning act at the Heritage Music Fest in Wheeling, WV.... This Blues fan needed to learn more about Piper and the Hard Times!!!! A sit down was in order with lead singer, Al Green... a.k.a. Piper and lead guitarist, Steve Eagon. The enclosed is the interesting collaboration that evolved.



Al Green - Piper

Jonnye: Piper and Steve Why do you each do Blues...what is it about the Blues that ‘grabbed’ you. What about the Blues permeated your inner being?

Piper: I gravitated to the Blues through gospel music and by being exposed to it from my uncle and other was and still am attracted to the Blues because of the raw emotional stories it tells and how it moves people.



Steve Eagon

Steve: I discovered Blues music after listening to my guitar heroes like Jimmy Page and Jeff Beck. I heard what influenced them and did a deep dive to discover the emotional stories and playing of Muddy Waters, T-Bone Walker, B.B. King, and so many others. I love how the blues evokes so much emotion through the story-telling and music. There’s nothing like it!

Jonnye: Piper and Steve... Much has been said about your style of music. How would you each describe the music that you play.

Piper: I believe our original music is firmly planted in the blues as far as the lyrics and raw power. We also incorporate elements of funk, soul, and rock to create our sound. The band is so talented that we can stretch the boundaries but still stay true to the Blues.

Steve: We write our originals based on what we feel and we also allow ourselves to create different twists on the traditional format. Since we’re based in Nashville, we’re very lucky to be exposed to the importance of songwriting and the need for lyrical hooks and melody.

2.

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Jonnye: Piper ... How does the Blues song shape your perspective of music and life in general? What inspires you to create?

Piper: The Blues allows me to be me. I write lyrics that are based on my life experiences that I can deliver with emotion. I feel that people are drawn to our music, and blues in general, because the lyrics and music are filled with relatable stories and emotion.

Jonnye: Steve ... How has the Blues shaped your guitar playing? How do you stay true to authentic Blues?

Steve: I don't consider myself a Blues purist on the guitar. I have so many influences that creep into my style, and the Blues sits front and center. The Blues helps me play with emotion, space, and feel. The other styles I embrace allow me to bring something different to the genre and to create my own style and also bring something unique to our original songs.

Jonnye: Piper ... Being from Nashville.... what is the Blues scene like there now?

Piper: The Blues scene in Nashville is possibly the best kept secret in the U.S. There are so many different styles being played here with amazing musicians. There is also a strong focus on songwriting. The Blues scene in Nashville is a supportive close-knit family and we all push each other to be better.

Jonnye: Steve ... Being from Ohio, what is it that keeps you in the Blues mix?

Steve: As I have gotten older, I want to turn my attention towards expanding the blues audience to a younger generation. This keeps me in the Blues scene in addition to performing with Piper & The Hard Times. I am also drawn to so many great artists on the scene today with many of them expanding traditional Blues elements.

Jonnye: Steve and Piper ... Tell us about the making of your new album, Revelation. What were the highs, the lows, the obstacles, the triumphs?

Piper and Steve: We are so proud of our new album, Revelation! We set out to capture the energy and personality of our live show and to also bring something different to the scene. The highs of the recording process were many. This band gets along so well and our respect for one another allowed for fun times, energy and collaboration. There weren't any lows or obstacles that were serious issues. Two lows that jump out are the stress of finding the financial means to record and manufacture Revelation, and the other was paring the original songs down to 12 for the album. The triumphs have been how well Revelation has been received by fans (most importantly) and by the press and other blues industry people. Sales have been very strong! Revelation hit #1 on the Billboard Blues chart on August 27 and is still in the top 10 as of today while we're responding to these questions.

Jonnye: Steve and Piper ... Standing on that stage in Memphis, TN and being named the best band of the year out of so many from around the world.... tell us what your thoughts were. Tell us how you want to live up to that prestigious honor.

Piper and Steve: If you see the video of Joe Whitmer announcing us as the 2024 IBC winner at the Orpheum Theater, you'll see Piper running out from the shadows of **3.**

the stage overcome with gratitude and emotion. We are so humbled by the honor and want to take advantage of the opportunity to grow our fanbase, play music for a living, and give back to the community who has embraced and supported us. Winning the 2024 IBC (International Blues Challenge) has allowed us to live out dreams and set our future into motion to see how far we can take this

Jonnye: Steve and Piper ... Looking back on your musical career, what advice do you have for others?

Piper and Steve: First and foremost, never lose the love and passion you have for music. It is hard to go through the motions of playing blues or any music if you do not embrace it and love it. Second, be true to yourself and form your own identity – whether that as a player, songwriter or performer. Lastly, Piper & The Hard Times is a testament to the notion that hard work and perseverance pays off.

Jonnye: Steve and Piper ... If you were backstage with BB King, Luther Allsion, Muddy Waters, Lonnie Brooks, what is it you would want to ask, share, need to know.

Piper and Steve: First, we would both love to sit down over a cold drink and listen and smile at the great stories they could share. You learn so much in life from listening. We would also like to know what advice – both positive and things to avoid - they would give to musicians who are working in the Blues genre. Lastly, Piper & The Hard Times would give anything to play with our heroes on stage and soak up their mojo!

Jonnye: Steve and Piper ... What are your aspirations for the future? What goals have you set for yourselves?

Piper and Steve: While we are living in the moment and doing everything we can to ride the wave of our album and IBC win, we are planning for the future by preparing to record another album and continuing to play as many shows as possible. We feel we are just scratching surface of how far we can grow as a band. We hope to partner with a booking and management agency in 2025 and play as much as possible to grow our fanbase and share Piper & The Hard Times’ music with the world!



The Bluesman... "The Blues is a feeling that you get deep down inside. It's a feeling of sadness, but it's also a feeling of hope.
~Author unknown. Art: CamilleNat of Deviant Art



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Rooms will be available until December 24 (or until supply is exhausted) by calling Doubletree Hilton...412.329.1400 ...ask for \$109 Blues special. Additional rooms are available at the Hampton (next door) and La Quinta (across the street)

If you have 3 or more in your party, please contact the ... Bswpa.org so that your party can be seated together.

Doors will open at 6:00 pm. Dinner at 7:00 pm. What is included: dinner buffet, midnight buffet, four hours of open bar and...TWO smoking acts. 5.



Marie Trout... Taking the lead and making things happen!

At a recent show, Walter Trout and I said our hellos and exchanged a big hug...our paths have crossed many times over the years. Later, I watched and listened (mesmerized once again) as THE Walter Trout show unfolded. It was intense and engaging with humor infused into the mix. That evening happened to be the 10th anniversary of Walter Trout leaving the hospital after his liver transplant. The transplant had the Blues world waiting those many years ago for a positive outcome. Positive it was!!!!

I started thinking that evening about what it takes to put a show together; to keep it on the road day after day, month after month, and year after year. That extremely trying task takes a strong, level minded and fair playing person to maintain all that it entails. Knowing this, I admired the tenacity that one must have to maintain a brand, its integrity and the ability to orchestrate the many aspects involved. I then knew that I had to talk to Marie Trout. Yes, Mrs. Walter Trout who has spearheaded Walter's career for years and in my opinion is an **unsung hero**. Marie was gracious enough to share her time talking with this Blues fan.

Jonnye: Marie, thank you for talking with us and telling your story. Please tell us a little of your background.

Marie Trout: I was born and raised in Denmark. While finishing my university degree in teaching with a strong interest in psychology, I managed a bar doing PR and band booking and started a company specializing in advertising sales. I was busy! I met Walter when I was 27, fell in love, and moved with him to the US. It immediately became clear to me that he was being cheated monetarily and mismanaged by people in charge of his career. After a few years of marriage, and while pregnant with our first child, I finally got the evidence to present to Walter regarding the people who had taken advantage of his trust. I offered to take over as his manager and he accepted. Later, I continued my studies and completed a few degrees that were of interest to me.

Jonnye: Over ten years ago, your world almost came to a stop when Walter needed a transplant. During recovery, Walter found out that he needed to relearn everything.... Reading, playing, walking, etc. That had to be a tailspin moment (s). What were you faced with besides enabling Walter's recovery... financial, family, etc.

Marie: It was an existential nightmare. Since Walter and I work together, it was catastrophic when he could not work. When I took over the management of his career, it was in shambles, and we had to work to get him released from contracts that had long-reaching consequences. We were poor for many years, and in the beginning even had to pawn Walter's guitars to pay rent. When Walter became ill, we were solvent, had



managed to save up and buy a house, and were beginning to put away savings. But no income for two years, while Walter was sick, three kids, and sky-high health insurance costs meant we were once again in dire straits financially. It was scary on so many levels. I was mortified at the thought of losing the man I love and the father of our three kids. I was struggling in real ways to keep my anxiety from stripping me of my ability to think logically, which was more needed at that point than ever. Writing daily updates from Walter's hospital bed kept me centered. It was a lifesaver in more ways than one. That fundraiser, the kindness of strangers, and the help to get through it saved my sanity and Walter's life.

Jonnye: What about your background enabled you to become Walter Trout's manager and band coordinator. What an undertaking for so many pieces of the puzzle to come together.

Marie: You know, on top of some experience in marketing and business, some psychology, a few flirts with PR and band booking, my main ability is and has always been to intuit what is going to work for Walter. I need to keep a protective bubble of sorts around him so he can remain healthy, positive, encouraged, and inspired. He has an artist's heart. He has a very busy life touring and is always around many people. His life traveling to new hotels every day, having to find inspiration and strength to front two-hour shows each night leaves him drained of energy. He loves it, but it often takes everything he has. So, I take the lead on contracts, negotiations, tour planning, marketing, accounting, payroll in our business, and take care of bill paying, house maintenance and upkeep in our private lives, so he can focus most of his energy on being creative and to deliver each night on stage. But we discuss everything, and he is involved in every decision we make. I just prepare and present it and do most of the logistical footwork. I make sure he has a good road crew that looks after him when he is on tour, and when he is home, we spend as much time together as we can. He needs to recharge.

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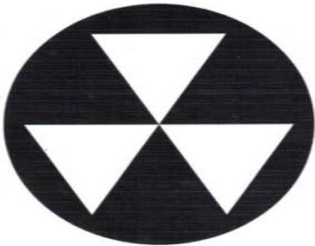
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Marie: It was tough when I also had the kids to take care of, because Walter was on the road for up to nine months of the year, and I was alone with lots of responsibility both for family and business. I struggled mightily having energy and opportunity to take care of myself back then, especially as Walter's health was failing for years before he got seriously ill, and he required a lot of attention and understanding.

Jonnye: You wrote a book about music being a therapeutic tool...please detail that. (And I had a book myself in the works at the time.... After reading yours, I ditched mine. I could not have said anything better than how you stated the cause, purpose and results.

Marie: My book was written from the research I did for my PhD dissertation. For years, I had watched how music transformed audiences each night allowing them a rollercoaster ride of emotions, and that people left the concerts visibly lighter and younger-looking. I interviewed and surveyed blues fans to find out what the relevance of blues music might be for its 21st century audience. Blues obviously is a gift from the blues ancestors who forged this music from their suffering, joy, experience, and wisdom. The bottom line is that blues music is, and has always been, a genius way for us humans to connect. All blues and blues rock fans know this of course. And this was also what the research showed. Documenting this relevance was primary for me, and then to tease out what these findings might contain when analyzed and compared with other literature from fields of history, sociology, psychology, and neuroscience. I wanted to see if we could try to better understand the power of this music. It was as if the research allowed me to open the hood and see how all the engine parts of the blues mobile worked. The research was clear in documenting that blues-based music can be restorative. It gives us hope by offering connection to our own emotions, to others in community, and to some mysterious life force that is just beyond our normal awareness.

Jonnye: What game plan did you put into play to create insulation around Walter Trout and his brand?

Marie: Walter's brand is Walter. It cannot be copied. It cannot be duplicated. He is such a unique artist, who has zero distance between his feelings and his music. He cannot lie when he plays. He feels every lyric and every note he sings and plays, and it is different each night. So, keeping HIM insulated and protected is important especially when he was sick, but really at all times. It is a very socially intense life being around a band of brothers all the time on and off the stage while giving 100% of himself from the stage each night. Keeping Walter safe during and after the pandemic is another challenge, since after the liver transplant and for the rest of his life, he will have to take pills that reduce his immunity from all kinds of infections. Insulating him is really a serious matter and we both work together to try to make him accessible from the stage, but not exposed too much at other times.

8.



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Jonnye: How did you manage to incorporate the family into all the transformations that you incurred along the way.

Marie: There were many years when the kids toured with us in the summer. It was generally the happiest times, because we were all together. I drove with the kids across the USA and Europe. Walter mainly drove with the band so he could get the rest he needed, but we would see him at gigs and on his days off. I created themed trips out of this opportunity with the kids and planned lots of trips to museums on the route, and other ways to keep them learning new things. There were many long drives, but our kids learned something about being part of a working family as well as seeing the world. There were years when the kids opened for Walter with their own band, Sibling Rivalry. When Walter was ill, I had to leave the kids in California, while I traveled with Walter to Omaha (the toughest thing I ever did). Thanks to the fundraiser that kept us afloat during Walter's illness, I was also able to pay a family friend a bit to stay with our two youngest, and occasionally, the kids could fly out to see Walter and me in Omaha.

The kids grew up watching two parents going through hard times with a strong work ethic, and a willingness to work through difficult times. They have been with us for all of it. We have never kept anything hidden from them. We probably have more in common with a traveling circus family than a normal suburban family. Therefore, work, play, family, music, love, learning, growing, arguing, resolving crises, driving, exploring, stretching, and accommodating others are components of what all of us have shuffled together. It has taken lots of communication for it to work, and this is also something we have all learned from and gotten much better at along the way.

Jonnye: Behind the scenes, it has to be an ongoing, time-consuming job...routing, contracts, money, weather, health.... bringing everything together to deliver the product that we know and expect. Tell us about the highlights and the pitfalls of managing the Walter Trout band.

Marie: The logistical challenges you mention in your question are real, and demand planning and an ability to constantly improvise and find creative solutions. I have great cooperation partners, a social media team, legal advisors, and CPAs, etc. At times, I feel like a mix between Elastigirl and an octopus keeping things coordinated. But I would say that what has been the hardest part of the job has been being met with suspicion regarding my professionalism because I was the wife of the artist – on top of being a woman in a male-dominated business – especially when I showed up with three kids in tow. That required some serious muscle.

Jonnye: Where do you see yourself and Walter in the future?

Marie: We want to continue doing what we love: bringing hope, joy, community, and emotional release to people that love Walter's music. We love what we do and want to keep going as long as we can. Retirement is not really on the table. We talk about having a bit more time to do things together – just Walter and me. But we also really love the good opportunities that are currently open for Walter and by extension for me. We are happy. We have a house in Denmark now as well as our home in California. Our three adult children have all decided to live in Denmark and my mom lives there as well. **9.**

I spend time in both places, as well as visits to the road. I love how we continue to find new ways at 73 and 61 to live our lives full blast.

Jonnye: What would you like to be remembered for when the Blues family reflects back on your many contributions?

Marie: A creative woman who loves deeply, who seeks to always do her best, and who wants to leave this place better than she found it.

Jonnye: When you reach your breaking point or are in a place that you need to escape for self-preservation, what is it that you do for yourself?

Marie: I just went on a week-long bicycle ride through Burgundy, France with a dear friend. I was totally immersed in it. We had deep conversations and just felt alive out in nature. I love exercising outside. Nature is my refuge in many ways. I also love traveling down the road in my car to chase this Blues guitar player I love, and with whom I have three kids, and rocking out to music in the car. I am fortunate to have great friends all over the world, and particularly combining our time visiting together with deep talks preferably out walking in nature. I love it when Walter is home from tour and we take little walks together (he is not really into super long hikes), and we spend time just being home. Cooking great food. Little everyday things we do as a couple mean a lot because we never take our time together for granted. Hmm, and then if I need a bit of a jolt, I take a stint in a superhot sauna followed by an ice plunge or cold shower. This tends to re-set my mood, should it become stale. And maybe that describes my personality quite well: *I like to feel alive and to stretch my reality, visit respectfully with the extreme, and ultimately reach deeply to experience everything life has to offer.* **10.**

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Harmonica by Clint Hoover His work with The Fontanas

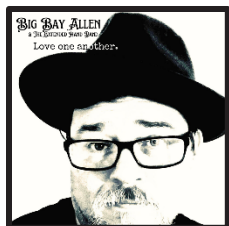
"From the sweet acoustic harmonica on "I Don't Want to See the Sun Today", to the totally in your face amped up tones on "When She's Gone" and "If You Would Just Be Mine", this is some of the most impressive harmonica playing I have ever heard". -Pat Missin

The harmonica has had a long history with rock and pop music, being featured by artists from The Beatles to King Gizzard & the Lizard Wizard, but unlike blues and to some extent country music, it has never been a core part of the instrumentation of those genres. Off the top of my head, I can only think of two big name bands with full time members whose primary role was to play the harmonica - the J. Geils Band (who of course started out as a blues band) and WAR. Perhaps if things had worked out a little differently 30+ years ago, there would have been a third name on that list.

I will state upfront that **Clint Hoover** is one of my favorite harmonica players. Whether riding shotgun for folk blues legend Papa John Kolstad, blowing early blues and hokum with The Sugar Kings, country with Bill Geezy and the Promise Breakers, jazz standards and originals with East Side and with his own trio, his playing on both diatonic and chromatic is always eloquent and lyrical, not to mention technically masterful. He first got my attention in the late 90s with "Dream of the Serpent Dog", an album of highly original acoustic jazz, but this was not his first visit to a recording studio. About a decade earlier, he recorded with a band called The Fontanas, as their non-singing harmonica player. Unlike Magic Dick and Lee Oskar with the previously mentioned J. Geils and WAR, Clint's main instrument with this band was chromatic (a CBH-2016, to be exact), although he also played some diatonic, as well as alto sax. He was not simply standing around waiting to take the occasional solo, either - although there were plenty of tasty solos, his harmonica was tightly woven into all the band's arrangements, helping to create an extremely distinctive sound. Unfortunately, shortly after finishing what would have been their debut album, financial problems set in, the band broke up and the master tapes got lost. Not at all an uncommon story, but thankfully, the story did not end there...

Fast forward more than 30 years and better late than never, we are finally treated to an official release of The Fontanas' album. Eleven tracks, ten of them written by singer and guitarist Brian Drake (currently fronting The April Fools), plus a solitary cover - and if you did not know the original, you would probably assume it was one of theirs too. The strong melodies, sharp lyrics, crisp guitars and tight, propulsive rhythm section would have held their own against bands such as The Replacements, Gin Blossoms and The BoDeans, not to mention that the harmonica solos would have given John Popper a serious run for his money. So... given that that this was recorded in the late 80s, does it sound dated? Well, I do not think that anyone hearing it would be surprised to learn when it was recorded, but I think the uniqueness of the harmonica-driven melodic hooks would make it still sound fresh to today's ears. "Unique" is a word that comes to mind a lot of as I listen to this album, particularly with regard to the harmonica. **11.**

I probably don't need to say that I have heard a lot of harmonica over the years, but I've never heard anything quite like the playing on this album and I'm pretty sure that unless you were lucky enough to catch one of their live shows back on the day, you have not heard anything quite like this either. Not just the unique (there's that word again) way the harmonica is integrated into the band's overall sound, but also in the incredible solos Clint throws into these songs. From the sweet acoustic harmonica on "I Don't Want to See the Sun Today", to the totally in your face amped up tones on "When She's Gone" and "If You Would Just Be Mine", this is some of the most impressive harmonica playing I have ever heard. Of course, it's fun to speculate about what might have happened if The Fontanas had got some serious airplay back in 1990. I am not sure they would have inspired all the up-and-coming bands to start auditioning harmonica players, but I cannot help but think that Clint's playing would have sparked the imagination of any open-minded harp players who happened to be listening to the radio back then. Maybe this release might go some way to doing that. Anyway, I really cannot recommend this album highly enough, whether you are looking for inspiration on how to incorporate a harmonica into a rock or pop ensemble, or you're a Clint Hoover fan curious about his earlier work, or just someone who likes great music. To download or purchase a CD, visit Blackberry Way Records. To learn more about Clint Hoover and his other projects, visit his website. To hear the man himself talk about his music, check out his recent interview with the Harmonica Happy Hour Podcast at <https://www.harmonicahappyhour.com/clint-hoover-interview/> ~Paul Missin



"Love One Another"

Big Bay Allen & The Extended Hand Band

Big Bay Allen's debut release on Lightning in A Bottle Records truly bottles up a great variety of Blues! "The whole album deals with love...mostly how we don't do it well, and need to change." Big Bay said. The title track shows that hatred affects us all...rich, poor...rural...urban...All of us — "we gotta start loving one another, 'fore this hate kill's me and you." In a nutshell, this entire album bottles up raw emotion and unhindered artistry, and sports a great list of guest musicians who make up the Extended Hand Band including Chad Rupp, Joe Munroe, TJ Wong, Manny DeGrandis, and Charlie Barath to name a few! When asked about the name of his band on this album, Big Bay said, "Every band I have ever been in has broken up...which is why I have always done my own thing. The Extended Hand Band can never break up. It is an ongoing invitation for friends to 'sit in' so to speak...So the band is anyone I extend a hand of invitation to...and their reciprocation, extending their hand back in support. The band could look different on any given day."

Already receiving national and international radio recognition, this album is one of the unexpected jewels of 2024. ~ Blues" Christianson

**Officially released on Halloween, it is available at all the normal streaming platforms, and for download at your usual digital retailers. CDs are available directly from Big Bay Allen at a show, or drop an email to: bigbayallen@gmail.com or visit his Bandcamp site at: bigbayallenblues.bandcamp.com

V O L U N T E E R

*The Blues It takes a village!!!!*

I was asked recently to do an interview about my being the lead of the Blues Society of Western PA and all that has been done by the Blues Society as a group over the years in honor of its 20th Anniversary. My response was that it was not just me but an entire team of people that work together as volunteers to get the job done. I cannot take credit when so many helping hands have been involved over the years.

I gave that response a lot of thought. I smiled thinking back to when I was dragged into this entity by my late partner. I had been ready to pursue a master's degree after 20 years of working to attain a bachelor's degree. My partner laughed and said... 'Blondie, I have supported all of your crazy endeavors over the years. Now, I need your help.' He added (with his famous chuckle) that he had the looks and I had the brains, together we would be a great team. That word **TEAM** still resonates when I think back to my early days having been recruited for **team Blues**. That said...it was the music and its people that brought me to the Blues. The warmth exuded at every turn from the Blues family gave it meaning and depth... and I owed my partner my assistance in his quest to **keep the Blues alive in Western PA**. It has been an amazing journey!

Everyone, as a team, pitches in where needed to get the business tasks and events done. At times, it is not for the faint of heart. Many hours are involved in securing and preparing merchandise, picking up equipment, running errands, standing for long periods of time at a booth to spread the word about the Blues, designing flyers and handouts, maintaining the books and all that is needed to enable 'all things Blues' to come together. It takes a team to coordinate such endeavors. It takes a team of volunteers to bring the umph. It takes the Blues family bringing their smiles and enthusiasm to each event to encourage getting things done. Yes, it is a family.... sharing and caring with music thrown in.

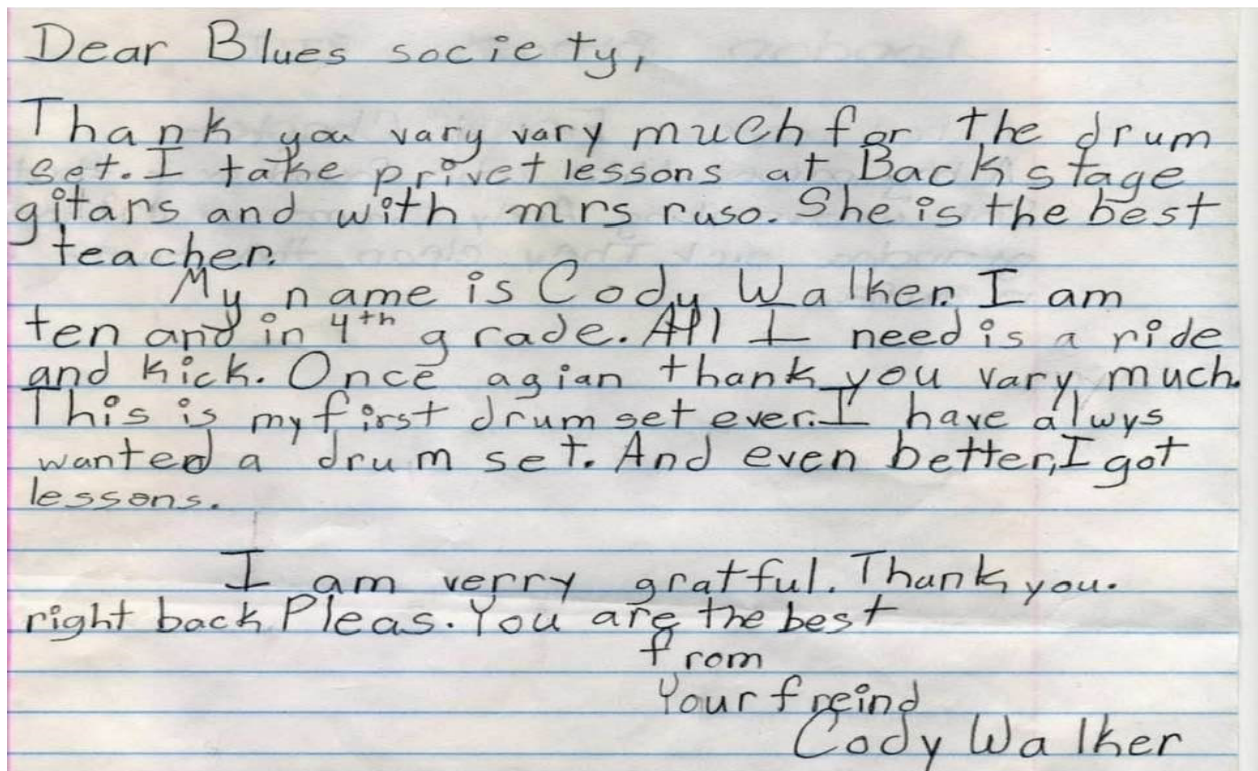
Could we have done things better at times, yes. Could we have done things much worse at times, yes. There was/is no 'tried and true formula'. Some give a little. Some give a lot. Some give their all. It is an ongoing mission... keeping the Blues moving along. Throughout the 20 years, people have come, people have gone. We, as a group, just keep trying.

I was asked if it was a glory job. I had to chuckle. Every group has someone to oversee the operation.... the girl scout troop, the baseball team, the football team,

a sales team, etc. This Blues enterprise is work. There are no company cars, no pay checks, no airline tickets to events, no entertainment reimbursement, no free dinners (except the \$10 meal during a Blues challenge). There is a lot of work that goes into coordinating any undertaking, behind the scenes, during an event and afterwards.

Please, give the credit to the team!!! Yes, it is hard work **but...** When one feels like throwing in the towel, it is the first smile; the first laugh; the first note that makes it all worthwhile. There is a lot of work but a lot of fun thrown into the mix at every turn... thanks to the team and the Blues family!!! Again, give credit where credit is due. **The team deserves the credit...** this Blues fan is just a worker bee and cheerleader.

We would not be able to do anything Blues without the continued support of our many Blues volunteers, the Blues fans, and the Blues members. Collectively, they deserve the credit for all things Blues in Western PA...and borders beyond. ~Jonnye Weber, President



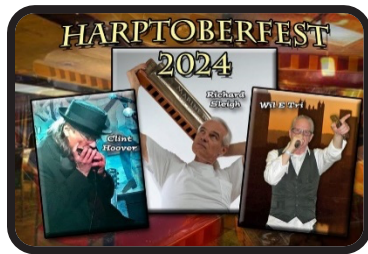
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HARPTOBERFEST 2024

Another year, another successful Harptoberfest! This annual event has become a highpoint for me ever since its inception back in 2015. It just gets more fun each and every time, and not just for me, but for everyone involved. Harptoberfest 2024 did not disappoint!

This year's Harmonica Showcase found its way back to the friendly atmosphere of 565 Live – Speakeasy & Stage in Bellevue, PA. 565 Live is a super cool basement room with friendly staff and ownership, great service, and a decidedly bohemian vibe.

For the very first time, we started the evening off a little early with an intimate Meet n' Greet/Q&A session with our featured Harmonica players. I was joined by Clint Hoover, Richard Sleight, and Wil E. Tri on the stage as we kicked things off with an improvised Harmonica jam to warm things up.

We then opened the floor to questions for any or all of the harp players. For the following 60 minutes or so, we were all treated to some wonderful stories and answers to the many great questions from the audience. Being it was the first time we offered something like this, none of us were quite sure what to expect. It turned out to be a fantastic start to the evening, and will, in all likelihood, become a regular feature to this event.

The house band, as usual, showcased some of the best talent Pittsburgh has to offer, and was led by "Sudden Steve" Binsberger on Keyboards. Joining Steve on the bandstand was Gary Antol on Guitars, Bob Insko on Double Bass, and JR Richley on Drums. I am not saying this because they are my friends, but these guys did an amazing job of supporting our talented Harmonica Artists. Those featured Harmonica players, by the way, each had a very distinct style, but Sudden Steve and the boys were absolutely solid behind each one. As has been customary, I warmed up the house band as well as the audience with a couple solid Blues tunes. Each band member got a nice intro and a chance to stretch out a bit. I then put on my *Emcee Hat*, and introduced our first special guest of the evening.

Twin Cities native, Clint Hoover, made his way to the stage, arranged his collection of Harmonicas to be readily accessible, and then absolutely wowed the room with a set of jazz-inspired Blues that showcased his mastery of both the chromatic and the diatonic Harmonica. Clint is inarguably a world-class Jazz chromatic player, but can more than hold his own on the diatonic as well. He treated the audience to a wonderful and varied selection of tunes as he played and sang his way into their hearts and memories. Along with many others in the room, I did not want his set to end.

Following a very short break, the crowd was regaled with a mostly solo set by State College, PA Harmonica master, Richard Sleight. Richard is well known globally not only as a gifted player, but also as a renowned Harmonica teacher and customizer. **15.**

He spent the following 40 minutes entertaining the audience with his acoustic guitar and harp rack, complete with a prototypical microphone/pickup that enabled various voicings of the Harmonica. Between the well-executed Americana songs and the storytelling, Richard's set flew by. He then had the house band join him for Little Walter's classic tune, *Last Night*, to finish his set.

After a couple unsuccessful attempts at booking the next artist for previous Harptoberfest events, we were finally able to make it happen. Up jumped Pittsburgh's Blues harp veteran, Wil E. Tri. He has been doing this Blues thing as long as anyone in this market, and I was thrilled to be able to get him on the bandstand for this year's show. As expected, Wil brought his best, and he treated the room to a fantastic set which not only entertained the folks in attendance, but also highlighted his proficiency on the instrument, and his knowledge of this great American art form. He roamed the room, and kept everyone engaged with his energy and magnetism. *Hey! Ho! What do you know?*

At this point, the only item not crossed off the list was the finale. These three accomplished players joined forces for a couple tunes to close out yet another memorable Harptoberfest. (Shoot, they even dragged *me* up there with them ...) Trading solos and swapping lyrics, the bandstand was overflowing with great music and energy. As usual, the night flew by, leaving the folks wanting more.



I want to give a shout of "Thanks!" to everyone involved in Harptoberfest 2024! The featured Harmonica artists, this stellar house band, Mark Helbling and all the awesome staff at 565 Live – Speakeasy & Stage, and everyone in attendance all have my deepest gratitude. And finally, I want to sincerely thank the Blues Society of Western Pennsylvania for sponsoring this event each and every year thus far.

Until next year, be well! ~Charlie Barath



'Still Got the Blues!'

It was a stellar autumn day in Western PA... a perfect day for the Blues Society of Western PA's 20th Anniversary celebration and what a celebration that it turned out to be!!!

At 1 pm that day, this Blues fan threw open the door and stepped outside to wave the Blues fans into Moondog's...the place where it all started long ago. The line of Blues fans wound down the block and beyond!!! WOW!!! It was a sign of unbelievable happenings to come!!! In the Blues fans came with high expectations and unbridled enthusiasm for what was to be had that day!!! Everyone was warned at the beginning of the show to 'fasten their seatbelts'!!!



As the day unfolded, smiles were seen everywhere from the first note to the last. The ongoing clapping and cheering were music to our ears. As the Luther Allison song goes, "Leave your ego at the door, play the music, love the people." That is what happened...good vibes were felt throughout the day!!!



Bubs McKeg and the Aces (Bubs McKeg on vocals and guitar, Helene Milan on vocals, Frank Giove on guitar, Allen Muckle on drums, John DeCola on keys, Mike Sweeney on Bass) took to the stage and created musical magic!!! Their special guests included Shari Richards, Lori Russo, Max Schang, Jimmy Adler, John Gresh, Craig King, Barbara Blue, Kenny Blake and Wil E. Tri.



Each added a much- welcomed, well received dimension to the show!!!! Each revved up the temperature. The music reached unbelievable Heights!!!



***Thank you to the vocalists and musicians for giving their all!!!
Thank you to everyone who came out to the show!!!***



***Thank you to everyone for your continued support of the Blues in Western PA.
Twenty years later... and 'we still have the Blues'!***



Thank you to everyone who has supported the ongoing Blues Music Series at Houlihan's!!! What an amazing roster of players! What an amazing audience that gathered each and every time!



Tears in My Eyes Anthony Geraci

On his latest release, titled *Tears in My Eyes*, Anthony Geraci - on piano, Hammond organ, and vocals - is joined by: Sugar Ray Norcia on vocals; Barrett Anderson on guitar and vocals; Paul Loranger on bass; Marty Richards and Kurt Kalker on drums; Drew

Davies and Mario Perrett on saxophone; and Anne Harris on violin. The project contains eleven Anthony Geraci originals.

With Sugar Ray on the vocals, the opening track - "Broken Mirror, Broken Mirror" - recreates some of that old Bluestones' magic. I am talking about the kind of stuff that would garner the band as many as ten Blues Music Award Nominations for one release. speaking of which, with Sugar's soulful vocals, Anthony's bluesy piano highlights, killer lead and slide guitar work from Barrett, and the tight rhythm groove that Paul and Marty are laying down, this traditional Blues number could very well get a 'song of the year' nod.

Having just seen the band last week, as I am listening to the very up-tempo "Owl's Nest", a vision of Paul slappin' the hell out of his stand-up bass immediately came to mind. He and Marty are all over the monstrous rhythm on this one. Along with that, a smokin' sax lead by Drew, and several very jazzy piano highlights from the boss man, all make this instrumental one for the movers and shakers. Because I needed a lot more than its three minutes, this one got too many replays to count. Killer stuff!

Another of the disc's five instrumentals is titled "Blues for Willie J." It is a tribute to Anthony's bandmate in The Proven Ones, the late and great **18.**

Willie J. Campbell. Putting on what could be a concerto type performance, you can just feel the emotion coming through Anthony's piano. With that thought in mind, not even knowing if he ever knew Willie, the same could be said for Barrett, who is at the disc's best on some very serious Blues guitar. Wow!

Another of my favorites is a melancholic number called "Judge Oh Judge". It features Sugar Ray emotionally, and quite sincerely, pleading his innocence to a murder charge. With Anthony keeping his hands to his right as much as he does, slow piano blues does not get too much better than this. On top of that, on the only track that he appears on, the ninety second sax lead by Mario could be referred to as 'Blues saxophone 101'.

After seeing last week's show and complimenting Anthony on the vocal skills he has acquired, I am surprised that "Ooeee" is the only track of the bunch that he sings on. That said, this is a fun filled, frolicking number you might expect to hear coming out of a joint somewhere in the French Quarter.

The disc closes with a very relaxing instrumental titled "Lonely Country Road Blues", and if you let that title paint you a picture you just might figure out what the song sounds like. By the way, the ensemble on this one is actually Anthony's current touring band of himself, Barrett Anderson on guitar and vocals, Paul Loranger on bass and Kurt Kalker on drums. Check them out where you can. Other songs on this excellent project include: the rockin' title track "Tears in My Eyes"; two other instrumentals titled "Oh No" and "Memphis Mist"; "Witchy Ways"; and "Now What".

~ Peter "Blewzzman" Lauro, Mary4Music

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Blues Trivia...

Born in Tennessee but forever linked to Mississippi, this guitarist loudly proclaimed, "I do not play no rock and roll, just the straight natch'l Blues." That did not stop nascent rockers like Bonnie Raitt ("Write Me a Few of Your Lines") and the Rolling Stones ("You Gotta Move") from copying his slide guitar style and recording his songs...name him.

Join us as we wish 'OUR' acts that will represent the Blues Society of Western PA at the International Blues Challenge in Memphis, TN a safe journey and a rewarding experience. (Jan 7-11, 2025)



Guitar Zack Wiesinger



Bubs McKeg and John DeCola

The International Blues Challenge has been a happening event for over 35 years. Acts from around the world gather to compete for the coveted privilege of being the best of the best in the Blues world. Each act will represent a Blues Society that is sanctioned as a member of the Blues Foundation.

Our 2024 representatives:

Guitar Zack Wiesinger - the band category
Bubs McKeg and John DeCola - the solo/duo category.

Each will be judged on the mandated criteria of established by the Blues Foundation: Blues content, instrumental talent, vocal talent, originality, and stage presence.

Show 'em what you got!!!! Let the attendees and musicians from around the world know that Western PA exudes talent!!!

Trivia Answer: Mississippi Fred McDowell spent most of his adult life farming and playing the guitar in Como, Mississippi. As a teenager, he learned to play slide guitar using a beef bone as a slide. Popular at house parties, fish fries, and local juke joints, he never recorded until he was fifty-five years old, when folklorist Alan Lomax taped him for the Southern Journey series on Atlantic Records. McDowell's life did not change much, though, until Chris Strachwitz came calling to record two albums for his Arhoolie label in the mid-sixties. These records caught the attention of the folk-Blues revival, and soon Fred was appearing on the bills of festivals from Newport to Europe, at colleges and coffee houses, and even in several films. He was much beloved by younger musicians like Raitt, with whom he was more than willing to share tips and techniques. Fred McDowell died of cancer in 1972 and was inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame in 1991. Recommended listening: The Best of Mississippi Fred McDowell (Arhoolie) – Cary Wolfson