Ann Arbor
Folk and Blues

The Scene in the 1960s and 1970s

By

Michael Erlewine

Michael@Erlewine.net

ISBN-13:
978-1517124953

ISBN-10:
1517124956

Cover Photo of Michael Erlewine interviewing Muddy Waters by Stanley Livingston.

Table of Contents

The Folk Music Revival in Ann Arbor

(The Late 1950s- Early 1960s)

In 1957 freshman student Al Young and Bill McAdoo founded the University of Michigan Folklore Society. Today Young is the Poet Laureate of California. The Folklore Society was a natural interface between the University folk and the townies – music. As a high-school dropout, I had no trouble integrating and being accepted in the folk circles. No questions were asked. We were all just 'folk' and it was a culturally rich scene.

And Michigan was not the only campus with a folklore society. Folk music was popping up on campuses all over the nation and we were interconnected by what came to be called the folk circuit, a constant stream of folk enthusiasts that traveled from campus to campus playing and sharing folk music. The circuit went from Cambridge to New York City to Ann Arbor to Chicago to Madison to Berkeley and back again. We were hitchhiking or piling into old cars and driving the route. Musicians like Bob Dylan would hitchhike into town, hang out, play a gig or two, and be on down the road. And well-known folk singers came.

Folksingers like Ramblin' Jack Elliot and groups like the New Lost City Ramblers and the Country Gentlemen were regular visitors to Ann Arbor and this was before anyone was famous. They didn't stay in fancy motels, but with us. They stayed in our houses, slept on a couch or in the spare bedroom. We all hung out together and played music or sat in the Michigan Union and drank coffee all day. Whatever music and culture they brought with them really had a chance to sink in. They shared themselves and their time with us. They were just like us.

Ann Arbor had its own players. The president of the

Folklore Society was Howie Abrams and we sported folk musicians like Marc Silber, Al Young, Dave Portman, Peter Griffith, and Perry Lederman. There was also an important lady named "Bugs," but I can't remember her last name. Anyone know? And we put on festivals and events. For example, the folklore society raised money to bring Odetta to Ann Arbor where she gave her first college performance. And a young Bob Dylan gave an early performance as part of a small folk-music festival in Ann Arbor put on by the U-M Folklore Society. I can remember sitting in the Michigan Union with a very nervous Dylan, drinking coffee and smoking, while we waited for the review of Dylan's performance the night before to come out in the Michigan Daily newspaper. It was something like 10:30 AM when the review surfaced and it was positive. With that good news Dylan proceeded to hitchhike out of town. And when Odetta sang at the Newport Folk Festival in 1960, Al Young, Perry Lederman, and Marc Silber hitchhiked there to see her. And there was also a subtle change taking place.

Folk music in the late 1950s and early 1960s was part of what is called the "Folk Revival," and those of us who were part of it were very much aware of the need to protect and revive our musical heritage. Dylan and Baez were not writing their own tunes back then but rather reviving and interpreting songs that harkened from other generations. What made you a good folksinger then was the ability to authentically reproduce or reenact a particular song. The keywords were "authentic" and "revive." Folksingers went to great lengths to locate and reproduce the most authentic versions of a song. Writing our own songs came years later. We were busy rescuing this part of our cultural heritage from oblivion.

Folk music at that time was mostly White folk music with

maybe a peppering of Black country-blues artists or a virtuoso Black singer like Odetta. They were the exception, but they were treated like the rule: revive them and be authentic. When we heard the country blues, we wanted to revive and sing them as authentically as we could, Ebonics and all.

So, it was somewhat confusing when we eventually found out that the blues not only didn't need our reviving, but were alive and well, playing at a bar just downtown where they were perhaps separated by a racial curtain. We didn't go there because… well, just because. Another insidious form of racism.

But in fact blues, especially city blues, was very much alive, very seminal, and very, very available. In the early and mid-1960s, young White Americans began the trek to the other side of the tracks, took the trip downtown, and eventually the journey to Chicago and other places where electric blues were being played. Ann Arbor played a very significant role in introducing White America to city blues. The original two Ann Arbor Blues Festivals in 1969 and 1970 were landmark events and the three succeeding Ann Arbor Blues and Jazz Festivals just opened it all up to a wider audience.

There is more on this general topic in my book "Blues in Black & White: The Landmark Ann Arbor Blues Festivals," which was picked as one of the top 20 books published in Michigan last year. You will find it here:

http://www.amazon.com/Blues-Black-White-Landmark-Festivals/dp/0472116959/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1321295671&sr=1-1

And of course there were the folk festivals, of which the one in Newport, Rhode Island is perhaps the most famous, if not the first.

The Newport Folk Festival was established in 1959 by George Wein, the same man who in 1954 established the Newport Jazz Festival. The first Newport Folk Festival was held on July 11-12, 1959 and featured, among other acts, the Kingston Trio, a group that had exploded to national prominence only the year before. Flanking the Kingston Trio were classic folk singers like Odetta, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, and of course, the ubiquitous Pete Seeger.

During a set by the singer/songwriter Bob Gibson at that first 1959 festival, a young Joan Baez made her national debut to a wildly enthusiastic audience of over 13,000 people. The Newport festival is still considered to be the granddaddy of all folk festivals, even though it has been reduced in size in recent years.

The folk scene in the early '60s was very active and organized enough to have a well- established set of venues (coffee houses, church sponsorships, etc.) and routes that stretched across the country and over which performing folk artists traveled, mostly by hitchhiking. By the early 1960s folk enthusiasts everywhere were learning the rudiments of music research, at least to the point of tracing particular songs back through time to their roots or at least trying to. It was axiomatic at that time that the original version of a song was preferable to later versions, almost always enriching the listener's experience and enjoyment of the tune. "Sing Out! Magazine" was one of the main repositories of this research, our musical collective-heritage.

It should be remembered that the folk-music revival emerged toward the end of the 1950s and the early 1960s, a time when more and more young people were rejecting the culture of the 1950s (the flattop haircuts and what we felt was a cookie-cutter mentality) and

thirsting for something a little more real. It is a simple fact that most of us looked to the folk music tradition as a way of grounding ourselves, a way to somehow get underneath or break through the social veneer in which we were raised. Future events cast their shadow and the counterculture hippie revolution that was to come later in the mid-1960s was already emerging.

The Folk Scene

Unlike folk music, whose roots were often in England or Ireland, with blues, to the surprise of most white folk-blues lovers, a trip into the history book was often as easy as venturing into a different part of town, only we didn't know it then. The folk music scene was flourishing on college campuses and what started at Newport in 1959 was echoed in the next few years by startup folk festivals all across America, including the Berkeley and Chicago Folk festivals, both of which debuted in 1961. And, although these folk festivals also featured some blues (country blues), the blues at those festivals was mostly treated as part of the folk genre, and as a sidelight at that.

For example, one could hear Jessie 'Lone Cat' Fuller at Hertz Hall (Berkeley, CA) in 1959 and at Newport in 1960. In 1960 Robert Pete Williams performed at Newport. Other festivals in the early 1960s had Lightnin' Hopkins, Mance Lipscomb, and Mississippi John Hurt, Rev. Gary Davis, Sleepy John Estes, Jesse Fuller, and occasionally John Lee Hooker. It is hard for me to imagine John Lee Hooker or Lightnin' Hopkins not getting mainstream attention wherever they played. In 1965, an electrified Bob Dylan, backed by the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, shocked the Newport folk crowd and helped to bring awareness of modern city blues to a mostly white folk crowd. Dylan was booed. Dylan's

album "Highway 61 Revisited" was released in August of 1965, including the hit single "Like a Rolling Stone."

The Folk Revival – Looking for Roots

This folk music revival in the later 1950s and early 1960s was just that, a revival, an attempt to revive a music that most felt was already deeply embedded in the past. The revival started out looking back and, for the most part, stayed that way for many years. We sought to revive and find our future in past songs rather than writing our own songs for the future.

Initially, younger folk artists were just too shy. Emerging players like Bob Dylan, Ramblin' Jack Elliot (and scores of now-unknown players schooled in traditional folk music) were (at first) not focused on writing songs themselves. Their favorite contemporary songwriter was probably Woody Guthrie, but most of the songs they played came from even earlier times, sometimes all the way back to England and Europe. The great majority of folk artists did covers of earlier songs, Dylan included. The goal then was to do them well, make them live again, i.e. to revive them.

Pivotal artists of the time like Joan Baez and the New Lost City Ramblers were not writing their own songs, but instead re-enacting and re-presenting the finest in traditional folk music. Their technique was flawless, but it was not their own songwriting creativity that was being featured. Groups like the Kingston Trio and the Weavers are perfect examples. The folk music magazine "Sing Out!" is a written testimony to this approach. White America was exploring its roots, but we were looking backward to find what we felt was missing in the present – our living roots. Folk artists as a group had not yet empowered themselves to write for the present, much less for the future. They were too busy

trying to make the past live again, reviving their heritage. That's why it is called a folk revival.

I was fortunate enough to be part of the early folk scene in the late 1950s and early 1960s. There was a route we all traveled that went from Cambridge, Massachusetts to New York City, to Ann Arbor, to the University of Chicago, to Madison, Wisconsin, to Berkeley, California, and then round back again. For the most part we all hitchhiked or piled into cars that could barely run all the way across this wide country. If I remember right, I believe I hitchhiked the distance from Ann Arbor to New York City some ten times, and hitchhiked to and lived in Venice Beach and North Beach, San Francisco as early as 1960. I even travelled with Bob Dylan for a while, hitchhiking together with my friend Perry Lederman, who then was already a legendary guitar instrumentalist.

The folk route also included side trips to places like Oberlin and Antioch colleges in Ohio, and so on, wherever colleges and universities were. In Ann Arbor, folk artists like Bob Dylan and Joan Baez were frequent visitors, while groups like the New Lost City Ramblers and the Country Gentlemen were pretty much regulars, and Ramblin' Jack Elliot spent a lot of time there. We met mostly in houses or apartments and it seems we spent an inordinate amount of time drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes in the cafeteria of the University of Michigan Student Union, the place called M.U.G, the Michigan Union Grill. I can recall sitting around the Union with a nervous Bob Dylan who was awaiting the Michigan Daily review of one of his earliest performances in Ann Arbor. He couldn't bear to leave town until the review came out. When he saw that the review was good, Dylan was on his way, hitchhiking out of town.

For the most part, the folk movement at this time was oriented around covering traditional folk tunes. The folk artists originality was in how well they sang the song and not yet in the writing of contemporary songs. This is not to say that no songs were written; some were. My point is that back then it was all about the 'singer' in 'singer/songwriter' and not yet so much about the 'songwriter'. For most of us, that came a bit later.

I can remember well traveling in 1961 with Bob Dylan and stopping at Gerde's Folk City on West 4th Street in New York. Gerde's was 'the' happening place back then and the folk star of the moment in that club was a guitar virtuoso named Danny Kalb, who later became part of the group known as the "Blues Project." Dylan was obviously jealous of the attention Kalb was getting (you could hear it in his voice), but it was not just petty jealousy. He honestly could not understand what Kalb had going for him that he didn't. It boggled his mind. I didn't know then that my traveling companion was "The" Bob Dylan, but I am certain he must have. After all, he had something to say that we needed to hear.

Remember, all of this was in the early 1960s, well before Haight Ashbury and the hippie scene. Most folkies (like myself) were wanna-be Beatniks, but that train had already left the station. We stood outside conventional society, but we were not so much politically alienated from that society as we were repulsed by it, and fascinated by the world of music, literature, art, and our own little social scene. Things were happening man! I was 19 years old.

The Folk Blues

Real folk-blues artists like Elizabeth Cotton and Jessie 'Lone Cat' Fuller began to be featured at festivals like the Berkeley Folk Festivals in the late 1950s. Many of

them came to Ann Arbor where I lived and we heard them live, songs like “Freight Train” (Cotton) and “San Francisco Bay Blues” (Fuller). To folk enthusiasts like myself, this was still just folk music, but you did get a different feeling when you heard the blues. To me at the time, this just sounded like really good folk music – ‘really’ good. Back then we didn’t know much about the blues, but we sure could feel that music.

While folk enthusiasts heard some blues early on (as mentioned), it was at first mostly only the folk blues, and folk blues were seen as just another form (albeit, with a lot of feeling) of folk music. Later, and only very gradually, more and more country blues began to appear, but usually only southern acoustic blues, not music from the North and nothing at all from the inner cities. There was no awareness of inner-city blues or electrified blues and no interest either. At that time electric-folk music was an oxymoron.

Being Part of the Scene

As a folkie myself, I can remember listening to acoustic folk-blues and really loving it, but I treated it the same way I treated traditional folk music, as something that also needed to be preserved and revived – learned, played, shared - kept alive. It was a natural assumption on our part that we were listening to the vestiges of what had once been a living tradition and we wanted to connect to that past, to revive and relive it. We had no idea that modern electric-blues music was not only ‘not-dead’, but was playing ‘live’ most nights of the week probably only blocks away, separated from us by a racial curtain. We just had no idea. The folk music scene had few blacks in it (other than a handful of performers) and those that were present were usually the older folk-blues artists like Sonny Terry, Odetta, and

so on. Their music was perceived by folkies as coming out of the past, not part of the present.

Please don't get the idea that our exposure to folk music was only at concerts or folk societies. Like most musicians, we played or practiced music all the time, if only to learn the songs and how to play our instruments. We were also exposed to a lot of jazz. In Ann Arbor in the early 1960s, before bars could serve liquor by the glass, everyone met in apartments and houses around town to drink, smoke pot, and play music. This was primarily a jazz scene and young folkies (underage high-school kids like me) were tolerated as long as we kept to the shadows and sat along the far edges of the rooms.

And quite a scene it was. I remember one house on E. Williams Street in Ann Arbor. Protruding horizontally from its second story hung a huge flag with a picture of Thelonious Monk. At nights, especially on weekends, there was impromptu jazz in that house that went on most of the night, with players like Bob James, Bob Detwiler, Ron Brooks, and many others. It was music, music, music plus wine and pot. High school kids like me sat on the floor, squeezed in along the back wall. We didn't rate any pot, but we used to snort the ashes from joints that others had smoked. That should tell you how desperate we were to be part of the scene!

Searching for Roots

We experienced jazz along with our folk music, but still not much blues. And the jazz was anything but bluesy jazz; it was more frenetic, like bop. And if it wasn't jazz we heard, then it was classical music played in the background on the stereo. Again: not much blues. This is an important point, because when the mostly-white folk musicians like myself were suddenly exposed to

modern (and virile) inner-city blues players like Junior Wells, Magic Sam, and Howlin' Wolf, we were astonished.

As folkies made the gradual transition from studying and researching traditional folk music to also searching out historic country folk blues and then on to discovering modern city blues, all of a sudden things lit up. We got it. Blues was not simply R&B or pop music like you heard on the radio, but music by plain folks – folk music! We could see that blues was the same as folk music, only modern, fresh – alive, well and incredibly potent.

What we had assumed must always be lost in the past, like folk music that depended on our efforts to restore and revive it was, when it came to blues, was very much alive and in the present – staring us in the face and more-or-less happy to see us at that. This blues music we were hearing lived in the present and not just in the past. It did not need us to revive it. Our idea of folk music as something to restore and treasure suddenly moved from the past into the present in our minds. We made the connection. Blues didn't need restoration. It was still with us and it was powerful. It was like the movie Jurassic Park; we had found a living dinosaur, folk music that lived in the present! And this music revived us and not vice-versa!

The blues scene in the early 1960s, as played out in the small clubs and bars of Chicago, Detroit, and other major industrial cities, while very much still alive, was by then itself on the wane, only we newcomers didn't know that yet. To us, it was way more alive than the standard folk music we knew. Intercity electric blues music was still authentic and strong, but (for the most part) the next generation of younger blacks was already not picking up on it; they were just not interested. Chicago-style city

blues was, to younger blacks at that time, old-peoples music, something from the South, a past and history they wanted to get away from rather than embrace. Younger blacks had already skipped ahead to R&B, Motown, and funk. Forget about those old blues.

My band played in a black bar for something like a year or a year and a half, a bar filled with mostly older black folks and a sprinkling of hippie whites who had come to see us. This was in 1967. Right next door was another black bar, where all the younger blacks hung out and where they played only the latest R&B hits. The younger blacks seldom came into our bar and, in general, were embarrassed that their parents and elders were listening to blues played by a racially-mixed band – listening to white boys play the blues. How embarrassing! Interest in the classic Chicago blues was just not there for the younger generation of blacks. They felt that blues was music from an older generation, music for old people.

While within the black community the door was slowly closing on the Chicago blues artists (even the artists knew this), another and much wider door for this music was opening onto white America, an open door that would extend the careers for many of these artists and secure their music well into the future.

B.B. King said in Time Magazine in 1971:

“The blacks are more interested in the ‘jumpy’ stuff. The whites want to hear me for what I am.”

As pointed out, in the early 1960s the folk music revival was one of the main things happening on all the major campuses across America: Cambridge, Ann Arbor, Chicago, Madison, Berkeley, etc. What happened to it?

For one, in the mid-1960s, pop music groups like the

Rolling Stones were busy recording covers of blues classics and pointing out the source – the artists who originally wrote and recorded them. White players like me, eager for guidance, hunted down the original blues 45s, which were a revelation to us. I can remember rummaging through bins of old 45s in downtown Chicago and finding just incredible music.

That first “Rolling Stones” album, of the same name, was released in April of 1964. It contained tunes like Jimmy Reed’s “Honest I Do,” “Willie Dixon’s “I Just Want to Make Love to You,” “I’m a King Bee,” plus songs by Chuck Berry and Rufus Thomas.

The Stones second album, also released in 1964, veered away from the blues and contained tunes recorded by Chuck Berry, Wilson Pickett, Dale Hawkins, songs like “Under the Boardwalk.” It also included the blues-R&B tune made famous by Irma Thomas, “Time Is on My Side.” In 1965, the album “Rolling stones, Now!” had the Dixon-Wolf classic “Little Red Rooster.”

From that point onward, the blues content of Rolling Stones albums decreased. In 1965, the album “Out of Our Heads” had no real blues tunes, and neither did their other 1965 album, “December’s Children.” It was those first two albums in 1964, and in particular that first album, that pointed the blues out to many in the white audience. The U.K. was all about authentic blues well before white America ever heard of them.

In the wake of the Beatles and Rolling Stones, late summer and early fall of 1965 saw the emerging dancehall scene in San Francisco and the arrival of bands like the Grateful Dead. This was the beginning of the hippie era, and it’s when my own band, the Prime Movers, formed in Ann Arbor, Michigan. We knew nothing of the Grateful Dead, yet we too arose at the

same time and represented a new era in music and lifestyle.

In fact the summer of 1965 was the trigger point for so very much. It marked a change in the folk scene with the advent of groups like the Paul Butterfield Blues Band. If there was a single band that opened up blues to white players, it was the Butterfield Band. That first Butterfield album appeared late in 1965, and it totally kicked ass. The Butterfield band in person was way more powerful than anything they managed to record.

This racially mixed band playing authentic Chicago blues sent a lightning bolt-like signal through all of us who were just waking up to the blues anyway. Their message was that white players could overcome their fear to play black music, including the blues. The Paul Butterfield Blues Band set the standard and set white musicians on notice that anybody was free to try to play the blues. We were emboldened to try.

Unlike many areas of folk music, modern city blues at that time was anything but a dead art. While the lineage of most folk music required revival, like trying to trace out the history and line of the music, this was not true of blues. The blues lineage was not only unbroken, but indeed very much alive, both on black record labels and in thousands of bars and clubs across the nation. Perhaps some forms of country blues were endangered, but inner-city blues (at least for the older generation of Blacks) was in full swing. White Americans just knew little or nothing about it. During the later 1960s, all that changed. And last, but not least, many of the modern city blues players were still reasonably young and more than willing to be discovered.

They needed the money and appreciated the

recognition.

Historians would agree that from the middle to the late ‘60s, music in general was, to a real extent, fusing. The whole psychedelic era blurred the boundaries of different music genres and emboldened white players to play music of all *kinds* – black, Indian, Asian, etc. The first extended psychedelic-like guitar solo/jam was Michael Bloomfield and the tune “East-West ” on the Butterfield album of the same name in 1966. It was over 13 minutes in length and inspired legions of heavy metal players that followed.

Blues in Black & White

Ann Arbor Blues Festival – A Brief History

On a warm summer night in August of 1969 a music legacy was born. Several thousand blues lovers gathered in a small athletic field called Fuller Flats near the North Campus of the University of Michigan (a spot along the Huron River in Ann Arbor, Michigan) to witness the first “Ann Arbor Blues Festival.” By the time blues icon Sun House took the stage to close the show it was clear that something magical was happening in this southeast Michigan college town. Few present also knew that music history was being made, for the 1969 Ann Arbor Blues Festival was the first electric blues festival of its scale in North America.

When we look back at the roster of performers at those first two Ann Arbor Blues Festivals, it is hard to imagine that all of this great talent managed to converge at one place and time, blues greats like Bobby ‘Blue’ Bland, Big Joe Turner, Buddy Guy, John Lee Hooker, B.B. King, Albert King, Freddy King, Lightnin’ Hopkins, Howlin’ Wolf, Magic Sam, Muddy Waters, Son House, T-Bone Walker, and Junior Wells, to name a few. And that is just the short list.

How I Happened to Be There

Before I begin, let me tell you something about why I happen to be writing this and how I got involved with these landmark festivals in the first place. It is simple: those first two Ann Arbor Blues Festivals changed the course of my life forever.

Sometimes I think of myself as similar to the lead character in the movie “Forest Gump,” always on the edge of history, witnessing, but never quite front and

center, never in exactly the right place at the right time. However, when it comes to those first two blues festivals in Ann Arbor, I was “there and then,” one-hundred percent. Those festivals were life-altering events for me, a pivotal point in deciding who I was going to be and what I would do in my life. Let me give you a quick idea what I was about back then.

In 1968, when that first blues festival was being organized, I was part of the only blues band in the area. The “Prime Movers Blues Band” first came together in the summer of 1965, the same summer that the Grateful Dead formed in San Francisco. This was a time of real cultural change across the country. I was studying and learning to play Chicago-style blues 24x7. It was my passion.

We hooked up with the blues festival organizers pretty much by default: we were the only band in the area that knew anything about modern city blues. We had been to Chicago years before and seen all the blues greats live, not to mention: you couldn’t keep us out of that festival for the world. This festival was like a dream come true for me, a chance to see my idols, these great blues players up close and right here in my own home town. Who could ask for more?

My brother Dan and I volunteered (we probably forced ourselves on the organizers) and ended up being put in charge of feeding all the performers and making sure they had drinks. Trust me, providing drinks proved to be ‘key’ in gaining access to these players. The opportunity to meet our heroes was way beyond anything we could have imagined on our own.

And to put the icing on the cake, I ended up officially interviewing (on reel-to-reel tape) almost every blues artist and sideman at the festival - scores of them. Later

in my life, the experience of putting all that interview information together led to my becoming something of an archivist of music data in general and I eventually founded and built the All-Music Guide (allmusic.com), which today is the largest database of music reviews, bios, tracks, and information on the planet. So you can see what I mean when I say that these festivals were life-changing for me. They gave me direction. Now you know how I fit into all of this, so let's move on.

In this writing, I have two stories to tell. One of course is the importance of those first two Ann Arbor blues festivals, how they came about, who was involved, and the artists that played there – the music itself. The second story I want to share with you has more to do with my experience of how white America first became aware of electric-city blues music and, as you will see, the two are to some degree interdependent.

A Short History of Blues Festivals

To appreciate the uniqueness of those first Ann Arbor Blues Festivals, some historical context may be helpful. Blues as a genre did not always have festivals. Although some blues was included in many of the early folk festivals, it was almost exclusively of the acoustic 'folk-blues' variety, more of an add-on than a featured style at folk festivals like those held in Newport Rhode Island. It was the 'folk' in folk-blues that was what most people came to hear, not the blues. The "blues" was just a feeling that the folk-blues held for many of us and was not recognized as the genre it is today, at least by folkies like me. Until the late '60s, modern, electric, citified blues was almost exclusively the province of black Americans, made available on black record labels or served up in hundreds of small clubs and bars across the land. White Americans didn't go there. All that

began to change with that first Ann Arbor Blues Festival in 1969, but let's back up just a bit.

The Chitlin' Circuit

Chitterlings or 'Chitlins' as they are called are the large intestines of pigs that have been specially cleaned, stewed, and then fried. The Chitlin' Circuit as it was called consisted of hundreds of small venues (mostly in the south) where chitlins were served along with plenty of beer and music. These were the places where black musicians travelled to play the blues and where black audiences could congregate in a racially divided country and age. The chitlin' circuit also included (on the high-end) some major black theaters like the Apollo Theater in Harlem, the Howard Theater in D.C., the Cotton Club in NYC, the Royal Theater in Baltimore, the Fox Theater in Detroit, the Uptown Theater in Philadelphia, and so on. But for the most part, this kind of blues was played in the hundreds of small bars, clubs, and way-stops along the circuit. Many of the great blues musicians featured at those first Ann Arbor blues festivals knew the chitlin' circuit only too well. For years, these performers had traveled the circuit playing the blues-one-night stands at roadside bars and clubs. To white America, the chitlin' circuit was practically invisible. City blues at that time was black music played in black venues - music for blacks.

The Folk Festivals

By the 1950s, more and more young Americans became interested in their own indigenous music – American folk music. In the later '50s and early '60s, festivals and folklore societies became increasingly popular, in particular on college campuses and among more affluent white Americans. Along with the interest in folk music came the folklore societies. My first

experience with these groups was the University of Michigan Folklore Society in Ann Arbor in the early 1960s. And of course there were the folk festivals, of which the one in Newport, Rhode Island is perhaps the most famous, if not the first.

The Newport Folk Festival was established in 1959 by George Wein, the same man who in 1954 established the Newport Jazz Festival. The first Newport Folk Festival was held on July 11-12, 1959 and featured, among other acts, the Kingston Trio, a group that had exploded to national prominence only the year before. Flanking the Kingston Trio were classic folk singers like Odetta, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, and of course, the ubiquitous Pete Seeger. During a set by the singer/songwriter Bob Gibson at that first 1959 festival, a young Joan Baez made her national debut to a wildly enthusiastic audience of over 13,000 people. The Newport festival is still considered to be the granddaddy of all folk festivals, even though it has been reduced in size in recent years.

The folk scene in the early ‘60s was very active and organized enough to have a well-established set of venues (coffee houses, church sponsorships, etc.) and routes that stretched across the country and over which performing folk artists traveled, mostly by hitchhiking. By the early 1960s folk enthusiasts everywhere were learning the rudiments of music research, at least to the point of tracing particular songs back through time to their roots or at least trying to. It was axiomatic at that time that the original version of a song was preferable to later versions, almost always enriching the listener’s experience and enjoyment of the tune. “Sing Out! Magazine” was one of the main repositories of this research, our musical collective heritage.

It should be remembered that the folk-music revival emerged toward the end of the 1950s and the early 1960s, a time when more and more young people were rejecting the culture of the 1950s (the flattop haircuts and what they felt was a cookie-cutter mentality) and thirsting for something a little more real and authentic. It is a simple fact that most of us looked to the folk music tradition as a way of grounding ourselves, a way to somehow get underneath or otherwise break through the social veneer in which we were raised. Future events cast their shadow and the counterculture revolution that was to come later in the mid-1960s was already emerging.

The Folk Scene

Unlike folk music, whose roots were often in England or Ireland, with blues, to the surprise of most white folk-blues lovers, a trip into the history book was often as easy as venturing into a different part of town, only we didn't know it then. The folk music scene was flourishing on college campuses and what started at Newport in 1959 was echoed in the next few years by startup folk festivals all across America, including the Berkeley and Chicago Folk festivals, both of which debuted in 1961. And, although these folk festivals also featured some blues (country blues), the blues at those festivals was mostly treated as part of the folk genre, and, as mentioned, a sidelight at that.

For example, one could hear Jessie 'Lone Cat' Fuller at Hertz Hall (Berkeley, CA) in 1959 and at Newport in 1960. In 1960 Robert Pete Williams performed at Newport. Other festivals in the early 1960s had Lightnin' Hopkins, Mance Lipscomb, and Mississippi John Hurt, Rev. Gary Davis, Sleepy John Estes, Jesse Fuller, and occasionally John Lee Hooker. It is hard for me to

imagine John Lee Hooker or Lightnin' Hopkins not getting mainstream attention wherever they played. In 1965, an electrified Bob Dylan, backed by the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, shocked the Newport folk crowd and helped to bring awareness of modern city blues to a mostly white folk crowd. Dylan was booed.

The Folk Revival – Looking for Roots

This folk music revival in the later 1950s and early 1960s was just that, a revival, an attempt to revive a music that most felt was already deeply embedded in the past. The revival started out looking back and, for the most part, stayed that way for many years. We sought to revive and find our future in past songs rather than writing our own songs for the future.

Initially, younger folk artists were just too shy. Emerging players like Bob Dylan, Ramblin' Jack Elliot (and scores of now-unknown players schooled in traditional folk music) were (at first) not focused on writing songs themselves. Their favorite contemporary songwriter was probably Woody Guthrie, but most of the songs they played came from even earlier times, sometimes all the way back to England and Europe. The great majority of folk artists did covers of earlier songs, Dylan included. The goal then was to do them well, to make them live again.

Pivotal artists of the time like Joan Baez and the New Lost City Ramblers were not writing their own songs, but instead re-enacting and re-presenting the finest in traditional folk music. Their technique was flawless, but it was not their own songwriting creativity that was being featured. Groups like the Kingston Trio and the Weavers are perfect examples. The folk music magazine "Sing Out!" is a written testimony to this approach. White America was exploring its roots, but we

were looking backward to find what we felt was missing in the present – our living roots. Folk artists as a group had not yet empowered themselves to write for the present, much less for the future. They were too busy trying to make the past live again, reviving their heritage. That's why it was called a revival.

I was fortunate enough to be part of the early folk scene in the late 1950s and early 1960s. There was a route we all traveled that went from Cambridge, Massachusetts to New York City, to Ann Arbor, to the University of Chicago, to Madison, Wisconsin, to Berkeley, California, and then round back again. For the most part we all hitchhiked or piled into cars that could barely run all the way across this wide country. If I remember right, I believe I hitchhiked the distance from Ann Arbor to New York City some ten times, and hitchhiked to and lived in Venice Beach and North Beach, San Francisco as early as 1960. I even travelled with Bob Dylan for a while, hitchhiking together with my friend Perry Lederman, who even then was a legendary guitar instrumentalist.

The folk route also included side trips to places like Oberlin and Antioch colleges in Ohio, and so on, wherever colleges and universities were. In Ann Arbor, folk artists like Bob Dylan and Joan Baez were frequent visitors, while groups like the New Lost City Ramblers and the Country Gentlemen were pretty much regulars, and Ramblin' Jack Elliot spent a lot of time there. We met mostly in houses or apartments and it seems we spent an inordinate amount of time drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes in the cafeteria of the University of Michigan Student Union. I can recall sitting around the Union with a nervous Bob Dylan who was awaiting the Michigan Daily review of one of his earliest performances in Ann Arbor. He couldn't bear to leave

town until the review came out. When he saw that the review was good, Dylan was on his way, hitchhiking out of town.

Singers, Not Songwriters

For the most part, the folk movement at this time was oriented around covering traditional folk tunes. The folk artists originality was in how well they sang the song and not yet in the writing of contemporary songs. This is not to say that no songs were written; some were. My point is that back then it was all about the 'singer' in 'singer/songwriter' and not yet so much about the 'songwriter'. For most of us, that came a bit later.

I can remember well traveling in 1961 with Bob Dylan and stopping at Gerde's Folk City on West 4th Street in New York City. Gerde's was 'the' happening place back then and the folk star of the moment in that club was a guitar virtuoso named Danny Kalb, who later became part of the group known as the "Blues Project." Dylan was obviously jealous of the attention Kalb was getting (you could hear it in his voice), but it was not just petty jealousy. He honestly could not understand what Kalb had going for him that he didn't. It boggled his mind. I didn't know then that my traveling companion was "The" Bob Dylan, but I am certain he must have. After all, he had something to say.

Remember, all of this was in the early 1960s, well before Haight Ashbury and the hippie scene. Most folkies (like myself) were wanna-be Beatniks, but that train had already left the station. We stood outside conventional society, but we were not so much politically alienated from that society as we were repulsed by it, and fascinated by the world of music, literature, art, and our own little social scene. Things were happening man! I was 19 years old.

The Folk Blues

Real folk-blues artists like Elizabeth Cotton and Jessie 'Lone Cat' Fuller began to be featured at festivals like the Berkeley Folk Festivals in the late 1950s. Many of them came to Ann Arbor where I lived and we heard them live, songs like "Freight Train" (Cotton) and "San Francisco Bay Blues" (Fuller). To folk enthusiasts like myself, this was still just folk music, but you did get a different feeling when you heard the blues. To me at the time, this just sounded like really good folk music – 'really' good. Back then we didn't know much about the blues, but we sure could feel that music.

While folk enthusiasts heard some blues early on (as mentioned), it was at first mostly only the folk blues, and folk blues were seen as just another form (albeit, with a lot of feeling) of folk music. Later, and only very gradually, more and more country blues began to appear, but usually only southern acoustic blues, not music from the North and nothing at all from the inner cities. There was no awareness of inner-city blues or electrified blues and no interest either. At that time electric-folk music was an oxymoron.

Being Part of the Scene

As a folkie myself, I can remember listening to acoustic folk-blues and really loving it, but I treated it the same way I treated traditional folk music, as something that also needed to be preserved and revived – learned, played, shared - kept alive. It was a natural assumption on our part that we were listening to the vestiges of what had once been a living tradition and we wanted to connect to that past, to revive and relive it. We had no idea that modern electric blues music was not only 'not-dead', but was playing 'live' most nights of the week probably only blocks away, separated from us by a

racial curtain. We just had no idea. The folk music scene had few blacks in it (other than a handful of performers) and those that were present were usually the older folk-blues artists like Sonny Terry, Odetta, and so on. Their music was perceived by folkies as coming out of the past, not part of the present.

Please don't get the idea that our exposure to folk music was only at concerts or folk societies. Like most musicians, we played or practiced music all the time, if only to learn the songs and how to play our instruments. We were also exposed to a lot of jazz. In Ann Arbor in the early 1960s, before bars could serve liquor by the glass, everyone met in apartments and houses around town to drink, smoke pot, and play music. This was primarily a jazz scene and young folkies (underage high-school kids like me) were tolerated as long as we kept to the shadows and sat along the far edges of the rooms.

And quite a scene it was. I remember one house on E. Williams Street in Ann Arbor. Protruding horizontally from its second story hung a huge flag with a picture of Thelonious Monk. At nights, especially on weekends, there was impromptu jazz in that house that went on most of the night, with players like Bob James, Bob Detwiler, Ron Brooks, and many others. It was music, music, music plus wine and pot. High school kids like me sat on the floor, squeezed in along the back wall. We didn't rate any pot, but we used to snort the ashes from joints that others had smoked. That should tell you how desperate we were to be part of the scene!

Searchin' for Roots

We experienced jazz along with our folk music, but still not much blues. And the jazz was anything but bluesy jazz; it was more frenetic, like bop. And if it wasn't jazz

we heard, then it was classical music played in the background on the stereo. Again: not much blues. This is an important point, because when the mostly-white folk musicians like myself were suddenly exposed to modern (and virile) inner-city blues players like Junior Wells, Magic Sam, and Howlin' Wolf, we were astonished.

As folkies made the gradual transition from studying and researching traditional folk music to also searching out historic country folk blues and then on to discovering modern city blues, all of a sudden things lit up. We got it. Blues was not simply R&B or pop music like you heard on the radio, but music by plain folks – folk music! We could see that blues was the same as folk music, only modern, fresh – alive, well and incredibly potent.

What we had assumed must always be lost in the past, like folk music that depended on our efforts to restore and revive it was, when it came to blues, was very much alive and in the present – staring us in the face and more-or-less happy to see us at that. This blues music we were hearing lived in the present and not just in the past. It did not need us to revive it. Our idea of folk music as something to restore and treasure suddenly moved from the past into the present in our minds. We made the connection. Blues didn't need restoration. It was still with us and it was powerful. It was like the movie Jurassic Park; we had found a living dinosaur, folk music that lived in the present! And this music revived us and not vice-versa!

The blues scene in the early 1960s as played out in the small clubs and bars of Chicago, Detroit, and other major industrial cities, while very much still alive, was by then itself on the wane, only we newcomers didn't know

that yet. To us, it was way more alive than the standard folk music we knew. Intercity electric-blues music was still authentic and strong, but (for the most part) the next generation of younger blacks was already not picking up on it; they were just not interested. Chicago-style city blues was, to younger blacks at that time, old-peoples music, something from the South, a past and history they wanted to get away from rather than embrace. Younger blacks had already skipped ahead to R&B, Motown, and funk. Forget about those old blues.

My band played in a black bar for something like a year or a year and a half, a bar filled with mostly older black folks and a sprinkling of hippie whites who had come to see us. This was in 1967. Right next door was another black bar, where all the younger blacks hung out and where they played only the latest R&B hits. The younger blacks seldom came into our bar and, in general, were embarrassed that their parents and elders were listening to blues played by a racially-mixed band – listening to white boys play the blues. How embarrassing! Interest in the classic Chicago blues was just not there for the younger generation of blacks. They felt that blues was music from an older generation, music for old people.

While within the black community the door was slowly closing on the Chicago blues artists (even the artists knew this), another and much wider door for this music was opening onto white America, an open door that would extend the careers for many of these artists and secure their music well into the future.

B.B. King said in Time Magazine in 1971:

“The blacks are more interested in the ‘jumpy’ stuff. The whites want to hear me for what I am.”

1965: A Sea Change

As pointed out, in the early 1960s the folk music revival was one of the main things happening on all the major campuses across America: Cambridge, Ann Arbor, Chicago, Madison, Berkeley, etc. What happened to it?

For one, in the mid-1960s, pop music groups like the Rolling Stones were busy recording covers of blues classics and pointing out the source – the artists who originally wrote and recorded them. White players like me, eager for guidance, hunted down the original blues 45s, which were a revelation to us. I can remember rummaging through bins of old 45s in downtown Chicago and finding just incredible music.

That first “Rolling Stones” album, of the same name, was released in April of 1964. It contained tunes like Jimmy Reed’s “Honest I Do,” “Willie Dixon’s “I Just Want to Make Love to You,” “I’m a King Bee,” plus songs by Chuck Berry and Rufus Thomas.

The Stones second album, also released in 1964, veered away from the blues and contained tunes recorded by Chuck Berry, Wilson Pickett, Dale Hawkins, songs like “Under the Boardwalk.” It also included the blues-R&B tune made famous by Irma Thomas, “Time Is on My Side.” In 1965, the album “Rolling stones, Now!” had the Dixon-Wolf classic “Little Red Rooster.”

From that point onward, the blues content of Rolling Stones albums decreased. In 1965, the album “Out of Our Heads” had no real blues tunes, and neither did their other 1965 album, “December’s Children.” It was those first two albums in 1964, and in particular the first album, that pointed the blues out to many in the white audience. The U.K. was all about authentic blues well before white America ever heard of them.

In the wake of the Beatles and Rolling Stones, late summer and early fall of 1965 saw the emerging dancehall scene in San Francisco and the arrival of bands like the Grateful Dead. This was the beginning of the hippie era, and it's when my own band, the Prime Movers, formed in Ann Arbor, Michigan. We knew nothing of the Grateful Dead, yet we too arose at the same time and represented a new era in music and lifestyle.

In fact the summer of 1965 was the trigger point for so very much. It marked a change in the folk scene with the advent of groups like the Paul Butterfield Blues Band. If there was a single band that opened up blues to white players, it was the Butterfield Band. That first Butterfield album appeared late in 1965, and it totally kicked ass. The Butterfield band in person was way more powerful than anything they managed to record.

This racially mixed band playing authentic Chicago blues sent a lightning bolt-like signal to all of us who were just waking up to the blues anyway. Their message was that white players could overcome their fear to play black music, including the blues. The Paul Butterfield Blues Band set the standard and set white musicians on notice that anybody was free to try to play the blues. We were emboldened to try.

Unlike many areas of folk music, modern city blues at that time was anything but a dead art. While the lineage of most folk music required revival, like trying to trace out the history and line of the music, this was not true of blues. The blues lineage was not only unbroken, but indeed very much alive, both on black record labels and in thousands of bars and clubs across the nation. Perhaps some forms of country blues were endangered, but inner-city blues (at least for the older

generation of Blacks) was in full swing. White Americans just knew little or nothing about it. During the later 1960s, all that changed. And last, but not least, many of the modern city blues players were still reasonably young and more than willing to be discovered. They needed the money and appreciated the recognition.

Historians would agree that from the middle to the late ‘60s, music in general was, to a real extent, fusing. The whole psychedelic era blurred the boundaries of different music genres and emboldened white players to play music of all kinds – black, Indian, Asian, etc. The first extended psychedelic-like guitar solo/jam was Michael Bloomfield and the tune “East-West ” on the Butterfield album of the same name in 1966. It was over 13 minutes in length and inspired legions of heavy metal players that followed

The American Folk Blues Festival in Europe

The first large-scale blues festivals, “The American Folk Blues Festivals” were not really festivals and were never held in America. Established in 1962 and lasting through 1972, these so-called festivals were in fact tours of Europe by groups of black blues artists thankful to get the work. This is what informed the British blues-oriented groups like the Rolling Stones in the first place. Starting in 1962, at a tour run of three weeks, the American Folk Blues Festival excursions eventually would run up to six weeks. Individual concerts often lasted three to four hours. The tours started up again in 1980 and lasted until 1985.

Europe has always been in love with American black music, especially blues and jazz. Whereas in this country players like Muddy Waters and Howlin’ Wolf found it hard to get a job outside of their home-town

bars and the Chitlin' Circuit, in Europe these players were treated like VIPs and played to rapt audiences. Race was never a real issue on the continent. This is why so many black blues and jazz artists have relocated to Europe. They found jobs that paid well and they were not considered second-class citizens.

Thanks to these touring festivals, Europe heard such blues greats as T-Bone Walker, Memphis Slim, Willie Dixon, Sonny Terry, Brownie McGhee, and John Lee Hooker. In 1963, the list was joined by Muddy Waters, Otis Spann, Victoria Spivey, Big Joe Williams, Lonnie Johnson, and Sonny Boy (II) Wiliamson. 1964 brought Hubert Sumlin, Lightnin' Hopkins, Sunnyland Slim, sleepy John Estes, and Howlin' Wolf. And in 1965, there was Mississippi Fred McDowell, J.B. Lenoir, Big Walter Horton, Roosevelt Sykes, Buddy Guy, Big Mama Thornton, Doctor Ross, and others.

In a very real sense, Europe was privileged to hear the more modern, electric, city blues well before the general (white) public in America knew anything about it. White America for the most part did not even know this music existed until the later Sixties.

Memphis Country Blues Festival 1967

Perhaps the earliest festival in this country dedicated exclusively to blues, albeit the more acoustic folk or country blues, was the "Memphis Country Blues Festival." Although it was organized in 1966 with the help of the great blues journalist Robert Palmer, the first festival was actually held in 1967. For example, the 1968 festival featured artists like Bukka White, Nathan Beauregard, Joe Callicott, Furry Lewis, and Rev. Robert Wilkins. Again, as the festival title suggests, this was country blues and acoustic artists, not the inner-city electric blues that had not yet been celebrated. That

was to happen in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

The Ann Arbor Blues Festival: The First of Its Kind

There is no doubt that the first North American all-out blues festival for modern, electric city blues (in fact all types of blues) was the Ann Arbor Blues Festival held in the fall of 1969. It featured artists like Muddy Waters, Junior Wells, B.B. King, Otis Rush, J.B. Hutto and the Hawks, Howlin' Wolf, T-Bone Walker, Magic Sam, Freddy King, and dozens of modern-electric blues players as well as traditional blues artists like Son House, Lightnin' Hopkins, and those in between like Clifton Chenier, Roosevelt Sykes, and many others.

In the Ann Arbor festivals, the accent was off the folk and country blues and right on modern, big-city, electric blues artists. After all, Ann Arbor is only about a three-hour drive from Chicago. While the Newport Folk Festival sometimes featured more than folk music, and to a small degree helped blues to segue from folk and country blues to a more modern blues, this was not something they actively featured. For many years, electric anything was frowned upon at the Newport festival. It was in Ann Arbor that we find the first all-out presentation of modern electric city blues.

It has been said that those first Ann Arbor blues festivals mark the end of the city-blues era and the beginning of its exploitation. Of course there is some truth to that if we mean that by reaching a wider audience, the music will be more easily embraced and imitated. But in fact the electric city blues by that time was already dying out of its own accord. The younger blacks had turned away. Reaching the larger White audience actually prolonged the music's decline and extended its life. Today (2008), with most of the original blues giants gone, we may be facing what amounts to

reenactment and revival once again – city blues as folklore.

There is no record of a blues festival of any similar scope and extent that predates that first Ann Arbor Blues Festival, which was organized in 1968 and held in 1969, much less one that endures to the present day. Actually, the popular Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festival, which saw its roots in those first two Ann Arbor Blues Festivals, was suspended in 2007 due to lack of funds. The last festival was in 2006.

The Ann Arbor Blues Festival: What it Was

The Ann Arbor Blues Festival was just that, a festival of blues featuring modern electric city blues -- the first of its kind in North America. Those two festivals helped to mark the discovery of modern blues music and the musicians that made that music. It was something more than just black music for white people. It was somewhat of a celebration for the black musicians themselves and the list of great blues artists present, on or off the stage, reads like a “Who’s Who” of blues musicians (of all types) alive at the time. They came from all over to play, of course, but also they came just to be together, to hang out – a real celebration.

Can you imagine? There was my dad, the comptroller of a small Michigan college sitting on folding chairs with blues great Roosevelt Sykes, the two of them leaning back up against a chain-link fence, swapping stories, and having beers all afternoon. They just liked each other and were having a ball. That’s the way it was all around – one big getting-to-know-one-another party. It was special.

That first Ann Arbor Blues Festival had its inception in the fall of 1968 at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. An on-campus entertainment group had called a

meeting with the idea of putting together some kind of musical event loosely based on the blues-rock music that was emerging from Great Britain, groups like the Rolling Stones, John Mayall, and its reflection in this country. The self-appointed chairman of this group was Cary Gordon, a student from the suburbs of Detroit.

However, also present was John Fishel, another student who had just transferred to Michigan from Tulane University. Fishel (who knew no one in town) came across a handbill asking for people interested in being involved in a “blues” festival to attend an initial meeting at the Michigan Student Union. Being new in town, Fishel decided to check it out. At that time he was already into well into listening to blues.

John Fishel:

“I had a growing interest in the black music from my high school days in Cleveland. At the time I had seen as many of the Motown and other acts who came to town as well as a number of acts on the "folk club" circuit including the Paul Butterfield Blues Band and James Cotton, etc. I was listening to many of the country artists who were being rediscovered. I had also spent a summer in Great Britain and seen some of the British bands influenced by the blues, like John Mayall, the Stones, Peter Green, etc. I had been attracted to the music and began to collect albums by *their* influences: BB King, Albert King, Muddy Waters, Howlin’ Wolf, Otis Rush, John Lee Hooker, and later Junior Wells and Magic Sam.”

Fishel, who was not so much interested in the blues-rock concept, but rather in the authentic blues masters themselves, volunteered to be the entertainment co-chair along with another U. of M. Student, Janet Kelenson. Other original members of that core group

included Bert Stratton and Fred Braseth (PR chairs), Ron Marabate (technical), and Ken Whipple (business affairs), plus Chris Seltsam, Howard Husok, Rena Selden, Dick Tittsely, Charlie Yoryd, Carol Maxwell, and local DJ Jim Dulzo.

The University of Michigan, with some initial reluctance, had agreed to be a sponsor without really understanding either the concept or the financial commitment. Later the Canterbury House (sponsored by the Episcopalian Church), an organization that had run a coffee-house/folk club in Ann Arbor for some time, also came on board as a sponsor. Something should someday be written about the generosity and foresight of the Canterbury House, which sponsored so much good music in those early years in the Ann Arbor area.

For many young white blues lovers living in the Midwest, like myself, a trip to Chicago, where the electric city blues was born was just a part of our general education. I should know. Our band, the Prime Movers Blues Band, made that trek in 1966 and at other times too, with our drummer (a young Iggy Pop) in tow. I was the lead singer and harmonica player, my brother Dan Erlewine played lead guitar, Robert Sheff (aka Blue 'Gene' Tyranny) was on keyboards, Jack Dawson (later with Siegel-Schwall Blues Band) played bass, and Jimmy Osterberg (aka Iggy Pop), a young drummer we had found in a frat band.

And like so many students of the blues, the first place we landed was in Bob Koester's "Jazz Record Mart." Koester, who founded Delmark Records (in my opinion the most important electric blues label ever) has probably introduced more blues fans to the real Chicago blues than anyone else on earth. He has my undying gratitude.

It was through Koester's kindness and generosity that we were able to visit many of the seminal blues clubs on Chicago's West and South side, places like Theresa's Lounge, Peppers Lounge, and others, watching artists like Little Walter, Junior Wells, Buddy Guy, Big Walter Horton, and all the blues greats playing live in these small clubs. John Fishel took the same route in 1968, as he notes here:

"By Thanksgiving I was on a roll and decided that I should go to Chicago to deepen my understanding of the scene and begin to identify artists to sign for the festival. My roommates were going home to Highland Park in the suburbs for the holiday, so I tagged along. Once there, I announced I was going into the Loop to visit the Jazz Record Mart, home of Delmark Records. I took public transportation to Jazz Record Mart, then located at 7 West Grand Street and walked into this very small crowded space.

"There were bins of hundreds of albums (blues, traditional jazz, bebop, etc. all the way to the new music being played by the AACM (Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians) and recorded by Delmark), the covers all wrapped in plastic. The actual records were stored on shelves behind the counter to prevent rip offs. Hundreds of 78's were stacked on the floor for collectors. There were also posters and handbills advertising music playing throughout the city. It was crowded with lots of customers, a number of very hip staff, and Bob Koester.

"Koester was the founder of Delmark Records in St Louis; he later moved to Chicago. The label was in the cellar entered through a trap door in the back. Bob was and is an original and he is the guy whom I credit for helping me to explore the blues and enter a world which

I only knew from albums and 45's, but had no idea about as lifestyle.

“On that first visit I began to discuss with him the idea of a festival focused on the real blues (if at the time I had a sense of what that meant), his ideas on who might be invited to perform, and perhaps most important for me, I asked about visiting some clubs. I heard about artists I never knew existed, guys like Luther Allison, Jimmy Dawkins, Mighty Joe Young, in addition to many legendary figures I didn't know were still alive, like Big Joe Williams, Sleepy John Estes, and Roosevelt Sykes, the Honeydripper. I was hooked!

“The next day, to the horror of my hosts in Highland Park, I announced I was going out to clubs on the South Side. I was back at the Jazz record Mart at closing time and one of the Jazz Record Mart clerks (Jim Brinsfield) took me by the El down to the clubs. I remember going to Peppers at 43rd Street and Vicennes (among others) and spending a night listening, watching, and becoming immersed in a lifestyle which would impact the first two festivals in 1969 and 1970. I remember a young Junior Wells and lots of bands who I never heard of, but who shook the place and reflected the connection of the migration from the south to the north in previous decades.

“I spent the next few days "living" at the Jazz Record Mart and talking to Bob Koester. I have (forty years later) three pages of mimeographed (remember that?) notes with dozens of names, addresses, and phone numbers of blues singers and players which Bob gave me. Looking at it today, many became the artists later contracted for the festivals, while others never were included. The sheets have my handwritten notes, names like: Carey Bell, the Myers Brothers with Fred

Below, Johnny Young, Robert Pete Williams, Johnny Shines, Otis Spann, St Louis Jimmy Oden, Matt Murphy, Eddie Taylor, Little Brother Montgomery, Billy Boy Arnold, Lonnie Johnson, Tampa Red, Bukka White, Houndog Taylor, Earl Hooker, Fred McDowell and the Howlin' Wolf. I had hit the Jack pot.

Jim Dulzo, popular DJ in the Ann Arbor/Detroit area at the time writes:

"The next thing I remember is that the blues committee decided they wanted to do a kind of like a warm-up or promotional concert for the festival. The idea was that since the festival itself was going to happen in like very late summer or very early in the fall, it would be very difficult to promote the students as they were coming back, so we wanted to do a kind of a warm up concert in the spring, before everybody left town.

"And so we did a show at the Michigan Union Ballroom, with the Luther Allison Trio. And I remember that I MC'd the show, because I was the disk jockey. And I think for me that was a very transforming experience, because although I had really enjoyed seeing the blues in those South-Side bars, there was so much else going on that I don't think I really locked into it like I did at this concert. That concert really changed me. I think that's when I really bonded with the blues, but my memory was that Luther was spectacular and this was a whole lot of U. of M. white kids seeing blues for the first time. And I think it really electrified a lot of people. So those are my very early memories of it.

John Fishel:

"Over the next few months, I began to be a regular visitor in Chicago. I discovered not only the South Side but the West Side as well. One of the younger guys I saw play was a then very young Luther Allison. He

seemed old to me, but I was only twenty and Luther was probably ten years older. Luther was, as you know, an amazing performer and by early 1969 (as we began to solidify the support from our sponsors to make the Ann Arbor Blues Festival happen) I decided we should bring Luther Allison with Big Mojo on bass and Bob Richey on drums to the Michigan Student Union. We secured the ballroom, the student volunteers put up the handbills, and about 8:30 P.M. they took the stage. The room was maybe a third full. Luther played his first gig in Ann Arbor and an hour later the word of mouth had resulted in a packed house. I think this performance was the beginning of Ann Arbor's love affair with Allison and really launched his successful career. Here was a guy with a few singles, but no album yet, an unknown, but a wonderfully emotional singer and guitarist.

“By March, we had gotten into high gear. The contours of the first festival were underway. Through Bob Koester I met more and more artists and experienced amazing music by artists totally unknown in the white community. I was introduced by Koester to Dick Waterman, who at the time was managing Buddy Guy, Junior Wells, and a number of extraordinary bluesmen from the south, such as: Fred MacDowell, Robert Pete Williams, and Arthur Crudup. I began to make the connections between the enormous diversity in styles of blues and their influence on the blues rock bands playing at the Fillmore Auditorium in San Francisco and other halls around the country. Waterman was a major influence on my growing interest in country blues and my awareness of how so many blues artists had been ripped off during their careers. He was a very honorable guy in a less then honorable field.

“Between May and July, the show took shape and various artists were contracted. Looking at the copies of

the contracts today it is hard to imagine how inexpensive the great blues artists were to book. One contract for the Muddy Waters band shows it cost the festival $3000 for the evening. Many of the country blues artists were costing between $250-300.

“In May we began to do the little bit of publicity we could afford. The festival budget was tiny! A press release states the Ann Arbor Blues Festival Committee "has no desire to become a part of the mammoth blues exploitation and is discriminately choosing its performers. We are interested in presenting a festival in which the artists and the audience will generate a blues mood, avoiding at all costs a teeny-bopper cultist happening." I think we succeeded. The festival tickets were priced at $14 for the three days or $5 per concert. How times have changed.”

The 1970 Ann Arbor Blues Festival

The 1969 Ann Arbor Blues Festival captured a moment in time of the blues scene as it was back then. By the 1970 festival, many great players had already passed away, starting with the untimely death of Magic Sam in December of 1969. Magic Sam (along with Luther Allison) had taken that first festival by storm. It was hard to believe we would never hear Sam play again. We had only just found him.

Otis Spann was also gone in the spring of 1970. Others who died in the interval between festivals include Lonnie Johnson, Earl Hooker, Slim Harpo, Skip James, and Kokomo Arnold. Already that first festival in 1969 (less than a year before) began to look more and more precious. The 1970 Ann Arbor Blues Festival was dedicated to Otis Spann’s memory.

John Fishel writes:

“Shortly after the 1969 festival, Delmark Records recorded and released “Southside Blues Jam” featuring Buddy Guy and Louis Myers. I remember talking with Otis Spann in the Jazz Record Mart about performing at the 1970 show. I also had the privilege of being at the “Southside Jam” recording session where Junior Wells sang about an ill Muddy Waters and Howling Wolf… In Chicago for Spann's funeral, I remember a large crowd at the service and sitting in the back of a Cadillac drinking a toast to Otis Spann with his former colleagues Birmingham Jones and drummer S.P. Leary”

“Visiting Toronto in early 1970, I saw Lonnie Johnson (no longer able to play guitar due to a stroke) sing in his beautiful soulful voice, accompanied lovingly by Buddy Guy. All these losses created an urgency in producing the second festival for 1970. The sponsors remained the University of Michigan and Canterbury House. The cast of volunteers changed. Ken Whipple became (along with me) the co chair and my friend Mark Platt took on the task of coordinating the entertainment. Other blues enthusiasts included Marian Krzyzowki, Dick Pohrt, Austin Iglehart, Glenn Baron, and Worth Gretter. A new stage was designed. The show was moved to the newly named Otis Spann Memorial Field.

“I traveled with my friends back and forth to Chicago, broadening my knowledge of the blues. We decided that we wanted to move beyond Chicago blues as our primary focus and try to give the audience an even better sense of the entire black blues genre. As I listened to more blues on albums, I tried to find out if the artists were still around and could come to the 2nd Ann Arbor Blues Festival.

“From the West Coast we signed Pee Wee Crayton, Eddie "Cleanhead Vincent, and Big Joe Turner. Also

from the West Coast came Lowell Fulson. From Houston we brought in Juke Boy Bonner, from rural Texas we signed Mance Lipscomb, and from Louisiana, Robert Pete Williams. Both Lipscomb and Willians were represented by Dick waterman's Avalon Productions. From Virginia came John Jackson.

“We branched out into a still more modern blues sound with Bobbie Bland and Little Junior Parker. Having heard a cut on an album of harpist Papa George Lightfoot, I was happy to learn that he was still gigging. The festival's success in 1969 resulted in interest in blues artists currently playing and began to spark what, over time, was almost a blues renaissance and growth of the blues festival concept, which today is still going strong.

The first festival created the impetus for the American blues publication “Living Blues” joining “Blues Unlimited,” a British publication, with Jim O'Neal, Amy Van Singel, and Bruce Iglauer (later of Alligator Records) among others taking the lead, all of them working at Delmark Records and the Jazz Record Mart. Delmark Records, Chris Strachwitz's “Arhoolie label in Berkley and other specialty labels began to reach a wider audience.

“By late 1969 and early 1970, we were identifying acts from Chicago to be included including Hound Dog Taylor (an original if there ever was one) and the House Rockers (a fantastic "bar" band), Johnny Young, Sunnyland Slim, Carey Bell, and Buddy Guy. It was a blast traveling back and forth to Chicago and we made many trips on treacherous winter weekends just to see an act. Fortunately the blues scene was still very exciting with dozens of bars, taverns, and clubs.

“I remember some very unusual venues. One night we saw Junior Parker playing in what was a renovated bowling alley. You never knew what could happen. One weekend we traveled to the West Side to see Hound Dog. It was a very funky club on West Roosevelt, with a wild crowd. One of the guys brought his girl friend for a first-time visit to see the real blues. When we got ready to leave, a mean looking guy comes over and says that the girlfriend is not leaving except with him. Fortunately, with a little help from Ted Harvey, Hound Dog's drummer, we safely exited an hour later. Another night, Luther Allison was playing up the street and a group of European blues fans were visiting the club. Suddenly guns were pulled and all hell broke loose. The French guy sitting next to me seemed to be unaware that something was going on.

“I was fortunate (after graduating in the spring of 1970) to spend the summer preparing for the festival working at the Jazz Record Mart and living in an extra bedroom at Bob and Sue Koester's apartment. It was perfect. Every day I sold blues albums and every night, if I wanted, I could go hear music. Blind Arvella Gray the street musician played out front. The Jazz Record Mart was a meeting place for all kinds of musicians including both Jazz and blues.

“People came from all over the world to see and hear the blues. One night there was an official from the still communist Czechoslovakia in town who went out with Bob Koester and his entourage to hear the music. Every Monday there were jam sessions at various venues. It is hard to remember who performed, but literally every working musician in the South or West Side would show up, beginning in the early afternoon and jam until the places closed late at night.

“It remains some of the finest most soulful experiences of my life. I got to know well most of the musicians. Carey Bell who played the 1970's festival was just starting to break out, and I remember his cousin Royal Johnson (an unknown guitarist who gigged with him) blowing my mind. I brought them to Ann Arbor to play at Canterbury House before the festival and I have some great snapshots of their visit to my crib.

“Finally the big weekend of the festival came, August 7-9, 1970. We opened as in the previous year with Roosevelt Sykes and closed again with Son House. In between, we had a few returning groups and some new ones. John Lee Hooker came in from Detroit, the extraordinary and articulate Johnny Shines, and Albert King. We were better organized and the crowd was larger. Sadly people decided that paying $15 for the series was too much and we had lots of gate crashers. Still it was a mellow scene. There were magic moments:

“The second year, our emcee was Paul Oiliver, the British blues scholar and academic expert in African architecture. He brought a more serious tone to the proceeding then Big Bill Hill in the first year, but did a wonderful job reflecting his love of the music.

“Memories of sitting with Fred McDowell, later my house guest, after the festival, Sunnyland Slim, and others listening to stories about Jim Crow and days on the cotton plantations of the South were a sobering experience which made me better understand the blues and its roots

“The festival was again a superb cross section of the music I continue to love. Sadly, the gate crashers created a financial crisis which resulted in the second Ann Arbor Blues Festival being the last until it was resurrected by another group a few years later as the

Ann Arbor Blues and Jazz festival. I have a memory of sending out our volunteers with empty card board barrels (with a Kentucky Fried Chicken logo on them) to raise a few bucks to cover the deficit seems incongruous, but maybe not.

The 1970 Ann Arbor Blues Festival would be the last. A benefit featuring artists Otis Rush, Johnny Winter, Buddy Guy, Luther Allison, and Junior Wells at the University of Michigan Events building was a wonderful show, but could not save the festival. Neither could a benefit show at the University of Wisconsin Blues Society that generated $1800, but again not enough to save the day.

The 1970 Ann Arbor Blues Festival was well received by the critics including a feature in the New York Times written by music critic John S. Wilson each of the three days. He commended the audience for its patience, receptivity, and the less familiar artists for giving the festival its unique distinct flavor.

A review in Rolling Stone magazine, still a relatively young publication, in September 1970 called the 1970 Ann Arbor Blues Festival almost a perfect success. "Rarely has an audience heard so much great music in a weekend."

John Fishel went on to do a series of small festivals at the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Florida with his brother Jim, who also helped on the two Ann Arbor Blues festivals. Jim Fishel was instrumental in turning John Fishel on to various blues artists when he was younger, artists such as Luther Allison, Rober Jr. Lockwood, Houston Stackhouse, and Eddie Bacchus (a great organist from Cleveland). John Fishel later worked with Dick Waterman for a short while when Luther Allison was trying to break out into a larger audience

and when Bonnie Raitt was beginning her career. John went on to do social work and today directs a large not-for-profit corporation in Los Angeles.

The End of the Blues Festivals

The 1970 festival ran into stiff competition from a large (and historic) rock concert being held at the same time in nearby Goose Lake. The Goose Lake Bonanza drew a lot of attendees away from the blues festival, with the result that, when all was said and done, the festival came out in the red, a loss of some $25,000, which was a lot in those days.

It has been said by way of criticism of the first two Ann Arbor Blues Festivals that they were too esoteric, that the artists were not known by the general public, and so forth. That is of course true, by definition.

At the time of those first two blues festivals, most of these performers were generally unknown to White America. City blues was esoteric, by definition. It hadn't been found by the mainstream yet and that is a major reason why the original Ann Arbor Blues Festival was undertaken in the first place: to bring these artists to general attention, which it did. If not for the insight of festival chairman John Fishel into these (mostly) Chicago artists, we would probably have had a good blues-rock concert that would be quite forgettable by now.

It is true that there was no attempt to include jazz, R&B, or popular headliners in these first festivals and it is true that mainstream artists might have resulted in a larger attendance. It is fair to say that John Fishel and crew were purists. A cross-section of music genres was not envisioned by the festival coordinators (or any of us involved), who were struggling to bring modern-electric city blues to national recognition. It is not that we were

scholars or historians, at least not most of us. More than anything else, everyone involved just really wanted to hear this music live and meet the performers. We just loved the music and felt it deserved a wider audience.

Discovering that these great blues artists were alive and living all around us, but never previously accessed or known, was a revelation at that time. Here was not a dying or antiquated music needing our revival, as was the case with certain styles of folk music. Modern electric blues was very much alive and well in cities across the United States, only separated from white America racially. It just needed some ears.

Removing that racial curtain exposed a vast wealth of music to be experienced and absorbed. What happened in that first blues festival in 1969 was a musical and personal revelation to many of those in attendance, at least to the white members of the audience. It helped to launch a new era of blues discovery and acceptance.

The Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festivals

There was no Ann Arbor Blues Festival in 1971, but a year later the Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festival was founded by promoter Peter Andrews and blues expert John Sinclair. Although quite similar and wonderful in its own right, the succeeding Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festivals were different in that they widened the scope of the festival to include jazz and R&B, for example Miles Davis and Ray Charles. The emphasis on purely blues was gone. This, coupled with the attrition rate of great blues masters in the subsequent years, made it increasingly difficult to repeat the format of those initial Ann Arbor Blues Festivals in 1969 and 1970 even if we wanted to. The attrition rate alone meant that those first festivals could never be repeated. Here are some details.

After losing money at the 1970 Ann Arbor Blues Festival, the University of Michigan was cautious about continuing the festival and asked their events director Peter Andrews to look into it. In an interview I did with Andrews, he states: “The University of Michigan administration asked me to look into reviving the Ann Arbor Blues Festival, because everybody saw that it was a great artistic success, which it was.”

Andrews wrote in the program for the 1973 Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festival:

“In 1971, I was appointed to the position of Events Director for the University of Michigan and asked by the Vice President in charge of student affairs to try to recreate the festival for the coming year. I told them that it would be impossible to have a festival that summer and that they should aim toward 1972. No 1971 festival was held.”

John Sinclair and Peter Andrews wrote in the printed program for the 1972 Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festival:

“The Blues and Jazz festival was conceived last winter by Rainbow Multi-Media president Peter Andrews as a revival of the original Ann Arbor Blues Festival, which after two incredible years (1969 and 1970) of artistic (but not financial) success was laid to rest by the University of Michigan before a 1971 festival could struggle into life.”

And from the same text:

“… careful booking, detailed planning, and superior organization, coupled with the expansion of the festival into contemporary jazz music and a slightly less esoteric line-up of blues artist, would not only insure the success of the 1972 festival, but would also expand upon the musical base laid down by the producers and

participants in the earlier blues festivals, which had essentially limited their potential appeal to music lovers by featuring little-known (though musically excellent) blues performers from many different disciplines with the blues idiom."

Finances and the Blues Festivals

Something that has come up again and again over the years for some reason is the statement that those first two Ann Arbor Blues Festivals didn't make money, while their successor, the Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festival did. The actual records don't support that statement. Here is what a little research turned up.

1969 Ann Arbor Blues Festival

The 1969 Ann Arbor Blues Festival had a total proposed budget for $57,200 in revenue and $52,950 in expenses, giving a profit of $4,250. In actuality, they received $63,533 in revenue, had $63,137.17 in expenses, giving a profit of $406.04, still a profit and not a loss. This data was taken from the "Financial Report for the Ann Arbor Summer Blues Festival," Summer of 1969, Bentley Historical Collection, UAC VP collection.

1970 Ann Arbor Blues Festival

"The major problem with the 1970 Blues festival was its tremendous financial failure, leaving a debt of some $25,000, most of which was attributable to last-minute emergency police and "security" costs and to over booking (too many artists at too high prices) and under-pricing of festival tickets (four shows for $10)."

This was taken from the 1972 Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festival program. In fact, most authorities blame the loss on the huge pop festival at Goose Lake, Michigan on the same days. John Fishel confirms the loss as about $25,000.

1972 Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festival Financials

Released by the Rainbow Multimedia, after the festival. These figures were preliminary, and miscellaneous bills were still coming in.

Total Revenue	$242,034.62
Expenses	$246,603.94
Loss of	$3,569.32

“We averaged 11,000 persons per show last year for each of five shows. Due to losses in the area of food concessions, our gross revenues fell some $4,000-$5,000 short of our final budget…”

This from co-founder Peter Andrews in the program for the 1973 Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festival. Source: Bentley Historical Collection, John Sinclair Papers. They ultimately lost perhaps five grand.

1973 Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festival Financials

According to Peter Andrews the co-producer of the 1973 festival, he remembers that the 1973 festival just about broke even.

1974 Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festival in Exile

In 1974, with a change in city government (more republicans on the city council), Sinclair and Andrews ran into problems getting a festival permit. The festival promoters were denied permission to hold the event in Ann Arbor and the fate of the festival became a bitterly debated issue in the press and about town. There was nothing to be done about it, so, it was decided to hold a 1974 festival, but in exile, at another location. A small college in Windsor, Ontario volunteered a spot and it was decided to hold the 1974 Ann Arbor Blues and Jazz Festival in another country - Canada.

All the standard festival preparations took place, including an extensive car-pool system for busing blues enthusiast from Michigan to the site in Canada. There was only one problem and it was a big one. They failed to anticipate that the FBI and other law enforcement officials would prevent the thousands of would-be attendees from crossing the border. They just refused to let concert goers from the states of Michigan cross the border, ordering their cards to turn back.

Worse, they refused to allow John Sinclair, who was co-producing the festival, to cross into Canada, forcing him to retreat to a temporary headquarters in the Shelby Hotel in Detroit. No reasons were given at the border for turning the cars back. Cars were searched and any with drugs were confiscated and their occupants arrested. That same was true at the gates in Windsor: anyone found smoking Marijuana or carrying it was immediately arrested and taken to jail. The net effect was to ruin the festival, causing over $100,000 in losses -- a financial disaster.

So, in the last analysis no real money was made at any of these festivals, but that first Ann Arbor Blues Festival made a profit of $406.04, enough perhaps to buy pizza for the staff and volunteers!

As for me, I continued to interview blues artists as part of the Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festivals and to take care of the performers, only now I was using video equipment. After the 1974 fiasco, the Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festival folded and was not resumed until 1992. In recent years, I served on the board of directors for that organization for a number of years and ended up as the official archivist. The festival closed in 2006 for lack of funds. By then there were blues festivals each year in almost every large Midwestern town. It is the end of an

era.

The Blues Today

Today blues continues to be popular across America. What I did not realize so well at the time of those first festivals is that the majority of the performers were not young men and women. The average age of all the main performers for the two festivals (some 47 of them, including the youngest players) was about fifty years of age and a number of them were in their sixties (Mance Liscomb was 74). We are talking about the end of a movement, not the beginning. In 2008, of the main headliner blues artists in those first Ann Arbor Blues Festivals, over 90% of them have passed away. Only some of the youngest artists (then) still remain alive and then only a few of them. They are the grandfathers now.

Of course there are some wonderful younger blues players. But let's not kid ourselves: we still have the form of the blues, but today we probably have more form than substance. Where is the next Howlin' Wolf or Muddy Waters? Players of that caliber have not appeared among the younger players and for a very simple reason: modern city blues, like all things in life, has a beginning, a middle, and now an end. This is not to say that blues are dead.

The Blues

Everyone gets the blues sometimes. We can all agree on that. But everyone does not get the particular blues that African Americans have had. We can all learn to sing the blues if we have that talent, but the historical blues sung by the black Americans that migrated from the South to Chicago is not open to us just because we all happen to get the blues from time to time.

African-American Chicago blues, like those played at

the first two Ann Arbor Blues Festivals is now a piece of history, a period in time, that (as racial exclusion ceases and racial tensions ease) has become a closed book for all of us (black and white together) going forward. We can all sing the blues, just not those blues. Even the racial divide that separated the races is weakening. The election of Barack Obama is certainly a signal that America is becoming multicultural and multiracial, and this country is no longer the exclusive province of white men. The discovery of modern blues on the part of white America did not happen in a vacuum. It came exactly at a time when the whole American culture was in upheaval. We are talking about the heart of the 1960s, from 1965 onward.

As some folk music enthusiasts moved from studying folk music into the blues, there was something in the blues that we really did not know in ourselves. Blues was (at least to me) a call from somewhere deeper than the white audiences knew about, a call that resonated and lured us to dig beneath the social veneer of white America and to see if what we heard out there from the black blues artists was also in here, somewhere deep within ourselves. Was there really such a thing as one human voice and condition?

Some have written that white artists were simply feeling guilty, trying to save their own souls. The white musicians I knew were not trying to save their souls as much as trying to reach a level playing field where they believed all humans stand. Sure, we were afraid we might be missing something in the soul department and we just wanted to get down to it. Most of us were not religious in the sense that we were trying to “save” anything.

We were perhaps guilty of ascribing to the blues

something outside of our own experience and longing to know what that experience meant. It was not the suffering itself of black history we were seeking, but a taste of the life wisdom that came out of that suffering. We looked up to black artists as mentors and perhaps we *were* questioning our own lack of suffering, the inequality of it all. I don't recall ever meeting a folk or blues artist who was a right-wing John Bircher.

Did white players lack soul? That is a loaded question. I don't believe anyone lacks soul, black or white, but we sure heard something in the blues that resonated with us, something we did not fully understand or know much about in ourselves. Otherwise the blues would not have fascinated us as it did. Perhaps some of us did feel guilty for our lack of suffering and our easy upbringing. In the mid-1960s, the whole culture was being shed like a snake sheds its skin. There was something real and permanent (beyond time) in the blues that spoke out to us, something we wanted to get to know, to understand, and also to find within ourselves. The blues helped us find that feeling for our self and for others.

What is music anyway? Why do we listen to it? Why do we listen to certain songs over and over? What do we absorb or get out of our favorite tunes? These are all questions that I have pondered.

Obviously blues music contains some kind of information that we somehow can't get enough of and that some of us feel we need, at least important enough to listen again and again to these tunes.

That's what happened to me. As a folkie, I was used to listening carefully to music. When I came across authentic modern blues, I heard something that resonated deep within me and I yearned for more of it.

There was something in that music that I needed to understand and to absorb.

In 2006 I heard a young white musician singing a classic blues song. He was singing in full Ebonic dialect and he was sincere about it. I was amazed and almost offended, but he was so innocent about it.

What was he thinking? It took me a while to understand that my over-reaction to this young player was not so much his arrogance, because he was not arrogant; it was something else. This young twenty-something kid was re-enacting the blues, word for word, including the black dialect and this amounted (in my hearing it) to pushing the blues from the present into the past. Chicago city blues is becoming folklore rather than reality – a part of history. And I hated to see it go there.

And time since then has shown this to be true. The Chicago city blues was an era like all other great periods of music and those first two Ann Arbor blues festivals brought this great music to public attention. Today, almost all of the great players are gone. Time marches on. Those of us who still hear Chicago-style blues alive in clubs or festivals well know that more and more we are subject to re-enactments - “it sounded like this.” The very fact that today musicians try to recreate, to sound-like, and to try to get back to what is already gone is telling in itself, as the poem “Memory,” by William Butler Yeats so clearly states:

“The mountain grass cannot but keep the form,

Where the mountain hare has lain.”

THE PERFECT BLUES STORM

Although we were not students or connected to the University of Michigan or officially part of the Ann Arbor Blues Festival committee, we were easily identified with blues music in the Ann Arbor area, because we played it all the time. That's how we came to be part of the festivals.

Our band (the Prime Movers Blues Band) was perhaps the first of the new 1960s-style groups in the Ann Arbor/Detroit area, having formed in the summer of 1965. Although some 37 musicians moved through the band over time, the main players were my brother Dan on lead guitar and myself as lead singer and amplified Chicago-style harmonica, sometimes rhythm guitar, Robert Sheff (AKA "Blue" Gene Tyranny" on keyboards, Jack Dawson (or Ilene Silverman) on Bass, and James Osterberg (Iggy Pop) or J.C. Crawford on drums.

We never recorded much and what we did apparently was lost. However, my brother Stephen Erlewine dug a bunch of old moldy reel-to-reel tapes of the Prime Movers out of his basement some years ago. What they amount to is about two sets of songs, one early in our career, and one later. That's all we have! For those who want to hear what we sounded like, here are some songs from back then:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZO5bsagUqY

We had been into listening, studying, and playing the blues for years. Moreover, we had been to Chicago a number of times, down to the South and West Side of Chicago to hear the great blues artists play in their own clubs. We saw Little Walter, Buddy Guy, Junior Wells, Howlin' Wolf, Muddy Waters, Magic Sam, and many other blues artists live on their own turf, so we just knew more about the music and the players than most of the

students putting on the festival; It was a natural fit. And we were probably more excited about the festival than they were.

As for myself, I was enthused beyond imagining that almost all of my blues heroes were coming to Ann Arbor and would play here. After all, aside from looking for someone to love, about all I did in those days was listen to, study, and play the blues, tracing out the history of this or that artist and trying to hear something of everything they put out.

I have been told that by my almost exclusive interest in Black Music I missed a lot of other music, music by my peers, which just makes my point. From where I stood, most modern (white) musicians back then were doing the same thing I was doing, listening to the great artists, which in blues and jazz means mostly black artists. Why would I be listening to my peers when I could hear Muddy Waters and Big Walter Horton live or on records. Same with Dylan. I had travelled with Bob Dylan back in 1961, and helped him put on his concert at the Michigan Union in Ann Arbor, so I knew him some. Although Dylan was very bright, to me he was just another folk-music traveling guy like myself.

This was before he was "Bob Dylan." Why should I listen to him in particular? Both he and I were listening to groups like the Swan Silvertones, The Mighty Clouds of Joy, and others. Looking back from today, I can see why Dylan was special, but you get the idea.

Artists like Janice Joplin interested me not at all. I had met Joplin and even hung out with her at the Grande Ballroom drinking whiskey. Well, she drank most of the whiskey. It was fun to meet her, but as to her music, I am reminded of a story told to me by the great poster artist Stanley Mouse when I interviewed him some

years ago. Mouse said that Joplin rehearsed in (I believe he said) an old firehouse. One day the police showed up at the door because they had reports of a woman screaming. Now, that's funny!

So if you get the idea that in those years I was very myopic, you would be right. I was focused on blues music and some jazz. And we were playing that music wherever we could, in particular at a black bar down on Anne Street in Ann Arbor, a one-block section of black businesses. It was called Clint's Club.

We were performing there several days a week for $35 a night, and that was for the whole band, all five members. Let's see, that adds up to $7 a night for each of us. But even promises of real money failed to distract me from my study of the blues.

I have told this story before, but at one point a subsidiary of Motown came up to Ann Arbor from Detroit in long black limousines and proceeded to court our group, the Prime Movers Blues Band. It seems they wanted to find a group of white musicians that could play black music. We were sometimes racially mixed, but mostly white players.

For a while they drove us around in those limousines and painted wonderful scenarios for us. For example, they arranged for my brother Dan and I to have lunch with none other than Don and Phil Everly, the Everly Brothers. Wow! What a thrill that was sitting at a table for four with our heroes. I'll never forget it.

However the romance did not last long. When it came right down to where the rubber meets the road, they wanted us to play songs that they gave us, with no freedom on our part to choose. I am sure that they probably knew a lot more than we did what would be good for us to make hits. However, I was not a bit

interested in being their musical puppet. We totally refused to do what they wanted, and that was the end of the limousines. No more Everly Brothers.

Looking back, we probably refused what could have been a big break, but at the time (and even now) I never blinked. All I did was study, practice, and attempt to play the blues music we so respected. And then came the festivals.

While the Prime Movers Blues Band (my group) may have missed our chance to make it big with the Motown folks, we were right on time for that first Ann Arbor Blues Festival in 1969. As soon as we heard about it, my brother Dan and I were all over that event. Before we knew it, we were in complete charge of taking care of the performers as regards food and drink. What could be better than that, especially to dole out alcohol, which was still really big back then, especially with the blues crowd?

The Ann Arbor Blues Festivals were put on by the Student Activities Committee (or some such group) at the University of Michigan, but IMO it was mainly the work of one John Fishel, a student, who became the leader of the festival committee. It was he who voted down having some white British blues group play in favor of the real deal – the great blues players themselves. After all, blues was not dead and gone like most folk music. It was alive and well, playing across town, and perhaps separated only by a racial curtain. It was Fishel who really made this landmark event happen, and I thank him!

So there we were at those festivals, right back stage with the artists, serving them food and booze out of the tailgate of my father's station wagon. And it gets better. Let me set the stage.

Until that first blues festival in 1969, a few of these great blues artists may have been together at one club or another, once in a while, but never everyone at one event and together. This had never happened before, and never has since. Suddenly just about everyone who was anyone in the blues roster was present and standing around talking with one another. It was like a blues convocation in heaven. And there is more.

For reasons I still don't understand, a number of the blues players like Big Mama Thornton, Arthur Big Boy Crudup, Fred McDowell, Yank Rachel, and others showed up many days before the festival. Who knows why, but suddenly here they were, being put up at the Michigan League and other places. I can remember going to the University of Michigan's West Quad and there was Mississippi Fred McDowell, Yank Rachel, and Johnnie Young all tucked away in little dark-wood-trimmed rooms. It boggled our minds.

They were everywhere. If there is a blues paradise, for me that was it. Can you imagine?

And this great conflux of blues greats pushed my buttons until they popped. Here I was actually talking one-on-one with my blues heroes and before I knew it I had a reel-to- reel tape recorder, microphone, and was officially interviewing these guys. It just happened. Little did I know then that this incredible stream of talent and energy would divert my life and segue it into something new, although it took some years for this to surface.

I had been to Chicago and seen many of these players one at a time, which was very, very different from suddenly being surrounded by them on all sides. The sheer energy of the all the artists at that first festival was so powerful. Couple that with the fact that I believe the artists had their own minds blown at the same time we

did. This was a first for them too. It was some very high energy, my friends.

I don't know what pooling that many similar minds together can do, but however you want to describe it, we can agree it was a unique gathering, one never to be repeated. Even by the time of the 2nd Ann Arbor Blues Festival the following year (1970), the music world had lost blues greats like Otis Spann, Lonnie Johnson, Earl Hooker, Slim Harpo, Skip James, Kokomo Arnold, and others. And it has been all downhill from there.

That first festival in 1969, whatever we can agree it was or meant, could never be repeated. It was the culmination and a coming together of a massive force of minds in one time and one place. We were all lit up. It was very much a celebration. There was joy there. Both the performers and the audience were open to one another and communicating. Here are some quotes about the festival by the performers taken from my interviews.

James Cotton (August 3, 1969)

“I've never seen nothin' like this in my life. This is the beautifulest thing I ever seen in my life. This is so beautiful.”

Magic Sam (August 3, 1969)

“This festival is like an all-star game.”

Louis Myers

“This blues Festival is a big family reunion.”

Luther Tucker (August 3, 1969)

“As for the blues festival, I can dig it. I enjoyin' it.”

Lightnin' Hopkins (August 3, 1969)

“Well, I been looking forward for this for a long time.

And I thought this would happen in the future and it did, so now I hope it lasts long. Fact of business is, I believe it will."

Sleepy John Estes (August 2, 1969)

"When all the children get together, Oh that will be a day."

And I was busy. I could hear the performances filtering through to the backstage area, but had (or took) little time to sit out front and watch. I had done that before and much preferred working backstage, where I was actually mixing with the artists, or getting off to the side with them and tape recording an interview. And I had my whole family all around me. I am one of five boys (no sisters), and all my brothers were there, and my dad!

My dad was a comptroller by trade, a CFO and money man; he was all about numbers. I never played by the numbers or was that concerned with financial matters, so he and I had not a lot in common. In my whole life I cannot remember even one personal or deep conversation with him. The 1970 blues festival was perhaps the only exception I can think of. My father had been an actor in college and a performing magician, so he liked to and was comfortable hob-nobbing with other performers, or so I realized when I saw him with them. They got tight.

Dad came down for almost the whole event, and before I knew it he was locked in deep discussions (and beers) with some of the older performers. In particular, Roosevelt Sykes and dad hung out a lot, sitting back along the fence on a couple of hard-backed wooden chairs, side by side, making points by grabbing each other's arms, and so on. And under their chairs was a small army of empty beer cans. Personally I didn't say

much of a word to dad during the festival, but it was one of the most together times we ever spent. Dad was loving what I loved. That was enough.

BEYOND THE MUSIC

THE ANN ARBOR BLUES FESTIVALS

This is the conclusion to my comments on these great landmark festivals. And what was I thinking during the festivals? Mostly probably not thinking, but living it, just being there. Life also has its high points, and for me this is one of them. I was taking it all in, one moment at a time.

In the flurry and hubbub of the constant festival activity, something was sinking in, and it had more to do with the interviewing I was doing than it did with the festival music or even the whole music scene itself. I already knew the music, but never before the performers up close.

And I interviewed scores of performers, not just the headliners or band leaders, but also their sidemen. Certainly I had never been in such proximity to the great players as I was here. Sure, I had done some of it before, for example, at places like the Chessmate Coffeehouse down on Livernois at McNichols in Detroit, sitting in that tiny green room with John Lee Hooker while James Cotton was playing his gig. Hooker was waiting to hang out and perhaps sit-in with Cotton later on. Hooker, like Muddy Waters, was regal, dignified, elegant, and beautiful to look at, "awesome" is the right word. I wish I could remember what we talked about. Perhaps it was very little.

And of course James Cotton and his entire band (including Luther Tucker) lived with us for weeks one summer. That was definitely up close and personal, so I had a taste, but nothing like this.

In those many interviews I was doing at the first two Ann Arbor Blues Festivals, and then later on at the 1972

Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festival with video and elsewhere…there was another element that was registering with me. And it took hold.

I probably couldn't put my finger on it then, but I sure can now. Hindsight is always 20/20. Of course the blues music of these great artists fascinated me. After all, I had studied and listened to it for years and years. But that was not it. Instead, it was the life savvy and wisdom of these men and women of the blues that was even more attractive, life wisdom like I never knew existed, but had always hungered for.

I am not saying that all blues performers were open and friendly. Some of the younger ones, like Junior Wells, were more guarded and concerned with acting cool. They were hip, but distant. But many of the elder blues statesmen like Roosevelt Sykes, Big Mama Thornton, Arthur Big Boy Crudup were more than just good musicians. They were kind and compassionate people with a deep experience of life, experience beyond my ability to measure. It was all I could do to soak it up.

My brother Daniel reminds me of the night he and I took a bottle of Jack Daniels up to the room where Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup was staying at the Michigan League and knocked at the door. No words were spoken. Crudup opened the door, looked at the bottle of Jack Daniels, and said "Come on in boys!" We were there for hours just talking and experiencing the wisdom and kindness of this man who wrote the first big hit Elvis ever sang, "That's All Right (Mama)." And it went on like that.

We spent another evening with Big Mama Thornton, up in her room at the League, doing much the same thing, just hanging out and learning. It was the same over in the tiny rooms at West Quad where Fred McDowell.

Yank Ratchell and others were staying. In those dorm rooms, there was hardly any room at all, so we sat on the floor at the feet of our heroes.

I guess what I am trying to say is that my takeaway of those landmark festivals was not so much just the music as the minds and hearts of these great men and women that I had admired for so many years. And it was the wisdom they so freely shared, something that I had seldom encountered in my own life. All this time I had loved the music, but never thought much about what made that music possible. And then on meeting the artists close-up, I instantly knew. I could see it. It was the quality of their minds, along with their deep experience and compassion that made the music what it was.

All that time I had it just backward, thinking it was the music that made the artists and not vice-versa. Of course, it was the artists that made the music and I finally saw why and how that worked. This was the real takeaway of those early blues festivals for me. And it was that element of wisdom in the music that attracted me to it in the first place, that sense of direct life experience that came out of it, plus the equanimity and kindness of many of the artists. This became a guide for me.

I followed that trail of wisdom and kindness in the blues until it gradually (but literally) died away. I once figured out that the average age of the performers, at least the headliners, at those early festivals was something like 50+ years of age at the time. I was catching the beginning of the end of a major epoch of American music, electric blues, in particular Chicago blues.

Later I was to find this same quality of mind and wisdom in the great Tibetan Rinpoches and lamas that poured

into our country after the diaspora from Tibet in 1959. They too knew reality and became my life teachers. I am still working with the Tibetans today.

And it took me almost twenty years before what happened back at those first festivals came to fruition in my life. That's when I founded the All-Music Guide and attempted to document the lives and music of musicians of all kinds. And all that started in this little office I sit in right now typing this out. There I was in a small town in mid-America, what is called the heartland. And when other music reviewers on the east and west coast heard about this guy in the Midwest who had the nerve to attempt to document all recorded music, they laughed. I don't blame them.

Yet the All-Music Guide today is the largest music database of albums, biographies, discographies, tracks, and music content in the world – hundreds of thousands of entries. It just shows you what dedication and perseverance can do. And a lot of that willpower to see that project through came out of what happened back at those early Ann Arbor Blues Festivals in 1969 and 1970, and then the follow-up Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festivals in 1972 and 1973. It was there that my heart was enlightened by the wisdom of the great blues players and a purity of intent and dedication (and devotion!) was forged that was to guide me in creating the All-Music Guide.

I saw not only the beauty of the blues artist's music, but the equal beauty of the minds and hearts of these great blues players and I wanted to do them right, to give them their "propers," as they say. And like the pebble dropped in a still pond, the circles of inclusion of the guide spread from blues and jazz to all kinds of music, thus the name All-Music Guide.

So that's the story of how I experienced those first landmark Ann Arbor Blues Festivals. Sure, there are scores of mini-stories in there, but hopefully you get the idea. Years later I was officially appointed historian for the Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festival that followed those first two blues festivals and served two terms on their board of directions. And I have written about those original two festivals in an award-winning book which I wrote the text for "'Blues in Black and White: The Landmark Ann Arbor Blues Festivals," and am working on a short video of those days, which I will share here when it is finished. The rough cut is here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2NZL_KDI59s

"Play That Funkly Music White Boy "

I don't have me a rockin' chair yet, but I probably should think about it, because thinking about stuff comes easy as I get older. Recently I found myself thinking about the fact that, fortunately or unfortunately, I managed to miss much of the music that many of you reading this article most love and grew up on. Since I made my living as a music critic (and organizing other music critics) for many years, how did that happen? Actually, it was easy.

I grew up in the 1940s, 1950s, and onward, listening to the best popular music that ever was, certainly the ground or basis on which everything pop we hear today still rests, genres like Doo Wop, Rhythm & Blues, Rockabilly, early Country and, of course, Rock & Roll. I got all that, but began to selectively tune out certain music somewhere in the 1960s. It was simply a matter of time.

I will spare you my "folkies" story (which I have told many times), but I found my roots in folk music and its revival, and hung out with players like Joan Baez, the New Lost City Ramblers, the Country Gentlemen, and the like. I travelled and hitchhiked with Bob Dylan, and so on, and we were all doing the same thing, reviving American folk music, but let me get right to the pivot point for me, in particular when we folkies turned to attempting to revive folk blues. This was in the late 1950s and the very early 1960s. The whole Sixties scene did not take hold until the summer of 1965, so there were all those early 1960s years to account for, and I can account for them.

Blues, unlike most of the folk music from Ireland and England, didn't need revival. It was very much alive and playing just across town in most cities, simply separated

by a racial curtain. And we White folk didn't go into Black bars and juke joints. And then we began to go there and got our minds blown, at least mine did. Here was music still fresh and living, unlike the desiccated European folk music we struggled to revive. Blues didn't need reviving. For me Black music was like going to a certain kind of heaven. And it was not just the music, but the minds and life savvy of the great Black blues players. It was like having scores of grandfathers and I never had any.

I could go on being a little formal and sketching out the history of how White America discovered the blues and Black music in general, but I have written this out in books (and many articles) like "Blues in Black & White: The Landmark Ann Arbor Blues Festivals I wrote and which was picked as one of the top 20 books in Michigan in 2011. Here is the link:

http://www.amazon.com/Blues-Black-White-Landmark-Festivals/dp/0472116959/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1416986472&sr=8-1&keywords=%22Blues+in+Black+%26+White%22

Instead, let me just illustrate how I missed most of rock music's many later treasures. It went in one ear and out the other; it just did not stick. And this was all on account of that Black music I fell into. I never fell back out, but I was happy just as I was. I am kind of like that. Once I find something that satisfies me fully, I am content with that. It was the same with ice cream. Just give me some good chocolate ice-cream on a waffle cone, and you can have the rest.

In other words, White groups (and music) like Led Zeppelin, The Who, Aerosmith, AC/DC, Van Halen, Def Leppard, Guns N' Roses, Kiss, and on down the line, in my case, fell on deaf ears. I had no patience with it

because, for the most part, I knew where most of the licks and hooks these players used came from, and it was, of course, earlier Black music. And just like these groups (in almost every case) borrowed from Black music, I would rather listen to the original roots that inspired these White groups, rather than to what I could easily see was derivative. And I did. It was no sacrifice on my part, but pure pleasure. To my mind, I didn't miss a thing. I was mainlining and hooked on Black music. I studied it day and night for years.

Sure, I played and jammed onstage with groups like Jerry Garcia and the Grateful Dead, but I didn't follow their music because I knew, for the most part, where every influence they played came from. I knew the roots where they worshipped because I went to the same church. I opened for groups like Cream at the Fillmore Auditorium during the Summer of Love, 1967, but I didn't pay that much attention to Eric Clapton and the rest of the group, because where they drew their music and where I did were the same. I also opened for groups like the Shangri-Las and the Contours, but most of you have never ever heard of these groups.

Our band would drive to Chicago and go into the small clubs on the West and South sides and hear players like Little Walter, Junior Wells, Buddy Guy, Big Walter Horton, Magic Sam, and many others play live. As White blues players, the one group I felt closest to was the Paul Butterfield Blues Band and the players Butterfield and his lead guitar player Michael Bloomfield. Here was a racially mixed band that was doing what our band was trying to do, respecting and playing Black music, the Chicago Blues, in particular. Michael Bloomfield was perhaps the best White blues guitarist I have ever heard. Bob Dylan has said the same thing. Moreover, he was a kind person, someone who went

out of his way for others. We became friends and it was Bloomfield who, when my group the Prime Movers Blues Band drove out to San Francisco in 1967 found us a place to live (the Sausalito Heliport) and generally looked after us.

Butterfield, on the other hand, who is one of the best harmonica players I have ever heard, and I have heard and studied them all, was not so friendly. He carried a gun and was a little bit mean. I remember one day Butterfield and I were sitting out in a van, either his band's or my own, in some alley in Chicago, smoking a cigarette (or joint) and the gist of his conversation was him trying to tell me that only the left-handed people in this world would every contribute anything. Of course, he was left-handed, etc. Butterfield did say that the Prime Movers Blues Band (our band) was the second-best white blues band in the country. We sounded like this:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZO5bsagUqY

That is me as lead singer and playing amplified harmonica.

I did an interview with the legendary Howlin' Wolf at the 1969 Ann Arbor Blues Festival. There I was backstage talking with Wolf. I am told by blues experts it is the probably the best interview ever done of the Wolf. It was just the two of us standing in the open sun and it was not your normal interview.

As I stood there listening to this huge man, I flashed back to some years before when I had seen the Wolf performing live in a small bar at the north end of Chicago late one night. There was no one in the place, just Howlin' Wolf and his guitarist Hubert Sumlin. My brother Dan and I stood somewhere at the back of the place and it was very dark. Wolf was way up to the front,

with one small light playing on him. He was sitting on an old wooden straight-backed chair. It was all light and shadows.

And Wolf was singing as only he can sing, and his music not only filled the room, it actually took over all sense of time as his laser-like voice penetrated deep into my brain. For a while, I lost all idea of who or where I was. The walls of the room just went transparent, as did my body, and I found myself suddenly thrust outside of time, beyond any sense of myself that I knew, somewhere out there on my own in this vast universe, just a bodiless mind floating out there. This was more than just music. This was a life initiation, as I believe you will get a sense of from reading my interview with this great bluesman. Here is that interview.

http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/articles/Music/INTERVIEW%20WITH%20HOWLIN%27%20_WOLF.pdf

Somewhere in the mid-1960s my brother Dan Erlewine and I would drive into Detroit, Michigan to hear blues greats like B.B. King. There we would be in some old smelly high-school gymnasium, usually the only White people there. On a little raised stage would be B.B. King and his whole band, laid out more like an old swing band, with featured performers, etc. Players like Duke Jethro on the Hammond Organ, Sonny Freeman on drums, and Bobby Forte on tenor sax.

They would play their asses off to a crowd that adored them. There was B.B. King along with beer and fried chicken for sale. That was it and it was more than enough.

Later I got to know and interview (audio or video) many of the great Black blues players (scores of them). I include some photos of me back then interviewing some of my heroes. Anyway, I could go on and on, of course,

but no room here. As some of you know, I went on to found the All-Music Guide, even today still the largest collection of music biographies, discographies, reviews, and ratings on the planet.

Memories of the Ann Arbor Blues Festivals

I want to write about my personal memories of that first Ann Arbor Blues Festival in early August of 1969. I already wrote the text for a whole (award-winning) book about the festival, but it was mostly the general history of the festival. You can find it here:

http://www.amazon.com/Blues-Black-White-Landmark-Festivals/dp/0472116959/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1386328730&sr=8-_1&keywords=blues+in+black+and+white

I have yet to write my own personal story of that event, so I am working on this for a short video I am putting together. I thought I might post some thoughts here, if you don't mind. And I have to back up a bit and first talk about how it was for me way back then in the 1960s.

I will start by saying that in every life there are turning points, forks in the road, which if taken, change our life. That first Ann Arbor Blues Festival in 1969 was such an event for me. I have never been the same since nor wanted to be.

When I am asked how I happened to miss an event like the great Woodstock festival in August of 1969. (Aug. 15-18), my answer is simple enough. I was still in the throes of (and I am still recovering) from the landmark Ann Arbor Blues Festival two weeks earlier (Aug. 1-3), which in my life was an even more important cultural event: a gathering together of some of the greatest living blues masters in an event that could never be repeated because of impermanence. Some performers died later that very year, and today almost none of them

are still alive. That first blues festival in 1969 and the one that followed it in 1970 were basically one-time events, but I need to preface all of this.

What is called the Sixties did not really start until the middle of that decade, in 1965 to be exact. It was in the summer of 1965 that the band "Grateful Dead" formed in the Bay Area, but the cultural event we call the 1960s did not have just a single starting location. Like a hot rash, it broke out all over this country and then spread to the world. I should know because I was there and came up during that time.

In fact, in that same summer of 1965 in Ann Arbor, Michigan my brother Dan and I formed the Prime Movers Blues Band. We had never heard of the Grateful Dead. What we now call the Sixties arose all across the nation more or less simultaneously, especially where LSD had done its work. In my opinion, the common catalyst, the true cause of what we call the Sixties was the advent of LSD in this country around 1964; the original Sandoz patents for LSD had expired in 1963, so the drug was free to travel and it did.

LSD was literally a game (and mind) changer for a whole generation; it opened up vast mental vistas that are still being explored today, over fifty years later. I dropped acid in May of 1964 in Berkeley California, where I was spending a year. I had tried various drugs before that, including marijuana, peyote, speed, and even codeine – that kind of thing. As I have written many times, only LSD really got my attention. In fact it was, believe it or not, my introduction to the dharma, to the way things actually are in the mind.

LSD showed me that the outside world I saw and believed in was the result of my own inner projections, including my likes, dislikes, biases, and prejudices. LSD

cut through the stagnant mental firewall of the 1950s like a blowtorch. The genie was out of the bottle and not about to go back in anytime soon. It was what I saw on LSD that fueled my interest in phenomenology, the study of my own consciousness and mind. And later it was the dharma that organized it for me and provided a path or method for continued development and even more awareness.

I have thought about these things for fifty years, and I can find no other cause - principle cause - for what we call the Sixties other than the advent of LSD on the scene. It was the single main catalyst that sparked what has been called the hippie revolution. Not everyone took acid, but most of the leaders of that movement did. It changed the mind of a generation, one person at a time. LSD gave an entire generation the courage and will to overturn the status-quo in favor of a new reality, one based on direct experience.

[The graphic is the cover of a book with blues photos of those first two Ann Arbor Blues Festivals by Stanley Livingston, perhaps the best blues photographs I have ever seen. The book was designed and laid out by my brother Tom Erlewine. I wrote the text, short bios of artists, an interview with Howlin' Wolf I did, and the history of the festivals.]


Blues in Black & White
THE LANDMARK Ann Arbor Blues Festivals AS PHOTOGRAPHED BY Stanley Livingston
WITH TEXT AND A History of the Ann Arbor Blues Festival BY Michael Erlewine
Jim O'Neal

The Ann Arbor Blues Festival: The First of Its Kind

There is no doubt that the first North American all-out blues festival for modern-electric, city blues (in fact, all types of blues) was the Ann Arbor Blues Festival, held in the late summer of 1969. It featured blues artists like Muddy Waters, Junior Wells, B.B. King, Otis Rush, J. B. Hutto and the Hawks, Howlin' Wolf, T-Bone Walker, Magic Sam, Freddy King, and many other modern-electric blues players. The festival also featured traditional blues artists like Son House and those in between, like Clifton Chenier, Roosevelt Sykes, Lightnin' Hopkins and many others.

In Ann Arbor at the time, the accent was off folk and country blues and on modern, big-city, electric blues artists. While the Newport Folk Festival featured more than folk music and to a degree helped blues to segue from folk and country blues to more modern blues, it was in Ann Arbor that the first all-out extravaganza of modern-electric city blues was born.

There is no record of any blues festival of any similar scope and extent that predates that first Ann Arbor Blues Festival, which was organized in 1968 and held in 1969, much less one that endures to the present day.

The Ann Arbor Blues Festival: What it Was

The Ann Arbor Blues Festival was just that: a festival of blues, including (and featuring) modern electric city blues -- the first of its kind. It helped to mark the discovery of modern blues music and the musicians that made that music. However, the festival was something more than just Black music for White people. It was somewhat of a celebration for the Black musicians themselves and the list of great blues artists present, on

or off the stage, reads like a Who's Who of blues musicians of all types alive at the time. They came from all over, to play of course, but also just to be together, to hang out.

Those first two Ann Arbor Blues Festivals in 1969 and 1970, sponsored by the University Activity Center (UAC) of the University of Michigan and the Canterbury House, were organized by a small group of University of Michigan students. Their leader was John Fishel, a young man who just happened to really love the blues.

Late in 1968, Fishel and a small group of students formed an exploratory committee to create a blues festival, tentatively scheduled for the fall of 1969. Among other things they traveled to Chicago and heard some of the great blues men in the South Chicago bars and clubs. They came back from that trip with their eyes opened, more convinced then ever to organize a festival that next fall.

Their chief worry was whether, in the commotion of the returning to school, students would have time to grasp what a blues festival was all about. Therefore, they decided to hold a warm-up concert in the spring of 1969, so that everyone on campus could preview the music and build an appetite for the coming festival. The preliminary concert was held in the University of Michigan Ballroom, featuring the Luther Allison Trio, a young blues group from Chicago. It was very much a success and the larger festival was scheduled for the Fall. The University of Michigan approved a budget and Fishel and his group set about making the festival a reality.

1969 Ann Arbor Blues Festival

And what a festival it was! That first Ann Arbor Blues Festival in 1969 included such great blues artists as B.

B. King, Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Otis Rush, Magic Sam, Freddy King, T-Bone Walker, Lightnin' Hopkins, and many others.[1] The 1969 Ann Arbor Blues and Jazz Festival even made a small profit. It was an enormous artistic success and it was decided to make this an annual event. A proposed budget for the 1970 concert was formulated and accepted by the university.

It has been said by way of criticism of the first two Ann Arbor Blues Festival's lack of monetary success (mostly by the producers of the subsequent Ann Arbor Blues and Jazz Festival), that the choice of talent was too esoteric and that these artists were not known to the general public. It was pointed out that the roster of those first blues festivals were too focused on the blues, and not designed to best market the events with a wide range of performers, including also jazz or some national act, such as Ray Charles, thereby bringing many more people to the events.

What these critics say is very true, but that is just the point. In those first two blues festivals, there was no sense of marketing or taking advantage of the event to establish a larger audience. It was a lot more like the movie E.T., where one group of beings came to meet another group, about which they knew precious little. It was not unlike some sort of religious experience. There were widespread acts of kindness in coming to know one another. And it was not just the Black performers sharing with their newly-found White audience. The Black performers were also there for themselves, as the following quotes by some of them at the time testify to.

Magic Sam (August 3, 1969)

“This festival is like an all-star game.”

Louis Myers

“This blues festival is a big family reunion.”

James Cotton (August 3, 1969)

“I've never seen nothin' like this in my life. This is the beatifulest thing I ever seen in my life. This is so beautiful.”

Luther Tucker (August 3, 1969)

“As for the blues festival, I can dig it. I enjoyin' it.”

Lightnin' Hopkins (August 3, 1969)

“Well, I been looking forward for this for a long time. And I thought this would happen in the future and it did, so now I hope it lasts long. Fact of business is, I believe it will.”

Sleepy John Estes (August 2, 1969)

“When all the children get together, Oh that will be a day.”

And one young festival volunteer wrote this:

“What a sight for me! There was my dad, the controller of a small Michigan college and blues-great Roosevelt Sykes, sitting on folding chairs, leaning back up against the chain-link fence, swapping stories and beers all afternoon. They just liked each other and were having a ball. That’s the way it was all around – one big getting-to-know-one-another party. It was special.”

It was not a media event, not leveraged for maximum anything, other than maximum communication between performers and their newly found fans. In defense of the early festivals, it is only fair to point out that at the time

of those first two blues festivals, these performers were indeed almost completely unknown to White America. That is a major reason why the original Ann Arbor Blues Festival was undertaken: to bring these artists to general attention, which it did, mainly to our attention, those who put it on and who attended it. More than anything else, everyone involved in the early festivals wanted to hear this music live and see and hear the performers up close.

Discovering these great blues artists, alive and living all around us, but never previously accessed or known, was a revelation to all present at that time. Here was not a dying or antiquated music, as was the case with certain styles of folk music. Modern-electric blues was very much alive and well in cities across the United States, only separated from White America by a racial curtain.

Removing that curtain exposed a vast wealth of music to be experienced and absorbed. What happened in that first blues festival in 1969 was a revelation to those in attendance, and not just to the White members of the audience. It helped to launch a new era of blues discovery and acceptance.

Held at the Fuller Flatlands, a small field along the Huron River in Ann Arbor, most often used for softball games, the First Ann Arbor Blues Festival was held in August 1-3, 1969. The tickets cost $14 for access to all four concerts (and the intervening workshops) over the three day festival.

My band, the Prime Movers Blues Band, was the only blues band in the area, and we were automatically looked to as blues experts. From a relative standpoint, I guess we were. We had taken many trips to Chicago and seen some of the blues giants playing in the

Southside and Westside Chicago clubs. We had worked since 1965 to study and play the blues, as best as we could. It fell to us to be in charge of feeding and serving "beverages" to the blues entertainers, backstage. What fun! I was lucky enough to be selected to interview as many of the performers as I could, using a simple audio recorder.

What follows are excerpts from those interviews. The original tapes were dutifully turned over to festival officials by me, never to be heard from again. I have tried in vain to find them. However, luckily I had taken the trouble to transcribe some of the highlights, for my own interest, and it is these selections that appear below. Most of these quotes are the performers response to being asked what the blues are and how do they differ from jazz. Here is all that remains from a very great many hours of interviews. I am sure you will enjoy what survives, as I do. In particular, the more extensive interview with Howlin' Wolf is unforgettable.

Jim Connely (horn player for Otis Rush) -- (August 2, 1969)

“Blues and jazz, they are one, yet still they are different, because to be able to play jazz, a musician has to be able to play the blues first. He's got to know the blues, because blues is soul. It's what you feel, and jazz is just a step farther than the blues. I mean it's musically a step up.

“You see, blues is just the common ground that you meet on, but jazz you get sophisticated and you move out a little more. But if you can't play the blues, then to me you can't play jazz.

“You play the blues and then you go a little farther and you go into jazz. Blues is a simple thing that anybody can understand. Jazz, you have to keep hearin' it, over

and over again to really adjust to it, where anybody can understand the blues.

“Whereas blues is a story, a story usually of one's life or somebody's life. And jazz is what a man…it's his life, but it's also what he lives in a dream world. And it’s also what he would like to do outside of his life. And he goes into this world of his own, but they are (blues and jazz) still close together that its hard to separate the two, like love and hate. You can't have one without the other.

“You don't learn how to play the blues. Blues is something that comes natural. You don't go around studying the blues. It's something that comes as natural as a baby sucks his mama’s breast.

“Blues is something that's gonna' come natural, anyhow, and the next step you go, you learn to play with rock and roll, and the next thing you know, you are trying to modernize it a little bit. You're tired of that old down feelin' of the blues, and the next thing you know, your gonna' be tryin' to play some jazz.

“Blues is me. Blues is the black man. Blues is what we had. Then you move up a step farther, not what we have, but what we want and that's jazz -- this other world we would like to have, when we can set here and imagine what we want. Blues is the most common thing that you have. It's a thing which will bring all people together, the common ground.

Sleepy John Estes (August 2, 1969)

“When all the children get together, Oh that will be a day.”

Roosevelt Sykes: (August 1, 1969)

“Blues is a part of a man. It's the way he feels. Lot's of people have the wrong understandin'. They think a

blues player have to be worried. Thinks the blues player have to been whipped or something, or worried, or troubled or something to sing the blues."

"That's wrong. There's doctors. He has medicine. He ain't sick, but he makes stuff for the sick people. So blues players. He ain't worried and bothered, but he's got something for the worried people. With a doctor, your can see his medicine. He can see his patient. Blues, you can't see the music; he can't see the patient, because it's the soul. So I work on the soul and the doctor works on the body. Do something for your soul. Do something for your body. All is mixed in one. Two makes one.

"I been goin' to Europe since 1960-1961. People all appreciated the blues every night I played, eight, ten thousand people a night, in Europe, even in the small towns.

"There, nobody could ever become graduated on it, that they can't learn no more music. You just get to think you're finished up, and there is something brand new started that you didn't get. So on and on. It's gonna' be that way.

"The blues is a talent. You can't learn that. There's nobody teaches that. No schools for it. Nobody can teach it to you. God gives every man a talent. It don't come in schools. It's something you born with. It's a feelin'. Can't nobody give you that feelin'. You have to have it. You can't buy it and you can't give it away if you got it.

"Blues is a part of a man. It's the way he feels. Lots of people have the wrong understandin'. They think that a blues player have to be worried.

Freddy King (August 3, 1969)

“Jazz gets a little too way out. I can't understand it if it gets too way out. You understand what I mean by too way out? Away from the beaten track, the common ground or bond of all men. Away from the heart. Blues is the heart.”

Fred Below (August 3, 1969)

“Altogether different beat, difference in chord structure. Modern Jazz is a measured thing. Blues is not measured. There's as much different between blues and jazz as between night and day.”

Louis Myers (August 3, 1969)

“Blues is a whole lot different than jazz. I think blues is more so the soul bag than jazz. Jazz is modified from the blues. This [the blues festival] is a big family reunion.”

James Madison (August 3, 1969)

“Blues is like something that's happened to you. You feel it. You have the blues each and every day. Jazz is more or less something you learn. You wake up and are worried about something, try to put it in music, it's blues.”

Jack Myers (August 1, 1969)

“Improvisation: I think jazz is limited, man. You got certain changes you gotta' make, while if you play the 12-bar bllues, a cat can just express his self. Blues is something that is happening every day, that you can understand.”

James Cotton (August 3, 1969)

(talking about the blues festival) “I've never seen nothin' like this in my life. This is the beatifulest thing I ever

seen in my life. This is so beautiful."

Luther Tucker (August 3, 1969)

"Everyday brings a little change. As for the blues festival, I can dig it. I enjoyin' it."

Charlie Musslewhite (August 3, 1969)

"Blues is a thing by itself. You can express it through music. You can express it by talkin' or paintin' or just walking' down the street, you know. Blues is a thing, separate. Music is a medium for it. Music just happens to be a very comfortable way to express the blues. Jazz is just like takin a tune, it's just messin with it. You take music and mess with it. Takin' a chord and instead of playin' it real conventional, playin' it real crazy. Blues is a thing."

Jimmy Dawkins (August 1, 1969)

"I feel like the blues is the truth, because when a guy sings the blues, he sings what happened. Jazz, you can adlib. You can do the little things you wanta' do to please the public. When you're doin' blues, that's the truth, that's the whole story of blues, tellin' the truth. If something happened to you that sets you back, that's the blues.

"Blues is standard. Maybe the jazzman makes a little money, so he don't want to be in the bag anymore. So he try to move away from it, but he never leaves blues. He just try to play something else.

"When a musician has not paid his dues, he sounds like somebody else. He does not sound like himself.

"The blues festival gives breathing space for smaller bands to expand and achieve self-confidence and standing.

“When you got the blues, you're always searchin' for happiness, and when I'm up there on the stage, I'm always searchin for something deeper and deeper all the time.

Fred McDowell (August 1, 1969)

“You play with understanding. That's the way I play.”

Lightnin' Hopkins (August 3, 1969)

“Now I just have to tell ya'. I never knowed anything about no jazz, because jazz never affected my life. In my life, the blues always dwell with me. Now, here's what the blues is: that is a good man feelin' bad. You ever heard of that? Now, I'm gonna' show you and it is true. Now you can walk right here and have one dollar in your pocket. You going to the store. You loose that dollar, before you get there. then you walk on by and you turn around. Lord, what happened to me? And now what you got? You got nothin' but the blues.

[about the blues festival] “Well, I been looking forward for this for a long time. And I thought this would happen in the future and it did, so now I hope it lasts long. Fact of business is, I believe it will.

Bob Koester (August 2, 1969)

“What is Jazz? The element of improvisation has to be present, blues chord structure has to be present.

“Blues is a vocal music and jazz is an instrumental music, and if you have an artist who is a great guitar player, and he does not sing well, he's eventually gonna' wind up in the jazz field, or somewhere else.

“Jazz is the ability to get away from that chord structure and the 12-bar language. It's a matter of material. But also I think it is the emphasis on the instrumental

aspects of the music, rather than the vocal. Blues is not only vocal, it's verbal, where words mean a great deal.

Big Mama Thornton (August 3, 1969)

“Jazz? I don't understand it in the first place. It don't have no endin’. Here he is up there blowin' and maybe he blow till he get tired, then he just stop. What about rock and roll? Some folks say: It's nothin' but a hopped-up, fast-up blues. That’s all it is.

“I like to let my audience be close to me, you know what I mean? And I want them to feel that they are close to me, anyway, because I wants to be close to them, because I want to express myself to let them know what I do and how I do it. And if they can do it, good luck to 'em, is all I can say.

Muddy Waters (August 2, 1969)

“Blues. I lived them. I lived them musically and I lived them lifewise. Blues is the mother of jazz and all those things. A blues performer stays in blues, when he loves them like I do. To me, I'd rather remain with the blues and not try to move into the jazz field. I didn't even have it on my mind to try a change, to do something else.

Arthur Big-Boy Crudup (August 3, 1969)

“I'm this a way. If I go to work for you, and just whatever I promise you, that's what I will do. If I promise you that tomorrow afternoon, me and you gonna' fight, we gonna' fight. The reason we don't fight is that I don't meet you, and that's the way I am. I only have nothin' but my word. And through not nothin' being but my word, I have to do as I say. A man's word is his bond. And if a man's word ain't no good, he ain't no good. And I've learned that.

You know the life of a musician is only thirty-three years, if he live it. Somebody will either poison you; some woman will kill him, or some man will kill him. And if you go beyond that, you got to treat everybody nice.

Magic Sam (August 3, 1969)

“This [blues festival) is like an all-star game. The blues has been handed down from generation to generation. Blues came from spirituals. It developed and developed. Jazz is taken from the blues.

T-Bone Walker (August 3, 1969)

“Without Blues, there wouldn't be no jazz. Blues is the basis of all jazz.

Clifton Chenier (August 2, 1969)

Blues gonna forever be here. Jazz goes on and off. See? The blues always standard. Jazz is Ok for those who like it, you know.

Otis Rush (August 2, 1969)

“Blues is the foundation of all music. They keep buildin' and buildin' on it, just like these cars. They didn't use to look like this; jazz is a thing like I'm saying. They just pep blues up. They speed it up. They cut it up, all kinds of ways and pieces. They got time to go by, nothin' but time, and they can cut it up all kinds of ways. This is what I mean by cutting it up.

Son House (August 3, 1969)

“Yeah, Yeah. It's all right I think. Mostly all the old guys, they mostly all are gone. I think Willie Brown was about the last one.”

Ann Arbor Blues Festival

Program Schedule 1969

1969/08/01 Friday Night

1969/08/01 Gallup Park Friday Night Roosevelt Sykes

1969/08/01 Gallup Park Friday Night Fred McDowell

1969/08/01 Gallup Park Friday Night J.B. Hutto & the Hawks

1969/08/01 Gallup Park Friday Night Jimmy Dawkins

1969/08/01 Gallup Park Friday Night Junior Wells

1969/08/01 Gallup Park Friday Night B.B. King

1969/08/02 Saturday Night

1969/08/02 Saturday Afternoon Workshops

1969/08/02 Saturday Night

1969/08/02 Gallup Park Saturday Night Sleepy John Estes

1969/08/02 Gallup Park Saturday Night Luther Allison

1969/08/02 Gallup Park Saturday Night Clifton Chenier

1969/08/02 Gallup Park Saturday Night Otis Rush

1969/08/02 Gallup Park Saturday Night Howlin' Wolf

1969/08/02 Gallup Park Saturday Night Muddy Waters

1969/08/03 Sunday Afternoon

1969/08/03 Gallup Park Sunday Afternoon Arthur 'Big Boy' Crudup

1969/08/03 Gallup Park Sunday Afternoon Jimmy 'Fast Fingers' Dawkins

1969/08/03 Gallup Park Sunday Afternoon Roosevelt Sykes

1969/08/03 Gallup Park Sunday Afternoon Luther Allison & the Blue Nebulae

1969/08/03 Gallup Park Sunday Afternoon Big Joe Williams

1969/08/03 Gallup Park Sunday Afternoon Magic Sam

1969/08/03 Gallup Park Sunday Afternoon Big Mama Thornton

1969/08/03 Gallup Park Sunday Afternoon Freddy King

1969/08/03 Sunday Night

1969/08/03 Gallup Park Sunday Night Sam Lay

1969/08/03 Gallup Park Sunday Night T-Bone Walker

1969/08/03 Gallup Park Sunday Night Son House

1969/08/03 Gallup Park Sunday Night Charlie Musselwhite

1969/08/03 Gallup Park Sunday Night with Freddy Roulette

1969/08/03 Gallup Park Sunday Night Lightnin' Hopkins

1969/08/03 Gallup Park Sunday Night James Cotton

The Forgotten Jazz Scene

How could the repeal of prohibition in 1933 affect the onset of The Sixties in Ann Arbor? It sounds like Chaos Theory, where the flapping of a butterfly wing in Brazil affects the amount of snow that falls in Greenland. But such an effect did occur. And the sad thing is that the scene I am about to describe is hardly remembered. I keep waiting for someone to write about it, but it might have to be me! That is a scary thought, because what took place back then is pivotal to understand how Ann Arbor grew up in the late 1950s and early 1960s, so here it is:

Prohibition was repealed at 6 P.M. May 11, 1933 at the Court Tavern on 108 East Huron Street, and simultaneously at some nineteen other Ann Arbor beverage businesses that day. But there was a catch. Although Ann Arbor would no longer be a dry city, liquor by the glass could not be sold at bars, but only in private clubs like the Elks and the Town Club, so that meant that most bars were cut out of it. And here is how it affected the onset of The Sixties:

Because liquor by the glass (a cash cow) was illegal, it meant that bars did not have the extra money to hire musicians and their bands. The result of this was that for a long time the jazz scene in Ann Arbor was not in the bars, but instead in private houses (usually student rentals) around town. This “liquor by the glass” law was finally repealed on November 9, 1960, but up to that point there was a special music atmosphere in Ann Arbor that only existed privately. Even after the law was repealed it took time for music to move back into the bars again.

As a high-school student interested in all things Beat, including jazz, I found my way into that private scene,

albeit only as a tolerated bystander, a youngster. So here was this vibrant music scene happening in private around Ann Arbor for those who knew about it.

I can remember one large rental on the north side of the street in the first block or two of

E. William Street, just west of State Street. Hanging from the second story, out over the front steps, was an enormous flag with a photo of Thelonious Monk and (if I remember right) just the single word “Monk” or did it say “Thelonious Monk?” Then again, it may have only had Monk’s image. It was in houses like these that the forefront of jazz was taking place. Jazz players like Bob James, Ron Brooks, Bob “Turk” Pozar, Bob Detwiler, and many others played there. Small informal groups formed and improvised far into the night. Yet you couldn't find this music in where you might expect, in clubs or bars. It was hidden away in houses, and it all depended on who you knew. Not everyone found their way there or was invited.

As a high-school kid, I was allowed in, but had to keep a very low profile, sitting along the floor with my back against the walls and just taking it in. No one offered me any of the pot they were smoking, but a friend and I used to snort the ashes left by their joints. Or maybe we would find a roach or two in the ashtray, but very rarely. That was how dedicated we were in our wish to emulate everyone there. Aside from smoking pot, there was lots of wine and always the music. When they were not improvising jazz, they were playing classical music on the stereo, and a little bit of folk. And although the atmosphere of those parties was not pure Beat, it was all serious and “down” as the beats liked it. The sunlight and nakedness of The Sixties was nowhere to be seen. "This was heavy stuff, man, so be cool."

The point of relating this story is to point out that these underground jazz sessions were just one of several indicators that pointed the way from the end of the Beat movement forward to what was to come in just a few years, the full-blown Sixties Movement. I am talking here of the late 1950s and very early 1960s. What we call The Sixties didn't start until the summer of 1965.

These houses and their jazz parties were usually held in one or two largish rooms. The jazz players would set up in a corner…. drums, a standup bass, and a horn, usually a saxophone, but sometimes a flute. And of course a piano, if one was present. There was very little vocal jazz as I remember. The drink of choice back then was wine, red wine at that, and you would usually find it out on the kitchen table in gallon jugs or bottles. We just helped ourselves or chipped in if we had any scratch.

And, as mentioned, there was pot, something that a high-school boy like myself (who was reading Kerouac) desperately wanted to get a taste of. And these parties went late into the night. Time was something we had back then, with nothing better than that particular night waiting for us the next day, so we were not in a hurry to sleep. The right- now of the late nights was just about perfect. And it was so serious. All of the dark mood of European movies, art, and literature had rubbed off on us until “down” was our form of cool. The word “cool” says it all. We were not hot, not even warm. We were cool.

And let’s not forget the poetry. Words were big with the beats, and literature and poetry were the coin of the realm. It was not all about music; it was cigarettes, coffee, and endless talking until the bennies or Dexamyl wore off. And it is not like we had any real experience in life at that point (at least not me), so it was pure

speculation. We were all entrepreneurs investing in the promise of the future. And it was hard for me to be cool or "down," when the future looked so bright.

If I was on speed and also drinking wine or coffee, some sort of high nausea would take hold of me as it got toward morning. My hands would shake, but I also knew that in that state no sleep would come for a long time yet, and any attempts to rest would find me lying there wide awake, slightly in the zone, when dawn came, staring at the ceiling. Any sleep would only be a half-sleep. By that time I would be telling myself that I never wanted to take speed again, but I probably would. And I am talking about those little rolls of Benzedrine wrapped in aluminum foil… about ten or so, the size of aspirin. It was like a tiny roll of Lifesavers, only these weren't life savers, but life burners.

So those were the two places where I felt (at the very least) the presence of the Beat muse, in those all-night house parties in Ann Arbor and sitting in the Michigan Union Grill (MUG) by day. For Ann Arbor, that was it. And although the beat stereotype image might be of the solitary thinker, the beats (or wannabes) I knew were remarkably social. They seemed to like gathering together. Of course there were one-to-one talks in apartments or even single rooms, but as often as not they were about administering drugs. The rest of the time we grouped together… somewhere.

And many of the Ann Arbor Beats were just university students, although students that were conspicuous by their berets, long hair, and Navy Pea Coats. And of course the folks I hung with seemed to always be older than I was. That was because there were. I so much wanted to be older and to be part of all that.

And then there were the women. I was too young to

really deserve much attention from the Beat women, although they were so beautiful. As I was really just a townie, I gravitated to the townie women who, like myself, hung at the edge of the student scene. And there were not many of us and we were treated a bit like a minority, which I guess we were. We townies knew each other on sight.

I remember a tall skinny blonde name Francis that I kind of hung out with. Fran was shared by a number of us, and she was more a friend than anything else. I do remember spending the night with her at this or that place, but we were just crashing together; probably nothing much happened. She was also a townie.

And places to have sex or even cuddle in Ann Arbor when you were in high school and living at home were very hard to come by, the empty room or apartment, the tiny side room off from where others were partying, the back seat of a car, the summer grass – anywhere possible. It was a constant problem. I can remember my grandmother who lived at the corner of East University and Hill Street had a little basement room that she would rent out to students. Sometimes it would be empty and I would sneak in with my current girlfriend (if I had one), file down the basement steps and past the old furnace and slip into that tiny room. What a godsend it was to be out of the elements and alone with someone you wanted to make love with. Of course grandma, good Catholic woman that she was, would have hated the goings on there, or would she? Yeah, she would.

Back in those times the world was vast, but the places we met were few. This was before coffee houses and there were no dance clubs. There were places like Drake's Sandwich Shop at 709 N. University, but these were preppy student tea houses, where you sipped a

soda or had a sandwich from which the crust had been cut off. They did have booths with tall sides, so private conversations could happen there, but none of the folks I knew ever went there.

Really it was only the Michigan Union Grill and live music at private houses on the weekends back in the late 1950s and early 1960s where we hung out.

Ann Arbor, Michigan: A Wishing Well

Most of us have a home town where we came from. Ann Arbor Michigan is my home town; I grew up there. In the 1960s Ann Arbor was very different from the overly-caffeinated and sophisticated city it is today. For one, it did not used to take me 20 minutes to drive across town, but that is beside the point. Back then Ann Arbor appeared much less sure of itself (or was it just me growing up?). It seemed to be overly self-conscious and playing second fiddle (weak sister) to other college towns like Cambridge, Madison, and Berkeley.

Ann Arbor had not yet found its place in mainstream America and what it lacked in bravado, it made up for in introspection and a quiet humility. What I did not fully grasp back then is that Ann Arbor is fecund, a fertile place, indeed a womb. It is pure feminine.

In the 1960's, Ann Arbor's innate receptivity and 'femininity' might well have been mistaken for passivity and naiveté, not that there was not some of that also present. Ann Arbor in the Sixties was not fully aware of itself, a city yet to awaken to its mission, but nonetheless busy taking a direction that time would reveal as significant. And it took a while.

Most city names are feminine, but that is not what I mean by saying that Ann Arbor is feminine. There are two kinds of sculpture, one made by adding clay until we have a form, and the other by cutting away stone until we have a form. Ann Arbor is definitely of the second variety. It reveals rather than posits; it is passive rather than active, passive enough to give and actually allow birth.

At the time, growing up in Ann Arbor (and never really knowing any other city) I was only dimly aware that my home town was more 'passive', more giving (as in

‘giving way’), and generally just more receptive and understanding than some. I might better say that I felt that other college towns (like Berkeley or Cambridge) were in some way more aggressive or just ‘on their game’. It was natural to assume that Ann Arbor was busy bringing up the rear. Obviously it had not yet found itself.

Exactly when Ann Arbor did find itself (in the contemporary sense) I cannot say. I was too busy finding my own self and that happened in 1967. In 1980 I moved about 180 miles northwest to Big Rapids Michigan where I live to this day. As near as I can tell, Ann Arbor became an adult somewhere after I left town. Certainly it is confident and sure of itself today, and I am not just talking about students walking right in front of your car either. They always did that.

My best guess is that Ann Arbor became aware of its feminine qualities the same way I discovered my own gentler side, gradually but certainly, by surrendering to surrender. In time, the passive qualities of the town have become a power, not a defect or liability. It is my opinion that this fertileness, this receptivity that Ann Arbor has in such high degree is very rare among cities. At least in this regard, to me Ann Arbor is very special indeed.

And I sometimes wonder just how many of us there are who lived in Ann Arbor beyond our college years (not that I went to college) and were somehow unable to be all that we could be while living there, and yet blossomed almost as soon as we left the town. This has always puzzled me and perhaps every town is like that. ‘A prophet is never known in his own country’ kind of thing, but is immediately recognized from the outside. I don’t have enough data to even make a guess at this.

Or, is the deep receptiveness and anti-macho quality of Ann Arbor Michigan something that makes traditional superficial success more difficult-to-impossible to achieve in this town, yet at the same time builds strong habits for responding and accommodating life. This I wonder.

It is interesting that my first real business (incorporated) was formed in Ann Arbor, Matrix Software. I chose the word “Matrix” not for its mathematical meaning, but because it meant ‘womb,” a place where something could be born. In lieu of my remarks here, I find that fact fascinating.

Or am I just a little crazy when it comes to the meanings in life. I find it hard to get away from myself and all the crazy associations that run through my mind. And there is no use apologizing here for my endless self-referencing either. Isn’t it natural? Trying to disassociate oneself from referring to oneself has got to be some kind of oxymoron, the ultimate tar baby. The more you protest and struggle, the deeper into the tar you sink. It is OK to reference yourself. Who else did I have in mind when speaking in the first person?

My point here is that Ann Arbor has always seemed for me to be a sacred womb from which good things come. Whether this just works for me I cannot say. I can only say it is true for me.

After all, how do towns come to be located where they are? Is it only because this road is connected to that road, is connected to another road? Or does the natural world have springs of spirit just as it has natural springs of pure water flowing? I like to believe in the later take on this, that land has indwelling spirits that also speak to us or for us, as oracles.

It is my belief that Ann Arbor is such an oracular place.

At least in my life, it has functioned like an oracle, that rare vortex through which the universe has spoken directly to me, albeit not in words that I have always immediately understood. In essence, Ann Arbor has been a wishing well for all my hopes and dreams.

In ancient Greece they had oracular places, why not here in America? What great female spirit indwells in a city christened after two women named Ann and a stand of bur oak? The Anns' arbor -- Ann Arbor. Tree Town.

"When you wish upon a star,
Makes no difference who you are,
Anything your heart desires,
Will come to you"

MAKING BLUES TIME

This article is about musical time, something we might agree to call “making time.” The classic blues players, like all great musicians, literally “make” time. They don’t just follow along in time like most of us do when listening. They set the time, inset the time with their music, but it goes deeper than that. Every once in a while you and I might look at our watch and see what time the clock says, but the time in between those clock checks goes unchecked? It just passes, like the old song from Sandy Denny, “Who knows where the time goes?” I certainly don’t know where it goes. My point is that while clock time seems to be regular, what goes on when you and I are not watching the clock can be anything but regular. In other word time contracts and expands, especially when it comes to musical time.

The really great blues players, and we all have our favorites, actually can ‘make’ time. Time is also something we make. My favorite for “making” time would have to be Big Walter Horton, the Chicago blues harmonica player. In my opinion he could make the best time. He could show me the best time I have ever had musically, the very best time I have ever experienced. And I have of course (like we all do) my own sense of time, you know just going along each day, like each of us are doing now, reading this – taking our own sweet time.

But with Walter Horton, Muddy Waters, Howlin’ Wolf and other blues greats, somehow their music takes over time as I know it. They can overtake my personal sense of time and replace it with the kind of time that they make, which is for me a much more vast sense of time, you know, more time, time enough to do other things in -- extra-ordinary time. I can synch up or resonate to their

time and it becomes (for the moment) my time. Big Walter Horton (for me) is a great director or conductor of time and I gladly groove along with him to his beat. Great blues players can expand time and, in that expanded time, these musicians give us more room to experience or listen, creating an envelope (almost like an aura) with their music, an envelope in which I have more room or space to know myself, to relax, to be myself, or to just think and be here now. Making time is what this article is about.

Musical Time Beyond Time

Making time is one of the hallmarks of the great blues musicians. Most of them are gone and I have resigned myself to not hearing their kind of expanded musical time played live any longer, although I can still hear it on some recordings. It is gone. However, to my surprise, I actually experienced this form of blues time live a couple years ago after a very long hiatus. It was at a Michigan music festival called “Wheatland,” held not far from where I live here in mid-Michigan. Perhaps 20,000 people attended it.

They had a musician there named Aubrey Ghent, a lap-steel player from somewhere in the southeast; I believe it was Florida. Ghent plays gospel music and, sure enough, that day he was making time like the old masters. I was spellbound. I had not heard profound “blues” time like that since back in the day around Chicago and places like that. And Aubrey Ghent was sitting up there on the stage playing blues time, just like they used to.

Aubrey Ghent was ‘making’ the time. It immediately put me back in a musical space when I used to listen to players like Muddy Waters, a space where a blues player would take over time as I knew (and lived it) and

would put me through something I could not put myself through, taking me on a trip and to a place where I sure liked to go.

Aubrey Ghent had that kind of sense of time and one of the songs he displayed it on was, to everyone's surprise, "Don't Worry, Be Happy," the Bobby McFerrin tune. The whole audience just stopped whatever time they were having and went on Ghent's time for a while. And of course the rest of the night we were all telling each other about that incredible music. What I am after here is what makes that kind of music time incredible?

Maybe at the end, after you listened to Ghent, you would say to yourself, "Wow, that music was 'really' good," but it is way more than just the music being 'good'. Most of those present had just experienced something that they never had before and that some of us hadn't heard for a very long time. And maybe they can't quite remember it or maybe they remember it later, slowly, over a period of time, calling it back into memory with satisfaction, a little bit of that time, reading it back to themselves.

Anyway, Howlin' Wolf would put me through something like that when I was with him. And another blues player who did that to me was Chicago's Magic Sam. Some of you may not know of Magic Sam, but he was one of the most virile, seminal guitar players that have ever played the guitar. And he also was an incredible singer, and I 'mean' incredible! You can hear what I am pointing out here on the Delmark album "West-Side Soul" by Magic Sam here:

http://www.amazon.com/West-Side-Soul-Magic-Sam/dp/B000004BIF/ref=pd_sim_m_2

And in the re-release of his Cobra and Chief Recordings from 1957 here:

http://www.amazon.com/Essential-Magic-Sam-Cobra-Recordings/dp/B000059RVO.

I first heard Magic Sam live in Chicago back in the mid-1960s in one of these large rooms like you find in some of the Chinese restaurants in the major cities, the ones with really low ceilings. I am talking about big rooms, where they have all these little tables and chairs that kind of go way back in the distance. You can't even see the end of them and in this case everyone was already standing. I couldn't see Magic Sam. I had just squeezed in the door and was flat up against the back wall, and the place was packed. All I could make out were heads as far as I could see. Yet I could hear this incredible sound coming from somewhere way up front. It was Magic Sam's voice, which immediately made the hair stand up on the back of my neck. I had never heard anyone sing like that. It was literally a shimmering sheet of sound. It was Magic Sam making time. That kind of time was rare then and almost impossible to find now.

In my opinion what we are getting from blues players today, and I don't mean to offend anyone, so I will try to say it gently, is the music "it sounds like this," as in: "it sounds like Howlin' Wolf." To myself I just call it "reenactment" blues. Today we are now reenacting something that used to be there but no longer is like: Howlin' Wolf used to be there, but he is no longer with us, and so on. Or we could just say that no one sings like the Wolf, and those who try are just re-enacting Wolf, trying to sound like Wolf.

The problem with younger players re-enacting Wolf's songs is that they always make me think of Wolf, and whoever is singing does not really sound like Wolf. This spoils it for me, because there is no comparison. I would rather these young players just sing Wolf's songs in

their own voice and with their own experience, so I could hear 'them', and not them through a Wolf filter, and often a lousy one at that. That's just me.

Consider this: Most musicians listen to someone like Howlin' Wolf or Big Walter Horton and they set about to learn Wolf's style, to play Wolf's licks, and so on, in hopes that they can make the kind of music Wolf makes. But this is just exactly backward to what would actually be needed to create the effect of a Wolf or a Muddy Waters, and this point may be a little subtle. Playing Wolf's licks, and so on, will never get you there. Wolf is not doing that. Wolf is not trying to resemble anyone. He has managed to get his mind and consciousness (whatever we want to call it) into a certain state so that anything he plays already has that sound and perfection. It is already perfect "Wolf." You can't imitate perfection and why would you want to?

Therefore, to play like Wolf plays, you would first have to perfect not your guitar licks, but your mind, your consciousness, pay your dues, and get yourself into a state where anything you do, including playing music, will already be significant, and will exactly signify you and where 'your' head is at. Do you understand? Don't work on the licks only, but work on perfecting yourself, your life, your consciousness, and where your mind is at. Then whatever you do will sound right, at least right for you. Anyway, back to "making time."

The main blues players from back in the 1960s were all incredible, but the greatest time-maker of all time (for me personally) was the harmonica player Big Walter Horton. He could set or make time better than anyone I have ever heard. I refer you to Volume Three of the "Chicago the Blues Today!" album on Vanguard, and the song "Black Spider Blues," as an example.

Horton is playing there with Johnny Shines and the two of them are making time together. Here is a link:

http://www.amazon.com/Chicago-Blues-Today-Various-Artists/dp/B000000EJ0/ref=sr_1_4?s=music&ie=UTF8&qid=1291988413&sr=1-4

And it is perfect. If you were to add someone else, the time would probably immediately change for the worse and the expanded sense of time that I can clearly hear on the record would be lost, unless that player too was of the same caliber.

And by "making time," I mean this: We all have a sense of time. Musicians who play regularly know that on the really good music nights they can make time slow down or somehow expand; time stretches. I may not have the best words here. The energy and effort put out by the musician to build the musical time actually creates not just a slowing down or expanding of time, but also produces some kind of mental or psychological space in which the audience can think or exist in. It's like clearing out the menial cobwebs when I listen to one of these masters; they somehow give me time to perhaps know more about myself. I learned this years ago in a little bar in Ann Arbor called Mr. Flood's Party.

Musicians, at least this one, constantly worry about how they sound. You know, is it good or good enough? Anyway, back then, playing harmonica and singing in that bar along with my brother Daniel (on guitar), I had a good night. I felt that finally I was playing what I intended to play and I looked at the audience, thinking, well somebody might be giving me the thumbs up, like "Michael, you're doin' good man!" But there wasn't any of that. As I looked out over the audience, everyone was in some sort of trance. They were all looking into their own mind as if in some kind of reverie. And I suddenly

realized what was happening and said to myself: Oh, I get it now. It's not about me! I realized that, like everything else in life, even music has a "what's in it for me" quotient, and in this case it was about what was in it for them, the audience. My music only gave them the room to experience their own thoughts more fully.

Great musicians make space in time. They expand time into space and make more room. They make room for us. They make time and in that expanded time people can get some very personal and specialized jobs done, like thinking or feeling whatever they need to. We all do this, and music is not the only avenue. For example, I work a lot. And I get up like at two or three in the morning and I work until five at night. I might take a nap. And then somewhere around 6 PM I like to watch a movie. It doesn't have to be a whole movie or it might be two movies. It often is just a little bit of a movie. In that movie time, that down time, I am, of course, watching the movie, but I am also mulling things over that happened that day in my mind.

Movies may be the most common form of meditation for most people, because we really are just looking at a spot on the wall and holding very still. Isn't that what meditators do? Anyway, in that down time I get things done in my mind (while I am watching the movie) that I need to do. I am processing the day's events. For me, it is very relaxing and actually quite necessary.

When great blues players play, they create a similar kind of time in which we, the audience, can get into and experience. So the great time setters, the great blues musicians (great musicians of any kind) take over our sense of time, take over what we can call clock time, this time and that time. They take it over and supplant it or replace it with their sense of time, what they know

how to do. They're setting the time. They are creating or making the time for us and suddenly our mind is caught by their sense of time. We are into it. This is why live performances can never be replaced by recordings.

We might say afterward, "Oh, isn't that an incredible guitar player" or we could also say "Wow, he or she took me on a trip." Musicians make time and in that time we have our own personal experience. It is not only about 'their' music, but also about our life. That is the point here. That is what great music is all about.

I can remember one example and it's a good one. In Chicago, back in the mid-1960s I went into a club, a tiny little place (I forget the name of it; it might have been "Mother Blues") that Howlin' Wolf was playing in. There was nobody there. There was only Howlin' Wolf and next to him there was his wonderful guitar player Hubert Sumlin. That's it. So we came in and it was almost totally dark. There was just a little bit of light up near the stage. Wolf was sitting on a chair way up front and singing like only Howlin' Wolf can sing. And for a while, time just stopped. It was not so much that, as it was that the walls, that whole place I was in, faded and gradually became transparent.

Not just the walls, but from the walls on out forever. What remained was this consciousness (I guess it was me) floating in an ocean of translucent space. And scout's honor, I was not on drugs! Everything just went void. For that time I forgot where I was in my life. I had to reach inside to get a hold on myself, and there was nothing to get a hold of. Wolf's voice and the power of his musical time had taken over mine. I could have been anywhere in the universe – somewhere, and yet there still no place. Place had nothing to do with it.

I was transfixed by Wolf's time. And of course I came

out of it, but it was like: how could I forget this? That's what I mean by time. Wolf's time was better than mine. I wasn't even prepared for the experience; it just happened. He took me deeper than I could get by myself. It is like one of those times when somebody dies that is close to you. Those events kind of stop you in your tracks and make you, for a time, more open. You are popped out of your groove and open to alternatives. Life is new again.

Toward an Explanation

What am I talking about here and how does it work?

This is where words can fail, but I will give it a try. You may have to meet me halfway. Have you ever been in one of those car accidents or near accidents when you see it coming, but maybe can't avoid it? It is easy to find these events when driving on ice. Your mind concentrates and you are "right there." Time slows down and everything seems to be taking place in slow motion. That is somewhat similar to what I am pointing at here when I use the term "making time." In times of stress, intense awareness, or extreme concentration, time stretches and slows down.

You can see it all happen. Time just somehow expands or makes room. "Making time" with the blues is like that.

The standard blues progression is just twelve bars which keep repeating themselves over and over. In order to take control of that progression and go deeper with time, the blues musician has to concentrate (be aware) and articulate each bar of that blues progression, putting the brakes on here and rushing to catch up there. What matters is to emphasize and willfully stress, accentuate, or push the time leading up to this or that change here, and drag out the turn-around or what-have-you over there.

If a musician is aware or present enough, and has enough experience, he or she can articulate the blues so that, although clock time just ticks on along, the end result of the effort is to expand time, slow it down, and we go between the clock-ticking seconds into what can only be described as expanded time, time in which we are beyond the distractions of the moment (our regular life) and able to taste or experience what is beyond, beneath, above (use your own words here) the normal. I don't want to call it eternity, because that term has been overused, but it is somehow outside, however marginally or temporarily, our normal sense of time. This then is what I mean by "making time." Musicians do this all the time (pun intended).

And really great musicians give us such great time or can make time so well that we can hitch a ride with them, even if only for the length of a song. For those moments we are on their time, traveling with them, part of their mandala, and they are taking us deeper within conventional time to something greater than that. It is easier to experience this than to put it into words. Let me try another metaphor.

The discipline and energy of making music can create more room in time than we normally have – expansion or extension. Think of it as an aura or envelope of normal time that somehow expands time as we know it (and the moment) into something deeper and wider – stretches time. It doesn't stretch time longer, as in making a song last longer; it stretches the time deeper as in: going beyond normal time into somewhere else. I don't have a word for it. In other words, when time appears to slow down, the song in clock time does not slow down or get longer in duration. That stays the same. It is our consciousness and experience that stretches or reaches deeper inside ourselves. We

expand.

In other words, intense musical activity creates space, an envelope or aura, and the ‘kind’ of our musical activity (the kind of blues we play) creates the kind of space or room we can experience or rest in. Different musicians create different spaces for us. Think of it as a living room, room to live, room to move around in, something like a time out from whatever line of life we are usually travelling along.

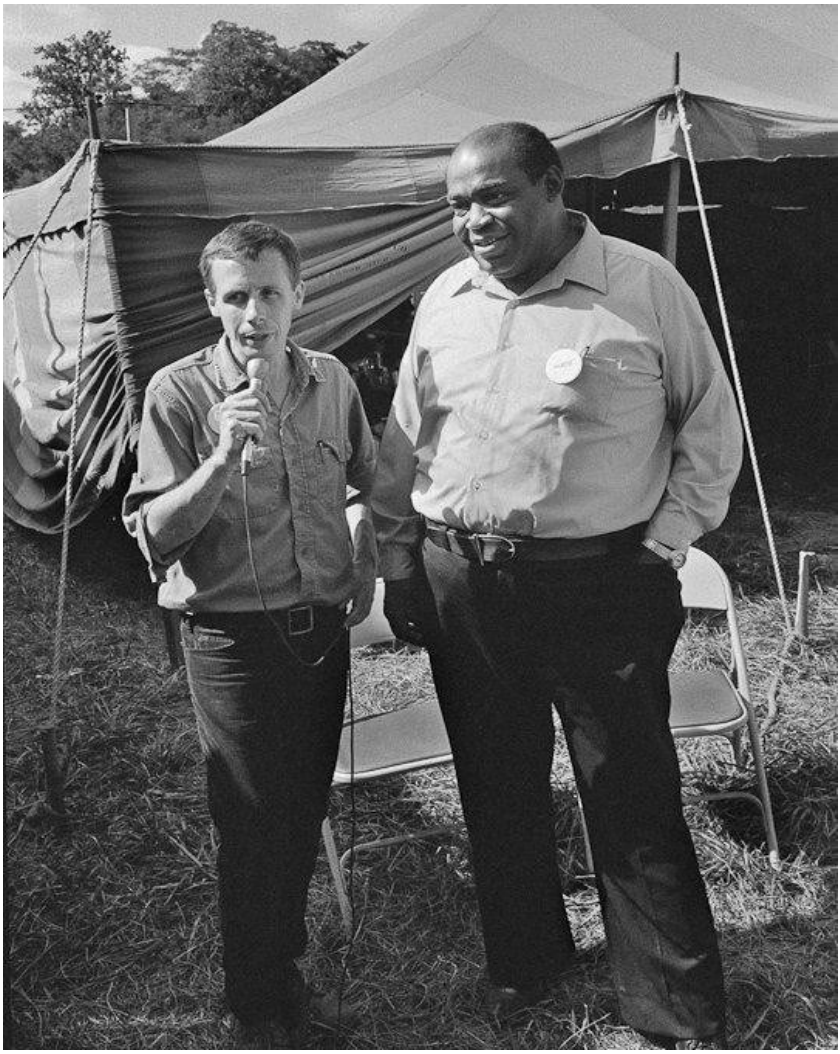
The more that the musician is able to work the time, the more of an aura or special space surrounds the moment, and in that space or in that extra room, there we are, experiencing it, living it. We are experiencing not only the music, per se, but the music allows us to experience ourselves as well, to go where we can’t usually get to on our own, except rarely. And this brings up the question: what is music? I won’t go there just now, but when great musicians make time, and we experience that expanded time, we use it like money to think about or spend however we like. It is not only about their music; this experience is beyond the music, if you mean labels, lyrics, notes, song titles, and albums. Music is not only about what it means, as in the words of a song, but those words and notes are only references, means and ways to experience the heart of music, the purpose, which is to experience what I can only point to here.

The words and sound of music depend on what they mean, the sense it makes. And ‘sense’ is always an experience, not an idea or thought. When great blues musicians make time, we sense it and have a deeper actual experience. We live it. Often that experience is ‘special’ because we can’t get there from here, not from our day-to-day experience. That is why we listen to

music. A great musician is capable of transforming our day, sending us back home with a deep experience and sometimes with a new sense of direction

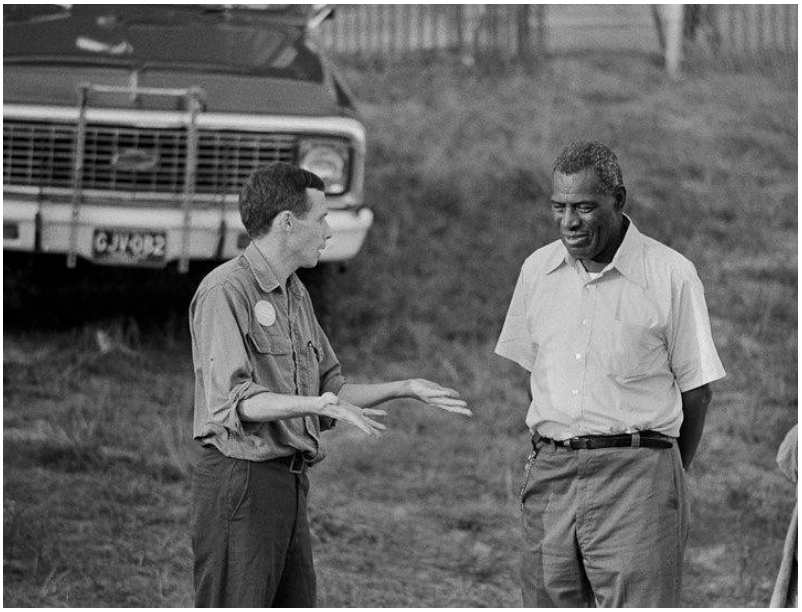
There you have the general idea of making time. Please don't read this article as a know-it-all statement from me, but more as a question, something I am thinking about and interested in, something to be discussed.

[Interview photos by Stanley Livingston (C) All Rights Reserved]

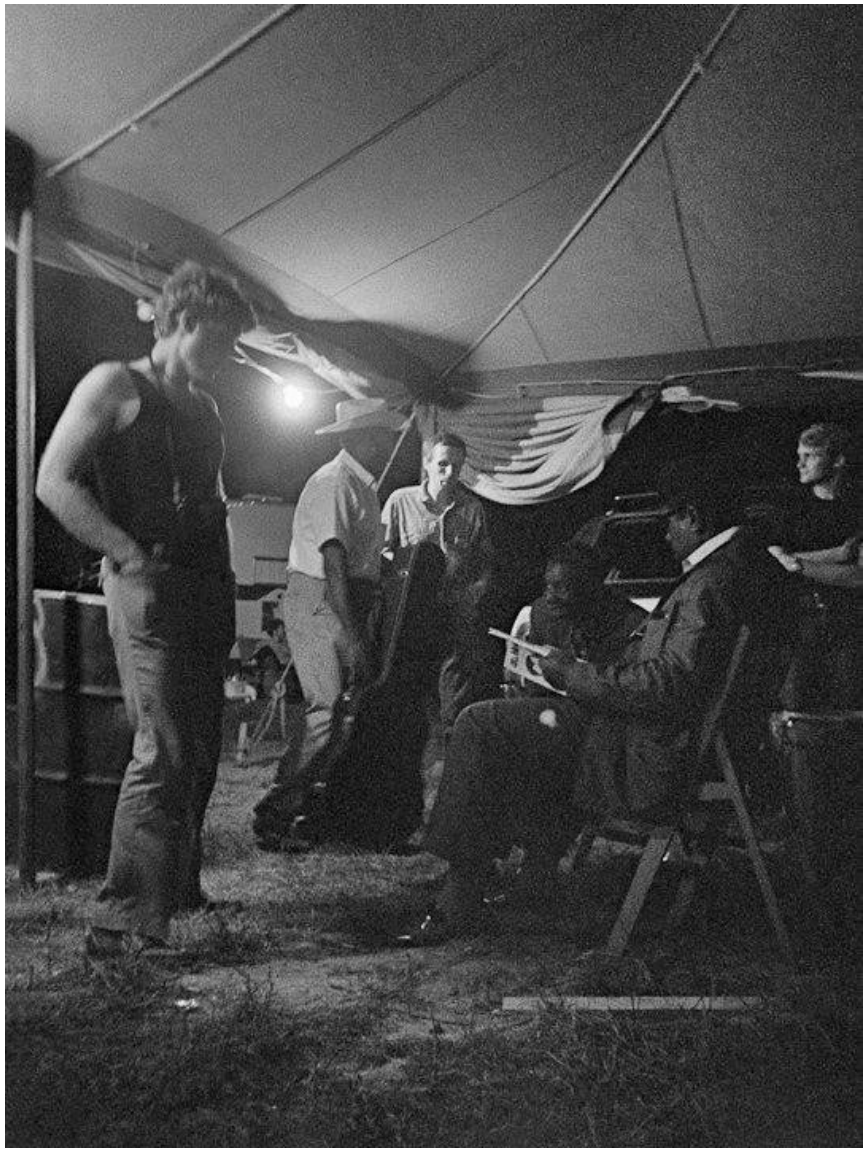


Michael Erlewine interviewing legendary songwriter and bass player Willie Dixon.

Michael Erlewine interviewing blues singer Koko Taylor.



Michael Erlewine sharing thoughts with blues singer Howlin' Wolf.



Michael Erlewine standing at back with legendary bluesman Robert Pete Williams. Brother Philip Erlewine on right.

Groove and Blues in Jazz

Music is good for the soul. It is one of the best medicines that I know of and the better the music, the better I feel. Hearing the good stuff makes all the difference. And that is what this article is all about -- how to locate the best blues music. Blues is so radical -- such a root music -- that it fuses with and gives rise to other music genres with ease. Jazz critics point out that the roots of jazz can be found in the blues. This article is about where in jazz blues lovers can hear and feel those roots -- the blues in jazz.

A little background on where I am coming from: I have been a blues and jazz lover for over fifty years. In the late 1950s and very early 1960s there was a strong jazz scene in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where I grew up.

This was before liquor by the glass became legal in 1963, after which a lot of the jazz scene moved into the clubs. Most any night of the week, but in particular on weekends, there was live jazz played in houses and apartments. Teenagers like myself were tolerated and we hung out. Players like Bob James, Ron Brooks, Bob Pozar, and Bob Detwiler were playing straight-up bop and exploring some cool jazz. The music and the parties often went on all night. On occasion, I heard Cannonball Adderley and others play in one of the many Detroit clubs like the Minor Key. Jazz records were big too. I can remember staying up all night listening to John Coltrane's "My Favorite Things" album over and over when it first came out. This was about 1960.

I fell in with the folk scene in the early 1960s and managed to hitch-hike all over the country several times. A fantastic guitarist by the name of Perry Lederman, a young singer/songwriter by the name of

Bob Dylan, and I hitched together for a stretch. Later I helped to put on the first Bob Dylan concert in Ann Arbor. During that time, I hung out with the New Lost City Ramblers, Ramblin' Jack Elliot, the Country Gentlemen, Joan Baez, and some other great folk artists that you may never have heard of.

It was in those years that I got introduced to blues and gospel music. The Swan Silvertones, an a capella gospel group of infinite beauty had an enormous effect on me in 1964 when I first heard their records. I had also been listening to classical music for a number of years, but had no real guidance. I spent all of 1964 listening to and learning in depth about classical music from a real expert. Then in 1965 I helped to form a band called the Prime Movers Blues Band.

Although we never recorded, we were no slouch. Iggy Pop was our drummer, avant-garde composer "Blue" Gene Tyranny our keyboardist, music columnist Dan Erlewine played lead Guitar, Jack Dawson (later in the Siegel-Schwall Blues Band) on bass, and I sang and played amplified harmonica.

Sometime in 1965 we heard the Paul Butterfield Blues Band live. That changed my life. We got to know those guys and they introduced us to all of the blues we had not yet found out for ourselves. We became, in an instant, the Prime Movers Blues Band. That was a time.

The net effect of all of this was that, during the 1960s, I listened to blues records day and night trying to learn to play the licks. And I just loved the music. In the mid-1960s, thanks to Bob Koester of Delmark

Records, I heard players like Little Walter, Magic Sam, Junior Wells and many others live in the Chicago clubs. Later, working with various blues and jazz festivals, I had the good fortune to interview (audio and video) just

about any blues player you could name that was around back then, and most of them still were.

This article is about blues in jazz, and I am getting to that. My first love is the blues and it took me some time to get much into jazz. At first about the only way I could hear jazz was through a blues filter, so any jazz I got into had to have those blues elements. Now that I know my way around the jazz catalog, I know that it contains some real treasures for blues lovers. But don't expect the standard 12-bar blues progression.

Blue notes are found in jazz, but seldom in the form we are used to in blues recordings. It is the blues as a feeling, the soul-full experience of the blues and gospel elements that can be found in jazz. So, I am writing this for blues lovers who may want to explore jazz through the same blues doorway I went through.

The jazz I love is the blues in jazz whether that means bluesy jazz, funky jazz, original funk, soul jazz -- terms which I will explain in due course. I tend not to like (very much) jazz that does not have some kind of blues or modal element in it. Swing and bop, to the degree that they lack the roots sound of blues and gospel, fail to hold my attention. I like my jazz with blues, please.

Something I realized some time ago is that jazz (and most kinds of music) are either energizing or calming in their overall effect. If you are the kind of person who needs something to get you moving (to energize you), then you will be attracted to music that is agitating and energizing like: marches, Dixieland, bop, free jazz, and other forms of progressive jazz. It appeals to those who need that cup of coffee in life -- get a move on! It stirs you up.

However, if you are a person (like me) who tends to be

very active and sometimes even hyper, then you need music to relax and calm you like blues, original funk, soul jazz -- groove music. It helps to get you in a soothing groove that dissipates energy -- relief!

Regardless of the fact that as a person we may (in general) be drawn to music that either stimulates or calms us, at times all of us may need some pick-me- up music and at other times some slow-me-down stuff.

You will find that the above (admittedly simplistic) concept works very well. Blues and the blues that is in jazz (for the most part) has to do with the release and expression of feelings. The effect is calming to the system. It is “get down” and relaxin’ music. Here is a brief tour of the bluesy stuff in jazz.

An Abbreviated History of Blues in Jazz

This is an abbreviated history because I want to just skip over the standard playing-the-blues-progression in jazz stuff. There is not much of it anyway. If you like blues, you all ready know that by now. For now, we will also pass on all of the old-time blues found in traditional jazz -- the early New Orleans jazz. There is plenty of great old blues and blues-like music to hear there and you will want to hear it someday. But it is just too much like the blues that you already know.

The same goes for what few blues tunes came out of the swing and big-band era. You don’t need a guide to check swing blues tunes out because there are not that many of them. When you can find them, they are pretty much straight-ahead blues songs or tunes played with a big band. Further, the arranged feeling of the big band is not up to the impromptu kind of blues feeling you may be used to, so let’s pass on that too.

When I speak of blues in jazz, I mean some get-down

funky blues sounds in the jazz that you have not heard before, so let's just get to that. If this history stuff bores you, skip over it and just read the recommended albums list. Start finding and listening to some of the picks. As mentioned, we will pass over the earlier forms of jazz including the New Orleans varieties, Dixieland, and swing. However, since a lot of the bluesier jazz that may interest you grew out of bop (bebop), you will need to know what bop is and how this music style came to be. We will start there.

Bop (bebop) -- Bop distinguished itself from the popular big-band swing music out of which it emerged by that fact that it is most often played in small groups. You can hear each of the players as separate sounds. And while swing can have a groove that soothes you, bop is wake-me-up music. It's faster tempos, more elaborate melodies, and complex harmonies do not tend to establish a groove. It is more frenetic, even frantic, than swing. In other words, this is not relaxin' music. Bop has an attitude.

Unlike the large swing bands, where there were a few featured soloists, most members of the small combo could and did solo -- democratic. In addition to an increase in improvisation and solo virtuosity, there was little dependence on arrangements. And fast tempos too. Bop is more energetic (read agitating) than swing, with the rhythm section keeping the time on the ride cymbal. Bop tunes can be very fast, often with elaborate harmonies and complex chord changes that take an expert player to negotiate. In fact, fluency in bop became the benchmark of the young musician. Bop is a sophisticated music that can be, for many, somewhat of an acquired taste. In this respect it resembles classical music. Here are some bop artists and a sample album of them at their best:

Bop Originators:

Charlie Parker (just about any album; the box sets are the best)

Dizzy Gillespie, “Dizziest”/Bluebird

Thelonious Monk, “Thelonious with John Coltrane”/OJC

Bud Powell, “Genius of Powell Vol. 1”/Polygram Dexter Gordon, “Our Man in Paris”/Blue Note Miles Davis, “First Miles”/Savoy

Fats Navarro, “The Fabulous Fats Navarro, Vol 1-2”/Blue Note

Sonny Stitt, “Constellation”/Muse

J.J Johnson, “The Emminent Jay Jay Johnson Vol 1”/Blue NOte

Max Roach, “Freedom Now Suite”/Columbia Lucky Thompson, “Lucky Strikes!”/Prestige Tad Dameron, “Mating Call”/Prestige

1950s Bop Players:

Sonny Rollins, “Newk’s Time”/Blue Note Jackie McLean, “Let Freedom Ring”/Blue Note Oscar Peterson, “The Trio”/Pablo

Clifford Brown, “Brownie”/Emarcy

Phil Woods, “Pairin Off”/Prestige Kenny Dorham, “Una Mas”/Blue Note Barry Harris, “Live in Tokyo”/Xanadu Tommy Flanagan, “Thlonica”/Enja

1970-1980s Bop Revival:

Richie Cole, “New York Afternoon-Alto Madness”/Muse

Chris Hollyday, “Ho, Brother”/Jazzbeat Blues in Bop:

Thelonious Monk, “The Thelonious Monk Trio”/Prestige

Miles Davis & Milt Jackson, “Bag’s Groove”/Prestige
Miles Davis, “Walkin’”/Prestige

Horace Silver, “Senor Blues”/Blue Note

Hard Bop

Hard bop was a reaction to the somewhat brittle and intellectual nature of straight bop. Hard bop distinguished itself from bop by its simple melodies, slower tempos, and avoidance of the (by then) cliched bop chord changes. The constant up-tempo frenetic quality of bop pieces is absent. Tunes are often in the minor mode, much slower paced, and often moody -- more feeling and thoughtful. Hard bop reaches into the blues and gospel tradition for substance to slow the up-tempo bop music down, stretch the time out, and imbue the music with more feeling. It was as if jazz had once again found its roots and was nourished. The public thought so too, because it was more approachable than bop. Hard bop is one big step toward establishing a groove, but it lacks what has come to be known as a groove, as in “groove” music. Blues lovers will appreciate the more bluesy nature of hard bop, but probably still yearn for more blues yet.

Hard Bop Pioneers:

Horace Silver, “Pieces of Silver”/Blue Note

Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers, “Moanin”/Blue Note

Cannonball Adderley Quintet, “Quintet at the Lighthouse”/Landmark

Nat Adderley, “Work Song”/Riverside Art Farmer, “Meet the Jazztet”/Chess Crusaders, “Freedom Sounds”/Atlantic Lou Donaldson, “Blues Walk”/Blue Note

Kenny Dorham, “Trumpet Toccata”/Blue Note Donald Byrd, “House of Byrd”/Prestige Coltrane-Influenced Hard Bop:

Wayne Shorter, “Native Dancer”/Columbia Freddie Hubbard, “Hub-Tones”/Blue Note McCoy Tyner, “Sahara”/Milestone

Herbie Hancock, “Maiden Voyage”/Blue Note Joe Henderson, “Page One”/Blue Note

Weather Report (Joe Zawinul), “Mysterious Traveler”/Columbia

Mainstream Hard Bop:

Sonny Rollins, “Saxophone Colossus and More/OJC

John Coltrane, “Blue Trane”/Blue Note Wynton Kelly, “Kelly Blue”/Riverside

Clifford Jordan, “Glass Bead Game”/Strata-East Booker Ervin, “The Book Cooks”/Affinity

George Coleman, “Amsterdam After Dark”/Timeless Charlie Rouse, “Two Is One”/Strata-East

Harold Land, “The Fox”/Contemporary Blue Mitchell, “The Thing to Do”/Blue Note Kenny Dorham, “Afro-Cuban”/Blue Note Oliver Nelson, “Soul Battle”/Prestige

Hank Mobley, “Soul Station”/Blue Note

Wes Montgomery, “Incredible Jazz Guitar of Wes Montgomery”/Riverside

Funky Jazz

Some hard-bop players like pianist Horace Silver began to include even more feeling in their playing by adding blues riffs and various elements from gospel music to their playing. Silver, considered by many to be the father of funk, describes funk: "Funky means earthy, blues-

based. It may not be blues itself, but it has that down-home feel to it. Playing funky has nothing to do with style; it's an approach to playing... "Soul" is the same basically, but there's an added dimension of feeling and spirit to soul -- an in-depth- ness. A soulful player might be funky or he might not be."

The hard bop jazz that they were playing became in Silver's hands still more earthy, bluesy or, as it was called, "funky". This was jazz, but with a funky flavor. It is quite easy to distinguish this funky jazz from the all out jazz funk described below. I really like funky jazz because it sometimes has a groove, but I love jazz funk better because in that music there is a total groove.

Horace Silver, "Song for My Father"/Blue Note
Cannonball Adderley "Somethin' Else"/Blue Note Nat Adderley "Work Song"/Riverside

Bobby Timmons, "Moanin'"/Milestone

The Blues Groove -- Groove Music

The whole thing about groove music is that everything exists to establish and maintain the groove. Solos, egos, instruments -- what have you -- only exist to lay down the groove and to get in it. There is a steady constant beat that can become drone-like or trance- like. You get in a groove and you stay in the groove and that feels good. There are no absolute rules about what makes groove music. Anything can happen as long as the effect is to put you in and keep you in the groove. It often has a Hammond organ in the sound, but not always. It can have any number of instruments doing all kinds of solos and what-not as long as these things don't break the groove.

Everything exists to create and maintain the groove. Blues lovers tend to like groove music because the

blues is nothing but a groove.

Groove music can be up-tempo or slow, bright or dark, but the net effect of getting in a groove is always to satisfy and relax. There is always a constant rhythm section driving the groove, invariably danceable. Grooves always have a funky, earthy flavor and blues and gospel elements are essential.

All grooves are bluesy, by definition. It can be as funky and nasty as you want to be, but groove is not stir-it-up music. It is always cool-you-down music. If it is not relaxing, then it is not groove. Which is not to say that groove is not energetic or fast paced. It may sound wild, but the final effect is: a groove. Although I hesitate to characterize it this way, groove music is always a little trance-like. The result of the funkiest, baddest piece of groove music is a bit of clear sailing

-- relaxation. Get in the groove! That's the place to BE.

Original Funk/Soul Jazz

The transformation of bop did not always stop with hard bop or even funkified jazz. Some players dove rather than dipped into the roots music and an even more bluesy music was born that came to be called funk or soul jazz. For the first time, we are talking real groove music.

Funkified Jazz, also called soul jazz, jazz funk, original funk, or just plain funk is a form of jazz that originated in the mid-1950s -- a type of hard bop. It is often played by small groups -- trios led by a tenor or alto sax, pianist, guitar and the Hammond organ.

Funk music is very physical, usually 'down and dirty'. Funk or soul jazz emerged as a reaction to the bop/cool jazz (cool, intellectualized) prevalent at the time. Funky music is everything that bop/cool jazz is not. It is hot,

sweaty and never strays far from its blues roots. The term “soul” is a link to gospel roots; “funk” links to blues roots. This fusion of jazz with blues and gospel elements became known as “soul jazz” during the 1950s, partly through the promotion of the Cannonball Adderley Quintet as a “soul-jazz” group.

Fast-paced funk pieces have a bright melodic phrasing set against a hard, percussive dance rhythm. Funk ballads are never more than a few steps from the blues. Above all, this is dynamic relaxin' music that is easy to listen to -- the groove. Those of you who like blues and R&B (and gospel), but find some jazz just a touch remote, may well like original funk. There is no better music to kick back to than this.

Jazz funk is sometimes called “original funk” to distinguish it from the contemporary funk sound of the James Brown/George Clinton variety. Along with blues and gospel, original funk or soul jazz had some R&B (soul music) elements thrown into the mix and the resulting fusion was even more to the public’s taste. Soul jazz has remained one of the most popular and successful forms of jazz to this very day. Bop is stir-it-up music while funk or soul jazz (no matter how up tempo or percussive) is at heart calm-you-down or groove music. Here are some classic funk albums:

Eddie Lockjaw Davis, “Cookbook”vol. 1-3/OJC

Gene Ammons, “Gene Ammons Story: Organ Combos”/Prestige

Arnett Cobb, “Smooth Sailing”/OJC Red Holloway, “Cookin’ Together”/OJC Willis Jackson, “Bar Wars”/Muse

Ike Quebec, “Blue and Sentimental”/Blue Note Jimmy Forest, “All the Gin is Gone”/Delmark Bobby Timmons,

“Soul Man”/Prestige

Johnny Hammond Smith, “Breakout”/Kudu Harold Vick, “Steppin’ Out)/Blue Note

Harold Mabern, “Rakin’ & Scrapin’”/Prestige Stanley Turrentine, “Comin’ Your Way”/Blue Note Houston Person, “Soul Dance”/Prestige

Grover Washington, “Mister Magic”/Motown Harold Maybern, “Rakin’ and Scrapin’, OJC-330 Cornell Dupree , “Coast to Coast”/Antilles

Les McCann, “Swiss Movement”/Atlantic (soul jazz)

Organ Combos

At the heart of original funk and soul jazz sits the Hammond Organ, 400 pounds of musical joy. This unwieldy piece of equipment can do it all -- work by itself, as a duo, trio, quartet, or with a full band. It is a full band. More important is the fact that the Hammond-organ sound pretty much defines real funk. There is something about the percussive sound and the adjustable attack/decay effects that, coupled with the famed (rotating horns) Leslie speakers, epitomizes that music called funk.

Whatever the reason, you will find a Hammond organ at the center (or as backup) of the majority of soul jazz recordings, not to mention contemporary funk and R&B recordings. Jimmy Smith is the man who tamed the great beast and turned the Hammond from a roller-rink calliope into a serious jazz instrument.

The story is the Smith locked himself in a warehouse with a Hammond for almost a year and came out playing that sound we all love.

And Smith is just the tip of the top. There are many great Hammond players that are every bit as great in their own way, names like Richard Groove Holmes, Jimmy McGriff, Shirley Scott, Charles Earland, John Patton, Larry Young, and others. Put a Hammond organ and some drums together with a tenor sax or guitar and you have all you need for some real funky music. This is groove music par excellence.

Jimmy Smith, “Back at the Chicken Shack”/Blue Note Jimmy McGriff, “At the Appollo”/Collectables

Jack McDuff, “Live!”/Prestige

Richard Groove Holmes, “After Hours /Pacific Jazz Don Patterson, “Genius of the B-3”/Music

John Patton, “Let em’ Roll”/Blue Note Shirley Scott, “Blue Flames”/OJC Charles Earland, “Black Talk”/Prestige

Charles Kynard, “Reelin’ with the Feeling”/Prestige

Larry Young, “The Complete Blue Note Larry Young”/Mosiac

Joey DeFrancisco, “All of Me”/Columbia

The Commercialization of Soul Jazz

Soul jazz sometime gets a not-so-great rap. Anything so potent and popular lends itself to misuse and a great many so-called soul jazz albums were recorded that had no “soul” -- bad commercial funk. On the theory that you never know what is enough until you have more than enough, artists sought to increase their popularity by making their music more and more commercial until, in the end, they lost touch with the roots of the music -- the soul.

To make matters worse, the advent of bop and the

various forms of progressive jazz that grew out of bop, gave birth to a somewhat elitist, conservative, and overly intellectualized attitude -- the jazz purist. This purist looks down on jazz that partakes too much of its blues and gospel roots, and any R&B influences are really frowned upon. These mainstream jazz purists used the overt commercialism aspect of soul jazz as grounds to dismiss the entire music off hand. Funk and soul jazz was somehow (in their opinion) not as worthy of respect as the bop or progressive jazz they admired. The fact that soul jazz is the most successful and popular form of jazz was cited as further proof of its commonness. This elitist attitude is now on the decline and soul jazz is beginning to take its place in the history of jazz as a legitimate form of the jazz. Soul jazz reissues are a hot item. It is a fact that most great jazz performers also have a funky or soul side and albums to prove it. Often very little is written about the soul jazz side of these artists.

Well, there you have a quick tour of the funkier side of jazz -- groove music. It is important to point out that soul jazz, although always popular with the people, has received short shrift from the jazz elite. The attitude is that groove music is something, like the blues, which should be kept in the closet -- keep back. That time has passed.

Groove Masters

We are coming out of a time when jazz has been measured by how outstanding the soloist is -- how high can they fly? Critics only seem to know how to rate what stands out. This won't work for groove music. In groove, the idea is to lay down a groove, get in it, and deepen it. Groove masters always take us deeper into the groove. These artists are our windows into the groove, and their

hearts become the highway over which the groove can run. They reinvest. And we ride the groove.

This is why jazz critics have either passed (never got it) over groove masters like Grant Green and Stanley Turrentine or heard something but did not know what to make of what they heard (and felt). If music is not viewed as such an intellectual thing (something to see) but more of a feeling kind of thing, then groove masters can be appreciated. You may not see the groove masters, but you sure can feel them. In groove, the solo (and all else) only exists if it adds to the groove. Witness Grant Green's incredible single- note repetitions. Who would ever think to do that?

You wouldn't dare think of that. It is done by pure feeling. It feels good and you keep doing it. Nothing to think about.

Stanley Turrentine has been laying down grooves for many a year for all to hear. I am surprised at how many books don't even mention him. Grant Green has received even shorter shrift. There have been a few voices crying in the wilderness of soul jazz criticism. Producer Bob Porter of Atlantic Records and Bob Rusch of Cadence Magazine have always known and told us about the groove. Recording engineer Rudy Van Gelder is another pre-eminent groove expert. More than half of all great soul jazz sessions were recorded by Van Gelder. The next time you hear some real groove music, in particular if there is a Hammond organ on it, just check the album for this engineer's name.

Grant Green: THE Groove Master

All that I can say about Grant Green is that he is the groove master. Numero uno. He is so deep in the groove that most people have no idea what's up with him. Players like Stanley Turrentine, Jimmy Smith,

Kenny Burrell, and many other really great soul jazz artists are also groove masters. But the main man is Grant Green. He is so far in the groove that it will take decades for us to bring him out in full. He is just starting to be discovered.

To get your attention and make clear that I am saying something here, consider the singing voice of Bob Dylan. A lot of people say the guy can't sing. But it's not that simple. He is singing. The problem is that he is singing so far in the future that we can't yet hear the music. Other artists can sing his tunes and we can hear that all right. Given enough time… enough years… that gravel-like voice will sound as sweet to our ears as any velvet-toned singer. Dylan's voice is all about microtones and inflection. For now that voice is hidden from our ears in time so tight that there is no room (no time) yet to hear it. Some folks can hear it now. I, for one, can hear the music in his voice. I know many of you can too. Someday everyone will be able to hear it, because the mind will unfold itself until even Dylan's voice is exposed for just what it is -- a pure music. But by then our idea of music will also have changed. Rap is changing it even now.

Billy Holiday is another voice that is filled with microtones that emerge through time like an ever-blooming flower. You (or I) can't hear the end or root of her singing, not yet anyway. As we try to listen to Holiday (as we try to grasp that voice), we are knocked out by the deep information there. We try to absorb it and before we can get a handle on her voice (if we dare listen!) she entrances us in a delightful dream-like groove and we are lost to criticism. Instead we groove on and reflect about this other dream that we have called life. All great musicians do this to us.

Grant Green's playing at its best is like this too. It is so recursive that instead of taking the obvious outs we are used to hearing, Green instead chooses to reinvest -- to go in farther and deepen the groove. He opens up a groove and then opens up a groove and then opens a groove, and so on. He never stops. He opens a groove and then works to widen that groove until we can see into the music, see through the music into ourselves. He puts everything back into the groove that he might otherwise get out of it. He knows that the groove is the thing and that time will see him out and his music will live long. That is what grooves are about and why Grant Green is the groove master.

I hope that some of what I have written here will help blues lovers push off from the island of blues out into the sea of jazz. You can always head back to the solid ground of blues if you can't get into the jazz.

Blues and jazz are not mutually exclusive. Blues in jazz has been a thrilling ride (groove) for me and I have found a whole new music that satisfies much like the blues satisfy. I listen to groove music all the time. If you find some great groove tunes that I have not mentioned here, drop me a line. I want to hear them.

Blues in Jazz and R&B

There are forms of blues in jazz other than the groove music presented above. Here are a few notes on some of the major styles:

Blues Shouters and Singers-- There are blues singers who tend toward jazz and almost all jazz singers sing some blues. This is not the place to point these out since they are more-or-less straight-ahead blues singers when they sing blues. The one exception, of course, is Billie Holiday. Holiday is probably the most seminal singer ever recorded. But is her music the

blues? Everything she sings is way beyond blues and blues is supposed to be the root music. Holiday is the equivalent of Delta blues singer Robert Johnson in that she is seminal -- pure source. Period.

If you have not listened to Billie Holiday and gotten into her music to the point of real distraction (being moved!), then you have missed one of the premiere music experiences of a lifetime. Enough said.

Bluesy Jazz

There is also a style of blues-laden jazz that is not so much funky as downright bluesy. Kenny Burrell is perhaps the chief exponent of this style of jazz.

Bluesy jazz has a slow or mid tempo and is easy to listen to -- relaxing. It makes great background or dinner music and yet is integral and stands on its own merits as a music. A lot of artists play bluesy jazz; some play it often. Much bluesy jazz can establish a groove.

Kenny Burrell, “Midnight Blue”/Blue Note

The Three Sounds (Gene Harris), “Introducing the Three Sounds”/Blue Note

Ron Carter, “Jazz: My Romance”/Blue Note Grant Green, “Born to be Blue”/Blue Note Ray Bryant, “All Blues”/Pablo

Red Garland, “Soul Junction”/Prestige Wynton Kelly, “Kelly Blue”/Riverside

Blues/Funk Sax

Honkers, Screamers & Bar Walkers -- Although the emergence of blues sax can be traced all the way back to the great Ben Webster, the honkin’, screaming tenor sax of the bar-walking variety originated with Illinois Jacquet and was carried to its logical conclusion with

the R&B sax of King Curtis. The term “bar walkin’” came from the habit of emotionally driven sax players walking on the top of a bar among the customers playing at a frenzied pitch -- often in contests with another sax player walking from the other end of the bar. This honkin’ blues-drenched sax style was as much performance bravado as sheer music. As Cannonball Adderley said about the funky big-toned sax, “Its the moan inside the tone.” Since many of the main players in this style hailed from the Southwest, players in this style are often referred to as “Texas tenors.” Some of the main artists in this style include Al Sears, Big Jay McNeely, Willis Jackson, Sill Austin, Lee Allen, Rusty Bryant, Hal Singer, and Sam “The Man” Taylor. Most of these players came out of the large swing bands and either formed their own groups or found work in various R&B settings. This raunchy honkin’ music scratches that blues itch and satisfies. This is often groove material.

Since many of these sax players can (and often had to) play it all -- blues, R&B, honkin’ sax, soul jazz, straight jazz, etc. , they are listed here together. I have made some notes to guide you as to their main directions. If you can find the 3-CD called “Giants of the Blues and Funk Tenor Sax”/Prestige (3PCD-2302- 2), you will get a superb 23 cut collection with many extended solos and liner notes by Bob Porter. Worth ordering or searching for.

Sax: Blues, R&B, Funk: Honkers and Bar Walkers

Lee Allen (R&B) “Walkin’ with Mr. Lee”/Collectables (R&B) Gene Ammons (R&B, bop, soul jazz)

“Boss Tenors -- Straight Ahead from Chicago 1961”/Verve

Sil Austin (blues) “Slow Rock Rock”/Wing Earl Bostic (R&B)

“Best of Earl Bostic”/Deluxe Rusty Bryant (R&B, soul jazz) “Rusty Bryant returns”, OJC Arnett Cobb (blues, soul jazz) “Smooth Sailing”, OJC-323 King Curtis (R&B, soul jazz) “Soul Meeting”/Prestige

Hank Crawford (soul jazz) “Soul Survivors”/Milestone

Eddie Lockjaw Davis (blues, soul jazz) “Cookbook, Vol. 1-3”/OJC

Jimmy Forrest (blues, bop, soul jazz) “Out of the Forrest”/Prestige

Frank Foster (blues) “Soul Outing”/Prestige

Johnny Griffin (bop, hard bop, blues) “Big Soul Band”/OJC Eddie Harris (soul jazz) “Best of”/Atlantic

Coleman Hawkins (blues, hard bop) Red Holloway (soul jazz) “Cookin’ Together”/Prestige

Joe Houston R&B Honker (Honker, blues) Willis Jackson (R&B, funk) “Bar Wars”/Muse

Illinois Jacquet (Honker, blues, R&B) “Blues: That’s Me!”/OJC

Big Jay McNeely R&B (Honker, blues) Wild Bill Moore (blues) (Look for him as a sideman)

Oliver Nelson (blues, out) “Soul Battle”/OJC

David Fathead Newman (R&B, soul jazz) “Lonely Avenue”/Atlantic

Harold Ousley (blues, soul jazz) Sweet Double Hipness”/Muse Houston Person (soul jazz) “Goodness”/OJC-332

Ike Quebec (blues, soul jazz) “Blue and Sentimental”/Blue Note Al Sears (blues)

“The Swingville All-Stars”/Swingville Hal Singer (blues)

“Blue Stompin’/Prestige Sonny Stitt (bop, soul jazz) “Soul Summit”/Prestige Buddy Tate (blues) “Tate’s Date”/Swingville

Sam “The Man” Taylor (blues, R&B) Eddie Cleanhead Vinson (blues) “Kidney Stew”/Black & Blue

Ernie Watts (blues, bop, soul jazz) “Ernie Watts Quartet”/JVC

Blues in Free Jazz

Blues in free jazz are present; the notes are there. The problem is that the constant beat is missing and thus the groove never gets laid down. More important, most free jazz is stir-it-up music rather than cool out. While this is great music, it is not groove music. Here are some outstanding examples of some blues in free jazz.

Archie Shepp, “Attica Blues”/Impulse

Oliver Nelson, “Screamin’ the Blues”/New Jazz

Charles Mingus, “Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus”/Candid

John Coltrane, “Love Supreme”/Impulse

Sun Ra, “The Heliocentric Worlds of Sun Ra”/ESP

Ornette Coleman, “Tomorrow is the Question”/Contemporary

Blues in Jazz Rock & Fusion

The Same is true for most jazz rock as for free jazz. The notes occur but the energy is more agitating than not and the groove is seldom established.

Crusaders, “Crusaders 1”/Blue Thumb

David Sanborn, “Backstreet”/Warner Brothers

Mahavishnu Orchestra, “The Inner Mounting

Flame”/Columbia

Miles Davis, “Star People”/Columbia

The Groove Guide to Blues in Jazz

Here is something that I wished I had when I first started to get into groove and blues jazz -- a quick guide to the best recordings. It can save you both time and money. These are some of the main jazz (and R&B) artists with a strong blues content. You will want to hear them out. In each case I have tried to point out key albums that are worth a listen from a blues or groove perspective. The albums are rated and reviewed, (where possible) to give you insight into why these might or might not interest you. A short biography is also included and sometimes additional notes on how to approach the artist from a blues perspective. We would need a whole book to do this right, and the All-Music Guide to Jazz (2nd edition) is available when you are. I am sorry to say that many of the albums listed below are not available on CD. Some probably never will be. Although I love CDs, I have had to get back into vinyl to hear a lot of this music. Many of you will also -- back to the old record bins. It’s worth it if the music is there. And it is. I hope you enjoy this short guide to groove music.

Landmark Jazz Albums

Putting aside the blues in jazz aspect, here is a list of landmark jazz albums that every jazz lover should hear. And this does not just represent my personal opinion. Any serious jazz listener would agree that these are classic albums that should be heard at least once. Whether you like them or not does not matter. It will show you the wide world of jazz and help you figure out what you do like, which directions to take, etc. One thing is certain: if you don’t like these albums, it is not because they are lousy performances, but because it is

not your kind of music. This list is admittedly weak in traditional, swing, big-band jazz, and fusion.

Air, “Air Lore”/Arista

Mose Allison, “I Don’t worry About a Thing”/Rhino/Atlantic

Louis Armstrong, “Hot Fives and Sevens Vol 1-3”/JSP

Art Ensemble of Chicago, “Jackson in Your House”/Affinity 9

Count Basie, “The Original American Decca Recordings”/MCA

Sidney Bechet, “The Bluebird Sessions”/Bluebird

Art Blakey, ““Jazz Messengers with Thelonious Monk”/Atlantic

Anthony Braxton, “For Alto Saxophone”/Delmark Clifford Brown, “Jazz Immortal”/Pacific Jazz Dave Brubeck, “Take Five”/Columbia

Ornette Coleman, “The Shape of Jazz To Come”/Atlantic

John Coltrane, “A Love Supreme”/MCA Chick Corea, “My Spanish Heart”/Polydor Charlie Christian, “Solo Flight”/Columbia Miles Davis, “Kind of Blue”/Columbia

Eric Dolphy, “Out to Lunch!”/Blue Note

Duke Ellington, “Blanton-Webster Band”/Bluebird Bill Evans, “Sunday at the Village Vanguard”/OJC Keith Jarrett, “The Koln Concert”/ECM

Erroll Garner, “Concert by the Sea”/Columbia Stan Getz, “Getz/Gilberto”/Verve

Dizzy Gillespie, “In the Beginning”/Prestige Herbie Hancock, “Maiden Voyage”/Blue Note

Billie Holiday, “The Quintessential Billie Holiday Vol. 1-9”/Columbia

Milt Jackson “Bag’s Groove”/Prestige Roland Kirk, “Rahsaan”/Mercury Shelly Manne, “At the Blackhawk”/OJ

Charles Mingus, “Mingus at Antibes”/Atlantic

Thelonious Monk, “Genius of Modern Music Vol. 1-2”/Blue Note

Wes Montgomery, “Incredible Jazz Guitar of Wes Montgomery”/Riverside

Fats Navarro, “The Fabulous Fats Navarro, Vol 1-2”/Blue Note

Oliver Nelson, “Blues and the Abstract Truth”/Impulse

Herbie Nichols, “The Art of Herbie Nichols”/Blue Note Oregon, “Out of the Woods”/Electra

Charlie Parker, “The Charlie Parker Story”/Savoy

Bud Powell, “The Amazing Bud Powell Vol. 1-2”/Blue Note

Sonny Rollins, “Saxophone Colossus”/OJC

Sun Ra, “The Heliocentric World of Sun Ra Vol 1”/ESP

Cecil Taylor, “Unit Structures”/Blue Note McCoy Tyner, “The Real McCoy”/Blue Note

Juke Joints and Saturday Nights

This is a short article about juke joints and their part in African American music, in particular the blues. But it also sheds some insight on the proverbial innate musicality of Americans of African descent. What seems forgotten here (conveniently once again) is the whole specter of slavery and what that dictated. Some of you blues fans may find this interesting. Let me know.

Juke Joints

The term Juke (or Jook) Joints is probably derived from the Creole “juk” meaning to be disorderly and rowdy. Juke joints are said to have arisen after the emancipation when Jim Crow laws forbade blacks from entering white establishments. The facts show that they existed long before that, probably as early as there were plantations and slaves. In other words, even after the emancipation when slaves were free to leave the plantation they were not allowed in any establishment in town. Proscribed from white society and white establishments of any kind, juke joints arose wherever blacks could gather, socialize, eat, drink, and dance; many also sold grocery items, moonshine, and some even had rooms to rent and other conveniences.

Jook joints were shacks originally built by the plantation owners themselves on their own property to give slaves a place to socialize and blow off steam. Most were open only on Saturday nights and were not much maintained. And juke joints always had music, which meant at least one musician and often two or three. Historically tagged as ‘blues’ joints, the music originally played in these places was not blues but dance music -- ragtime, slow-drag, etc. What we know as blues today did not actually appear until the early 1900s. In fact musicians were not the focus early on but rather were there just to enable

the dancing. It was all about dancing. It could be one happy drunk person dancing and clapping their hands with maybe someone hitting a table along with them or perhaps a harmonica – anything with a beat.

And juke joints could be held anywhere, in someone's home, an abandoned sharecropper's house, any old shack of a building - wherever. In slavery days (and even after) blacks had no transportation, so juke joints had to be within walking distance or reachable by tractor, bicycle, or mule. And there was no law at juke joints.

On plantations the authorities never came unless the owner himself called them in to break something up. It was private land. Later during prohibition and the sharecropping days the sheriff was actually paid to stay away so that the illegal whisky would get sold and everyone in power got a piece of that. The law only came when they were called in on purpose. They never just "showed up."

Most early juke joints were one-room shacks, seemingly always too small for those who filled them. And they were not open the rest of the week, just Saturday nights, so they didn't get much upkeep and they weren't much at all, just some kind of roof, four walls, and a dirt floor.

I did not grow up down south and I am not African American, but as a musician I have played in plenty of bars both black and white. In fact I played more often in black bars than white ones.

Older blacks liked the kind of blues our band played – Chicago-style blues. I never knew the Deep South juke joints but I am sure that most any small bar on a hot summer night after a long week will hit the same pitch, if only for an hour or two. As for the rough quality of juke

joints, I have seen knives, guns, clubs, whatever, and actually witnessed one fight (hiding behind our amplifiers) that it took nine police cars to break up.

A juke joint was often an open shack in the back yard with a tin roof. It didn't take much of a place to draw a crowd. People were looking for somewhere to go and any excuse for a place would do. If you have ever found it hard to wait until Friday night when you got off work to visit 'the scene' at some local bar, imagine if that one Saturday night a week was your only chance to let it rip and socialize AND if there were no other opportunities for you than hard work the rest of your entire life aside from singing in church Sundays. That was the case for African Americans before emancipation. Consider that.

I am reminded of the poem "Black on a Saturday Night" by Rita Dove of which this is an excerpt: "… and an attitude will get you nowhere fast so might as well keep dancing dancing till tomorrow gives up with a shout, 'cause there is only Saturday night, and we are in it - black as black can, black as black does, not a concept nor a percentage but a natural law.

We all can identify with a wish to socialize, especially after a difficult work week. Just imagine if that Saturday night once a week was your only chance to do anything other than what you were told to do AND for your entire life this would be the case. That Saturday night and the following Sunday church service would take on a whole different meaning. And history records that blacks that could sing or play music were more valued than ones that could not.

African-American Music

I find it interesting to read comments about the innate musicality of African Americans. I don't question that. What I question is the myopic view that manages to

ignore two-hundred years of slavery when blacks were basically restricted to one night of social gathering and what that might actually mean in their history.

What seems forgotten here (once again) is the whole specter of slavery and what it infers, so I am asking readers to please think about this for a moment. And I am going to repeat some of what I presented earlier.

You are twenty-five years old, young, bright, full of promise, and a slave to some owner of 'you'. While you have your whole life before you, in the slave's case that life is already mapped out in terms of the possible. You work at what you are told from morning until night and what is left?

Perhaps you have Sundays off and maybe something like a Saturday night. That's it. You don't have college, schooling, or even trade school. You have no hope of seeing the world or even this country because you are not free to travel anywhere. You are not free. You are somebody's slave. And depending on how far back we go, you can't even read and write and your owner likes it that way.

I spent a good part of my young adult life studying black music so I know full well blacks are great musicians. Wouldn't you be too if your parents and their parents before them had nothing to look forward to but Saturday night music and Sunday-morning services? Instead of a myriad of possibilities and choices you had no choice and two possibilities. The only social outlet you had each week was perhaps getting together with your own kind on Saturday nights and singing the Gospel in church Sunday mornings. Music and dance were one of the few outlets open to Black Americans and to their forbearers. Everything else was scripted. No wonder blacks know music and dance! It didn't all come from

Africa my friends.

Song and Dance

My point is that aside from any traditional culture carried over from Africa centuries ago, plantation life (slavery life) left only a few opportunities for free time; music and dance were often the only social outlets open to slaves and then only at certain times. Life as a slave in America gave African Americans generations of training in music and dance in addition to whatever culture they actually brought with them from Africa. Think about it and I will reiterate please.

You are young, hopeful, energetic, and you have zero plans that involve freedom on your part. Your whole life is already entirely scripted leaving only Sunday church service and perhaps a Saturday night at a juke joint open to you. No wonder black Gospel music is so powerful. And no wonder blues music is so powerful. These were the only outlets open to many black Americans for generations – Saturday nights and Sunday mornings. The rest of the time they were slaves! And the transition from slavery to tenant farming did not change things much for most blacks. In fact as often as not the black tenant farmer ended up owing the plantation owner money at the end of the year – another form of slavery.

There was one break each week. Work stopped for most blacks in the slavery (and tenant) years sometime Saturday afternoon and that is when barbecues and social getting-together began. By Saturday night workers were headed for the juke joints on foot, by tractor, and by mule. Early on the juke joints were right on the plantation itself and black workers would even drive the plantation tractor right to the juke joint with the understanding that as long it was on the plantation they

could use the tractor.

I am not going to go into extreme detail on juke joints and what happened there. That has been covered elsewhere but suffice it to say that these places were where the work-week steam was let off, and the later the night got, the more out of control these joints could become. It is said that after 11 PM anything could happen and usually did, everything from bar fights to shootings and knife fights.

My main point is that these Saturday night juke joints were the focus of music, dancing, and celebrating. This is where the blues were born and grew up. This is where dancing was permitted and drinking took place. This was your one night out. And (as mentioned) the law never went to juke joints unless it was called in. That was understood by all. So there was the juke joints music and dancing Saturday night and the gospel singing in church Sunday morning. That was it.

I have pointed out that juke joints or Barrelhouses as they were also called originally were set up on plantations as a place for blacks to socialize on their one night off, which was Saturday. Later on, after the emancipation, when tenant farming had replaced slavery blacks were not allowed at bars and saloons in town so juke joints sprang up just outside of town at crossroads or wherever it was convenient. These joints were often hardly anything at all except a place to meet, drink, gamble, and dance. They were essentially shacks hastily thrown together and often with not enough room for but a few to dance - jammed.

It is true that juke joints were later moved into town, urbanized by whites in the south, and called “Honky Tonks.” But the original juke joints were hardly any kind of building at all, with no running water, and so on – just

a roof and some side walls. That's it. But juke joints were where everything exciting happened socially for black Americans way back then.

So when we say that blues music and blues musicians were popular with blacks, understand that it means a lot more than just 'popular'. The juke joint scene was all the freedom there was to let off steam and have a good time. Period. That and Sunday morning church service and gospel singing.

The main point here is not to just describe the juke joint scene but to highlight that the skill of black Americans in blues and jazz, in dancing and having a good time, did not only come from Africa. It had generations of extreme focus right here in this country to hone those skills into a veritable lineage. And those who believe that the emancipation changed all that had better get out their history books because tenant farming changed things very little at first and often made things even worse. In slavery African Americans had nothing to lose because they had nothing. As mentioned, with tenant farming they most often went into debt to the plantation owners on top of struggling to make a living.

If your whole life was work unending until you died and that one Saturday night a week of celebration followed by Sunday church were your only social outlets, what would that mean to you? How important would that music be and the musicians that played it? That is my question and also my point.

If blacks are master singers, musicians, dancers, and entertainers it is not just because they brought these skills from Africa. African Americans have had 200 years to refine these skills. It's no wonder that some say that white Americans can't dance and blacks can. And it is no wonder that popular music (especially jazz and

rock ‘n roll) in America finds its roots in the blues.

And it is not only about dancing and playing music; it is about having a good time in the midst of whatever your situation is, about letting go and grabbing time to celebrate in the moment – being here now. There is wisdom here.

And it’s all right there embedded in the music. You can hear it. Growing up I could hear the wisdom in the blues music and it pulled me to it. The music of Pat Boone didn’t grab me that way but Muddy Waters and Howlin’ Wolf did. There was something in the music that spoke to me beyond the sounds. These blues musicians knew something that I knew little of and I hungered for it and it was not just the sound of poverty or deprivation.

Later, when I had an opportunity to interview scores of the greatest blues musicians, I got to know these players often on an eyeball-to-eyeball basis. What I heard in the music was backed up by the persons they were. Blues greats like Big Momma Thornton, Arthur Big-Boy Crudup, and Howlin’ Wolf were incredible beings that made me feel accepted and welcome.

They had wisdom and life experience I did not have and that my teachers in school did not have. They had what I wanted to learn and I yearned for it. I more or less studied rural folk music, blues, and jazz from the late 1950s until around 1971. And it was an inspiration.

In the early 1970s I found the Tibetan Buddhists, who had the same joy and insight that I found in the great blues artists. And they were also devoted to knowing the true nature of the mind and life. While I never abandoned my blues teachers, I did begin to study and practice with the Tibetans and am still doing that today.

It was never the down-and-out nature of the blues that

caught my attention. It was the wisdom of life and the ability to seize the day and find joy in any situation, the ability to master extreme circumstances and still have a life. We all owe a great cultural debt to African Americans.

Interview with Howlin’ Wolf

August 2, 1969

Interviewed by Michael Erlewine

Here is an interview that I did with the legendary Howlin' Wolf. It was the 1969 Ann Arbor Blues Festival and there I was backstage talking with Wolf. It was just the two of us standing in the open sun and it was not your normal interview.

As I stood there listening to this huge man, I flashed back to some years before when I had seen the Wolf performing live in a small bar at the north end of Chicago late one night. There was no one in the place, just Howlin’ Wolf and his guitarist Hubert Sumlin. My brother Dan and I stood somewhere at the back of the place and it was very dark. Wolf was way up to the front, with one small light playing on him. He was sitting on an old wooden straight-backed chair. It was all light and shadows.

And Wolf was singing as only he can sing, and his music not only filled the room, it actually took over all sense of time as his laser-like voice penetrated deep into my brain. For a while, I lost all idea of who or where I was. The walls of the room just went transparent, as did my body, and I found myself suddenly thrust outside of time, beyond any sense of myself that I knew, somewhere out there on my own in this vast universe, just a mind floating there. This was more than just music. This was a life initiation, as I believe you will get a sense of from reading my interview with this great bluesman.

Howlin' Wolf:

“Some of them said years ago. ‘We will never make it to the moon.’ I said: ‘You never know.’ Today, we settin' on

the moon and got a flag up there. You understand? But they told me that we couldn't do that. Don't never say what we can't do."

"Next thing, I'm looking for a man walkin' down the street with no head on his body. And if they say they can't do it, I'm gonna' tell 'em, 'You're wrong.' He gonna' come down sooner or later. That's right. This is of the day. He will have no head and be all heart, just one big heart."

"Because these performers probably have the biggest hearts in the entertainment business, and there were thirty or forty thousand kids here trying to learn about heart, about understanding, about developing their hearts. Thousands of hippies, hipped up children, with great big heads and tiny hearts, trying to lose that big head and get that big heart. The big head and the hard heart of modern rock and roll and psychedelic music has gone as far as it will go. The heart just has to be developed and this, the first of all the blues festivals, promises much to cross the generation gap and bring the old and younger Americans closer than they have been for the last decade. Because blues performers have big hearts."

"I'm not a smart man. You see, I got a little head and a big heart. Because blues is based on the common ground shared by all people, black and white, young and old. Blues is the story of the human life, of its loves and struggles. All rock and roll, all jazz, all American music finds its roots in gospel music and in blues. Blues is not unhappy music."

"A lotta' people sing, but they don't sing with no understandin'. When you repeats your words, make sure to make some understanding of what you're sayin'. Those men played a clear guitar. They made clear

notes.”

“I've been pushed way back. I don't know why the people wouldn't let me up to the front like they did. I was just dirt. I felt like I was just dirt, so I stayed back, because I was able to back up my own self. I didn't think I had no right to be out there trying to push and scrap. I didn't think I had no right to be out there tryin' to push and scrap up no few nickels, you know, which I needed… never get too many of them.”

“But, I'm a funny kind of person. I don't never want to take advantage of nobody, and think I'm takin' advantage of… you know what I mean. Let the peoples have it. Then if anything for me, it will come by, and I'll get that.”

“Well, now anytime anything is pushed back, sooner or later, they gonna' bring it to the front. They can't keep it hid always.”

“I'll tell you. when people can't make or use you, they don't need you.”

“There ain't gonna be no trouble. Somebody gonna' come on up to the front and say "I am the man. I'm sorry," That's right. There ain't gonna' be no hard feelings. He didn't come for no trouble, but he gonna' sure let you know that he are ‘the man.’ Supposed to be.”

“Just like a flower. You see, we're trampin' on this grass. We stay here a couple months and tramp right around here, we gonna' kill it. Just as soon as we stop trampin', the first warm sunshine, and then the grass gonna' start a growin' again.”

“You don't never learn it all. You just learn some portion of it, and be able to, you know, entertain. And I play a certain portion of harp and a certain portion of guitar. I'm

not a smart man. You see, I got a little head and a big heart. That's all I need. You take people. When they got a big head, they don't make it far”.

“You're supposed to make it pleasin' to the peoples ears, then they don't mind listening to the tune.”

“I heard a negro, howlin' and moanin'. I said: I take it from you. He was an old man. I said: I'm gonna' take that someday and make something out of it. I took that howlin' and that yodelin' and put it together and made me a thing of my own.”

“You got to get in the right position to where you can control your voice. I'm not a smart man. You see I got a little head and a big heart. You got to know your keynote. You got to know your notes from staff to staff. If you don't know your notes from staff to staff, I can tell when you pick up your guitar, you really don't know what you're doin'.”

“I don't mean to be funny, but if you let me, I'll show you, and tell you, if you will accept it. But if you think because I'm a Negro, and you're not supposed to be told nothin', you understand, you're wrong. You're supposed to be told somethin' by anybody, when you're doin' wrong.”

“Take a learnin' from anybody. Somebody can always tell you something that fit you.”

“I hope I don't talk too much. No, I don't know. I'm just tryin. So, now that's a lotta' ground your covering, when you say you know better than me. I just know some of the things that are supposed to be done. When you say you know it, that covers the whole world.”

"Some people don't want to tell you how it is, but I'll tell ya.”

“If we were playin' in a key, tell me your tonic and I'll tell

you what else you're supposed to do. All I want to know is your tonic. I'll build the rest of it. See, but you got to have your tonic. That's your startin' off. Without that tonic, when you get ready to stop, you stop somewhere else. Anytime you start on your tonic, when you end your song, you got to be right back on your tonic."

"I don't have no education, see. Now you can take my sense and put it in a paper bag and it'll rattle like two nickels. But you see, understandin', that's all I need. Common sense, that's all a man needs now, common sense. Just get you some common sense and pass on by."

"Some of the music is too loud today, because it knock the eardrums to your ear. Them high speakers, tall as that fence there, is blastin' your ear down, all the time. Boom. Bam. Bing. You know what I mean?"

"That's uncalled for. You hear that? I played on a show one night, and I went home and cut myself all up and down the back, because I heard that thing in my sleep. It's too loud. I'm sorry. Ain't no need in me tellin' you no lie. It's too loud. That go for the white boy, and the Negro boy, and any old Mexican, anybody! When it's too loud, it's nothin' but 'knockness.'"

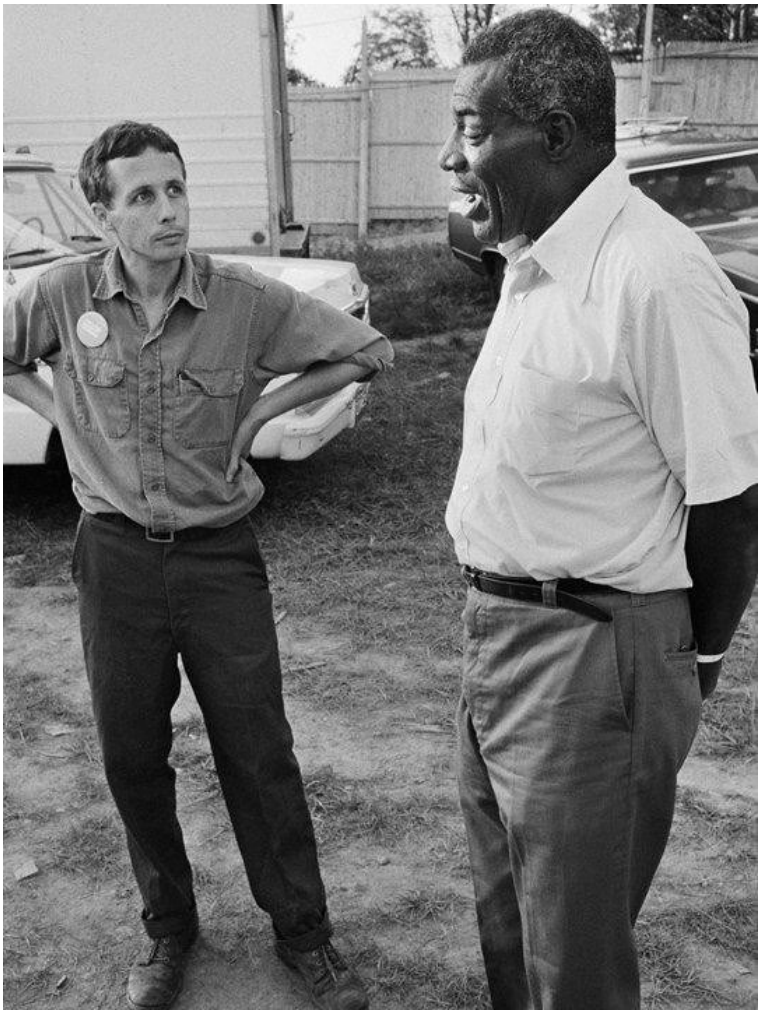
"Knockness, just some stuff comin' together, and you don't understand what it mean. That's what you call real garbage. That's the worst garbage in town. That's right, but the peoples eats it up. Just like the rabbit eatin' the carrot. What's up Doc?"

"I don't dominize no musician. I hate to hear a man dominize a musician, but I will say: music is too loud. Whether you playin' good or whether you playin' bad, you know it's too loud."

"Dominize, knockness. Some knockness. Something

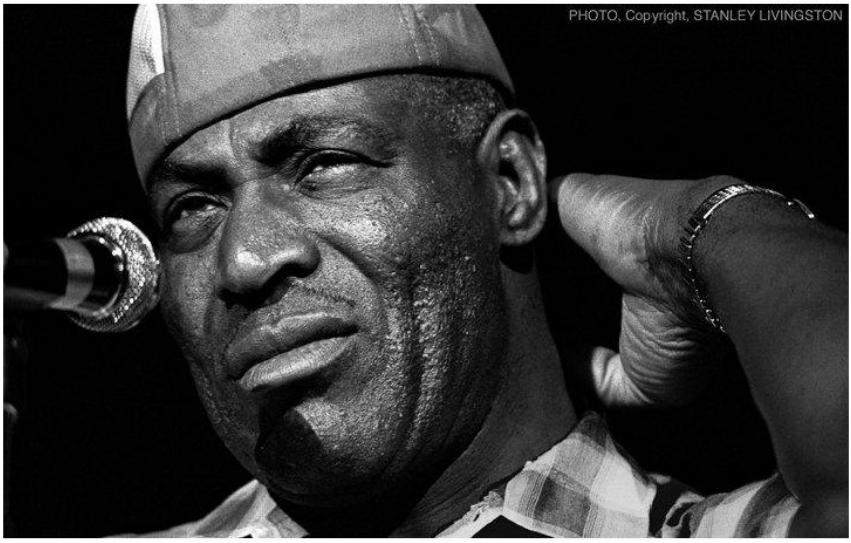
knockin' together. You know.”

 This interview also appears in the book “Blues in Black & White: The Landmark Ann Arbor Blues Festivals,” with the incredible photos of Stanley Livingston, graphic work by Tom Erlewine, and articles, interviews, and artist bios by Michael Erlewine. The book is available on Amazon.com or quality bookstores near you.



Michael Erlewine doing this interview with Howlin' Wolf in 1969 at the first Ann Arbor Blues

Festival.



The Wolf. (Photo by Stanley Livingston)

Blues Before Dharma

Since the mid-1970s I have been involved in dharma practice and affiliated with Tibetan Buddhism. Most of my Facebook friends must know that about me by now. I have had the extreme good fortune to sit at the feet of the Tibetan Buddhist masters that escaped from Tibet and learn. But before I found the Tibetans I had other life masters that I studied. I want to tell you about one group of them.

I became involved in the folk-music revival of the late 1950s and early 1960s. I was learning to play guitar and traveling the same folk circuit that folk singers like Bob Dylan traveled at that time. In fact I hitchhiked with Dylan for a stretch in 1961, was with him when he performed in Ann Arbor, and things like that. That would be another story.

This was before singers like Dylan and most other young folk artists were writing their own songs. We were too busy reviving and preserving the folk music of the past, studying singers like Woody Guthrie, and so on. As for me, at that time it was still years before I would become a professional musician, but I already was sorting through the folks songs and focusing on the bluesy and minor-key parts of songs, and, of course, the country blues that would turn up at folk festivals from artists like Elizabeth Cotton and Jesse 'Lone Cat' Fuller. Gradually I came to know that Black Music was what I particularly most loved. And then there was the revelation.

It came as a big surprise to White folk-musicians like myself to discover (and we did) that unlike most folk music from Ireland and England, Black music did not need to be revived. It was very much alive and playing at a club nearby, separated only by a racial curtain. To a folk revivalist, this was like going back to a time when

folk music was born, a music time-machine. There are a lot of stories I could tell about my learning curve, but perhaps another time. Here I want to fast forward through my own music career and settle on those first Ann Arbor Blues Festivals in 1969 and 1970.

That was definitely one of my Forrest Gump moments, a time when I was fully present along the sidelines at an amazing event, the first large-scale gathering of Black blues musicians in America. In fact, I wrote the text for an award-winning book on this event titled “Blues in Black and White: The Landmark Ann Arbor Blues Festivals,” featuring the incredible photography of my friend Stanley Livingston, and designed by my brother Tom Erlewine. You can see it here.

http://www.amazon.com/Blues-Black-White-Landmark-Festivals/dp/0472116959

I spent years studying Black music, doing my best to play the blues. The blues music led me, of course, to the artists themselves, and in meeting the artists I found something more than just their music. I found the authentic wisdom that I missed in my own upbringing, the sage advice from elders (I never had a grandfather on either side) who had (at least IMO) fully lived life.

For years I not only studied, played, and celebrated Black music, I also began to interview and document the great blues musicians and their music. This led to my (along with my brother Dan) spending real time, as much as we could, with Black musicians. We would drive to Chicago and hear the great blues masters in the tiny clubs on Chicago’s West and South Sides. This was around 1966. But the great opportunity was to be part of those first two Ann Arbor Blues

Festivals mentioned above, and then the following Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festival in 1972 and 1973. Dan and I were lucky enough to be in charge of providing food

(and drink!) to the blues musicians, and I began to interview in detail many of the great blues Artists.

I could not then know that those two early Ann Arbor Blues Festivals would never be repeated, because many of the major blues artists would begin to pass away soon after that first festival. I had painstakingly listened to their music, learned to play some, and then gradually began to document their lives as well.

Those interviews eventually led to my founding and starting the All-Music Guide (allmusic.com) in this tiny office where I sit typing now. The world definitely laughed at me and some of the well-known critics for the Rolling Stone Record Guide joked that some guy in a tiny town in the Midwest claims he is going to document all recorded music. LOL. In fact, we did, from 10-inch records onward.

Well, I am stubborn if not anything else, and today AMG is the largest music database of music reviews, biographies, and discographies on the planet. I sold the company and when I left there were 150 full-time employees and over 500 free-lance writers. It continues today, along with its sister site, the All-Movie Guide (allmovie.com), and other content. I also started perhaps the first site for video games and another for concert music posters (ClassicPosters.com). My CD collection, which I sold with the company, today is housed in a warehouse in Ann Arbor, and numbers over 600,000 music CDs. All that is part of my history as an entrepreneur, which I don't mention much here on Facebook.

What remains from those early years is the impression those great blues players made on me, not only with their music, but with their life experience and authentic wisdom that I soaked in as best I could. I got a chance to see blues greats like Little Walter play live in

Theresa's Lounge on the South Side of Chicago. Brother Dan and I spent an evening drinking Jack Daniels with Arthur 'Big Boy' Crudup, author of Elvis Presley's first hit, "That's Alright Mamma." Another evening was spent with Big Mama Thornton, who wrote Presley's hit "Hound Dog," and so on. You get the idea. I was learning from the masters.

For those interested, here is an interview I did with Howlin Wolf in 1969 that I have been told is the best Wolf interview ever done. See for yourself:

http://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10150098536007658.305358.587252657&type=3

These blues artists were important life teachers for me until I began to practice the dharma in the early 1970s, meeting (in particular) Tibetans like the Venerable Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, and then many, many others.

The Tibetan Buddhists were also authentic life masters that offered profound wisdom, and they did not have some of the unfortunate conditions (like alcoholism and poverty) that too often were the legacy of being Black in America in those years. How shameful racism is!

I continue my dharma practice and am grateful for the wisdom of the dharma. Yet, I can never forget the lessons learned, plus the kindness and acceptance, of many of the great Black blues artists. White society never took them in or treated them as they so deserved, but many of them had no trouble accepting (and being gracious and kind to) a young White kid like me. I am forever grateful and I salute them.

These Black artists gave so much to the culture of this country, and continue to do so.

The Ann Arbor Blues Festival –1969 & 1970

The following is a partial list of the blues artists and music-industry personnel that attended the first two Ann Arbor Blues Festivals. Most were on the program, either as featured artists or as sidemen, but quite a few just came to Ann Arbor to be with their fellow performers and to hang out.

Abernathy, Stan, (trumpet) Otis Rush Band
Alexander, Dave (vocals, piano)
Allison, Luther (guitar, vocals) & the Blue Nebulae
Anderson, Willie (harmonica)
Bell, Carey (harmonica)
Below, Fred (drums)
Big Joe Turner (vocals)
Bland, Bobby (vocals)
Bonner, Juke Boy (harmonica, vocals)
Burrow, Cassell
Campbell, Leroy (bass)
Chenier, Clifton (accordion)
Cotton, James (harmonica)
Crayton, Peee Wee (guitar, vocals)
Crudup, Arthur 'Big Boy' (guitar, vocals)
Dawkins, Jimmy 'Fast Fingers' (guitar, vocals)
Doctor Ross (harmonica, vocals, guitar)
Estes, Sleepy John (guitar, vocals)
Fulson, Lowell (guitar, vocals)
Garon, Paul (blues writer)
Gatewood, Ernest (bass) Otis Rush Band
Guy, Buddy (guitar, vocals)
Guy, Phillip (guitar) Buddy Guy Band
Harvey, Ted (drums) Hound Dog Taylor Band
Hooker, John Lee (guitar, vocals)
Howlin' Wolf (guitar, vocals, harmonica)
Hutto, J.B. & the Hawks (guitar, vocals)
Jackson, John (guitar, vocals, banjo)
Jones, Calvin (bass) Howlin' Wolf Band

King, Albert (guitar, vocals)
King, B.B. (guitar, vocals)
King, Freddy (guitar, vocals)
Lay, Sam (drums, vocals)
Lightnin' Hopkins (guitar, vocals)
Lipscomb, Manse (guitar, vocals)
Little Joe Blue (guitar, vocals)
Lockwood, Robert Junior (guitar, vocals)
Lucus, Lazy Bill (piano)
Magic Sam (guitar, vocals)
Marshall, Jim (photos)
McDowell, Fred (guitar, vocals)
Meggs, John (tenor sax) Otis Rush Band
Montgomery, Little Brother (piano, vocals)
Muddy Waters (guitar, vocals)
Musselwhite, Charlie (harmonica, vocals)
Myers, Louis (lead guitar, harmonica)
Oliver, Paul (blues writer)
Osterman, Tom
Papa Lightfoot (harmonica, vocals)
Parker, Junior (harmonica, vocals)
Phillips, Brewer (lead guitar) Hound Dog Taylor Band
Reed, A.C. (sax)
Reed, Jimmy Jr. (vocals, guitar) Hound Dog Taylor Band
Reidy, Bob (piano, vocals)
Roulette, Freddy (guitar, steel guitar)
Rush, Otis (guitar, vocals)
Shaw, Roosevelt (drums)
Shines, Johnnie (guitar, vocals)
Sinclair, John (music writer, poet)
Smith, Harmonica George (harmonic, vocals)
Son House (guitar, vocals)
Spivey, Victoria (vocals)
Strachwitz, Chris (label owner)
Sumlin, Hubert (guitar, vocals)
Sunnyland Slim (piano)

Sykes, Roosevelt (piano, vocals)
Taylor, Eddie (guitar, vocals)
Taylor, Hound Dog (guitar, vocals)
Thorton, Big Mama (vocals)
Titon Jeff Todd (guitar) Lazy Bill Lucas Blues Band
Twist, Johnny
Vinson, Eddie Cleanhead (vocals, sax)
Walker, T-Bone (guitar, vocals)
Wallace, Sippie (vocals)
Waterman, Dick (manager)
Wells, Junior (vocals, harmonica)
Williams, Big Joe (vocals)
Williams, Robert Pete (guitar, vocals)
Winter, Johnny (guitar, vocals)
Woods, Little Johnny (harmonica)
Young, Johnny (guitar, vocals, mandolin)
Young, Mighty Joe (guitar, vocals)