



BLUE NOTES!

A bi-monthly publication of the SACRAMENTO BLUES SOCIETY

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President's Column

By Sally Katen

As we approach summer, oops, it is Summer! Can you believe that we are already halfway through the year?!

Heading into July, we eagerly anticipate the grand re-openings of our previous local hangouts. In May, Swabbies and Stoney's Rockin' Rodeo hosted events, and the Torch Club resumed operations in June. Harlow's/Starlet Room start up again after Labor Day, and the Sofia Center/B Street Theater will also reopen July 30th.

Mick Martin had his 72nd birthday at Swabbie's 4th Annual Spring Blues Fling. What a great day that was! SBS even had a membership table with all the SBS merchandise.

We have a great update on our new merchandise that you can purchase on sacblues.org. There is also a Hall of Fame update and Barbara Katen has done an article with AJ Gross from the Big Blues Bender, which will be an awesome show this year! Delbert McClinton will be doing his final live in-person show at the event, (he is retiring). And you won't want to miss Barb's interview with Harpdog Brown in this issue of the Blue Notes.

We have our usual updates about BITS Big Day of Giving, which I felt went off without a hitch, thanks to Rick Snyder and Mindy Giles. We even have new T-Shirts with the BITS Logo. They are nice tees and are available on the sacblues.org website.

The upcoming SBS "**Back in Business!**" compilation CD should be available to everyone in late summer or early fall. It is going to be an awesome CD, which will be sold online and at our membership tables at events.

The John Lee Hooker Foundation and the Sacramento Blues Society Live-stream presentation occurred on June 5th and was a great



show. I am hoping most of our members were able to reserve a spot and watch!

Despite the weird times we've experienced over the last year and a half, it feels like things are starting to edge back to "normal" in the Blues and music world, and the Sacramento Blues Society is poised and ready to jump right back in! So, see you out and about somewhere soon!

2020 SBS Hall of Fame Update

by Sally Katen, HOF Committee Chairwoman

In June, the Hall of Fame Committee met to choose this year's Hall of Fame Inductees! Yes, it is going to be a great year with the city opening up venues in the Sacramento area. I am so looking forward

2021 Committee Chairs

Blues in the Schools - Rick Snyder

Hall of Fame - Sally Katen

Events - Mindy Giles

Membership - Linda McShane

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Public Relations & Social Media - Mindy Giles

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Big Day of Giving - Rick Snyder

Donor Gifts - Sally Katen

Blue Notes Newsletter - Cari Chenkin & Jan Kelley

IBC Competition - Open

Webmaster - Mindy Giles, Doug Pringle

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Help keep the Blues alive - Contact a Chair or Board Member to volunteer for the Board or a Committee!

The Sacramento Blues Society (SBS) is one of the oldest blues societies in California, founded in 1979. SBS is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization formed to preserve and promote blues music as an art form. SBS has kept the blues tradition alive in the Sacramento area by promoting the local blues music scene, bringing internationally renowned artists to the region, acknowledging our local blues artists, providing a Musicians' Crisis Fund and publishing the **Blue Notes** six times a year. SBS is an affiliate member of The Blues Foundation (which honored us with a 2015 Keeping the Blues Alive Award) which provides educational opportunities for young people with The Blues Foundation's "Blues in The Schools" Program.

Board of Directors Meetings - 2nd Tuesday of each Month, 7:00 p.m.

All SBS Members in good standing are invited to attend.

For more details, including meeting location, check: www.sacblues.org

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Hall of Fame Update, con't. from P. 2

to planning the upcoming SBS Hall of Fame Event on September 26th, 2021 at Harlow's from 1pm – 4:30pm, and our post-ceremony Showcase after-party at the Torch Club from 5pm – 8pm.

What an event we will have this year, celebrating the new Inductees and welcoming back previous Hall of Fame members to the event! The HOF Committee "unanimously" voted to Induct eight people this year, due to the fact we had no Induction last year.

It's with great pleasure that I announce this year's class of inductees to the Sacramento Blues Society's Hall of Fame:

- Bobby "Blues" Ray
- Charles Washington
- Greg Roberts
- James Winnegan
- Mindy Giles
- Paris Clayton
- Ronnie "James" Weber
- Sally Katen

You'll be able to learn more details about this year's HOF class in our next Blue Notes issue. Meanwhile, although we are done accepting Hall of Fame nominations for 2021, you can always send in nominations for 2022. To nominate, go to sacblues.org and suggest who you feel should be in the Sacramento Blues Society Hall of Fame. Nominations are accepted any time for the upcoming year.

Blues In The Schools (BITS) Update

by Rick Snyder, BITS Chairman

OK, we got off to a slow start this year. We bobbed and weaved and made the moves we needed to make to continue to provide Blues in the Schools. We made videos for our auditorium program so kids could safely learn about the Blues. We made changes in the After School Program by encouraging the teachers who could teach the curriculum in the classroom. We included both an in-person show and livestreamed events for our BITS Showcase because, if adults are Zoomed out, you can imagine that teenagers would be even more so!



We look forward to live events in the remainder of the year. To make that happen, Gina Lorenzo, one of our volunteers, started the BITS Alumni Program. With that program, kids who loved what we did and benefitted from the time spent in the BITS After School Program are continuing to build on that foundation. With the assistance of BITS and Gina and generous donations of gear from folks like John Noxon, the future of the blues is alive and well!

Big Day of Giving

By Rick Snyder, Chief Visionary, BDOG Team Leader

You might think that we had lowered our expectations due to the prevailing circumstances. You would be wrong. We had optimism and enthusiasm abounding within the Sacramento Blues Society and Blues in the Schools.



Despite the limitations that many folks have had to endure this past year, those that could donate did so. With the 5K plus in donations, all of you have ensured the health and well-being of the Blues in

Sacramento. With your generous donations, we will continue to provide all of the services and programs that aid and build the Blues community in the Sacramento area.

I hesitate to speak for those who are assisted and lifted up by the programs provided by the Sacramento Blues Society and Blues in the Schools. Still, I am reasonably confident that they are grateful and would like us to thank all of you who contributed. Thanks!

"Journey Through the Blues"

Livestream Event presented by the SBS and the John Lee Hooker Foundation

"The blues tells a story. Every line of the blues has a meaning" - John Lee Hooker

The **John Lee Hooker Foundation** formed a Blues Partnership with the Sacramento Blues Society and held a fundraiser Saturday, June 5th, 2021. The inaugural all-star livestream event, "Journey Through the Blues", featured some of the legendary John Lee Hooker's most famous blues "sons"- **Charlie Musselwhite, Rick Estrin, Elvin Bishop, Tommy Castro, Mark Hummel**, and daughter and Executive Director of the JLH Foundation, **Zakiya Hooker**.



Northern California-based blues luminaries also included **Terrie Odabi, Tia Carroll, Kyle Rowland, Michael Osborn, Steve Erhmann, The Bobby Young Project, Johnny Bur-**

gin, June Core, Robert Welsh, Rusty Zinn and Willy Jordan.

Proceeds from ticket sales benefited the SBS Blues in the Schools program.

In addition to musical performances, the event featured interviews and a special online auction of a signature *Epiphone Ltd. Edition John Lee Hooker 100th Anniversary Zephyr Outfit*.

The event went off without a hitch, with special thanks to **Christoffer "Kid" Andersen at Greaseland Studios, and Eric Bianchi with Bianchi Sound.** The SBS and the JLH



Foundation have discussed plans to release the recorded version for "anytime" viewing in the near future. So, if you weren't able to catch the original livestream on June 5th, you'll still have a chance to see this amazing show! Stay tuned for information on how to do that either in our next Blue Notes, or via our website and social media.

BITS Showcase on Big Day of Giving Exceeds our Wildest Expectations!

By Rick Snyder

The course of the music industry has been forever changed by the COVID pandemic, not precisely like Superman changing the course



of mighty rivers, but similarly. For the first time since its inception, the BITS Big Day of Giving Showcase was not only live and in-person but also



livestreamed as well.

We had a substantial crowd inside Stoney's Rockin Rodeo, our traditional venue for the Showcase for several years. Those who came to see and hear also came to loudly appreciate each and every song by each band... It was heartwarming to feel, see and hear the applause given to those who took the stage. Kevin Lutz and crew made everyone feel right at home as always, serving great food and great drinks to all who attended and participated.

The participating bands included: **Beckett Blues Band** featuring art teacher at Rosemont High School Erik Beckett and his two sons,



Zildjian and Strummer, **To Be Announced**, the BITS Alumni band comprised of Alumni Prez Amaya Levels, Anthony Galli, Chris Castles, Sean Patterson, and Brett Hopp, and **Ja Walter Band** with BITS

protégé Justin Walter, E Double, and Ray Mania. You should be

looking for all of these folks at future BITS events and more.

And, of course, we couldn't have done this without the energy and effort of the folks who volunteered to be at the gig, sell merch, take tickets, do the promotion, and much, much more. A big shout out to our troop, including Mindy Giles,

Dana Moret, Jeff Herzog, Gina Lorenzo, Liz Walker, Eric Bianchi and crew, and myself. Thanks to everyone who attended, donated, bought merch, stood on the stage, and played and made this event one to remember.



Back In Business! SBS Member Band Compilation CD 2021 Update

By Mindy Giles

As the world slowly awakens, and we thoughtfully and safely make our way out into public spaces again, we can actually say we are getting back in business. And so here is the update on our upcoming new CD from SBS member bands. It's titled **BACK IN BUSINESS!**



There will be sixteen songs, all original, some brand new and seeing their first commercial release with this CD, set for late August. Kyle Rowland, Red's Blues, The Midtown Creepers, Bill Scholer, Ray "Catfish" Copeland, Katie Knipp, Blind Lemon Peel, Val Starr w/ Victor Wainwright, The Hucklebucks, James Monroe, Mick Martin, The Tim Noxon Band, Dr. Rock & The Stuff, Zen Voodoo, The Anthony Paule Orchestra with Marcel Smith, and Marshal Wilkerson are our featured artists.

Our committee is extremely pleased with the professional quality of the submissions and the admirable, stylistically diverse batch of songs and instrumentation.

This is a project initiative to fund various SBS programs [e.g., The Gene Chambers Musicians Crisis Fund, The Mick Martin Student Fund, many others] AND to actively promote our members in the local musical community by providing a national platform. We are grateful that these artists each donated a track. The CD will be for sale at SBS events and on our website, www.sacblues.org.

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A Casual Conversation with Harpdog Brown

By Barbara Katen

Photos by Lisa MacIntosh and Mark Maryanovich



I have been a dedicated Harpdog fan for awhile now. Yep, Blues, the way I like it. I was intrigued this winter when Harpdog started a Sunday afternoon series called "In the Dog House with Harpdog Brown". For me it was just what the doctor ordered during the pandemic. Blues music and blues talk with Harpdog and some of my favorites like Aki Kumar, Christoffer "Kid" Andersen and John Nemeth, for starters. When I reached out to Harpdog regarding interviewing him for this article he replied within 30 minutes with an affirmative. And it never failed, each and every time I reached out to him regarding this article, whether it be for pictures, etc., he immediately replied. I was blown away. And majorly impressed, and if I'm perfectly honest, I subsequently developed a bit of a crush on Harpdog! He's the real deal in my book and his answers to my interview questions back this up. Read on and enjoy.

Blue Notes: What was your inspiration and how did you get your start in music?

Harpdog: Well, I always wanted to travel. I was raised with very little money. I was a shy kid, but my mother Pearl, (my adopted mother) introduced me to the lap steel when I was 5. She'd sit me up on the sofa and set me up with the thumb pick, and hand held slide, and I would entertain myself while she would do what mothers/housewives did those days.

BN: Why the Blues?

Harpdog: I saw James Cotton when I was around 17 back in 1979 and he truly changed my way of thinking! In a good way I like to think. Like I am NOT gonna be a welder!

BN: Who were your main musical influences?

Harpdog: So many to name, I'm influenced by artists who touched me deeply. To name a few, James Taylor to Joe Walsh, Louis Armstrong to The Who, from Charlie Patton to Jimi Hendrix. The list goes on.

BN: Who came up with the "Harpdog" moniker? And how?

Harpdog: I wrote a song called "What's Your Real Name?" while recording down in the Bay area in 2016. Short story is, some mid week night back in 1989, a friend and I went down to catch some friends giggin'. The band asked us both to sit in, and by the end of the night, two young well dressed dudes were hollering "Harpdog", "Harpdog"! I took that as a stage name, but around 2013 I decided to make it legal. You see, I never felt like I belonged to any name, family, place or thing all my life.

I was named three times in my life by complete strangers. My birth mother named me, but was not allowed to even hold me. (We met December 6th 1990) then again at adoption. Then, these fellas, 27 years later, maybe another reason why I found a life on the road.

BN: What was the Canadian blues scene like when you were starting out?

Harpdog: We didn't have much of a scene other than we were blessed with the bands who toured up this way. Keep in mind I was born and raised in Edmonton, Alberta. That's 380 miles directly north of Sweet Grass, Montana. So, we were on a bit of a blues circuit for blues bands touring up from Chicago and KC etc. Just not as much as what Toronto, or Montreal would have had touring

that region. By the time I put my first blues band together, (1982) we could find work all over the place. Used to average 40 weeks a year on the road, and work around town the other 12 weeks. You know I have never taken a vacation or holiday.

BN: How do you think the Canadian Blues fan differs from the



American Blues fan?

Harpdog: Well, I gotta say, they all look alike to me. Haha-

ha, Honestly, I think generally speaking Canadians seem to be more reserved, however, the fine people of Quebec, and the Atlantic provinces, they are over the top... so I have to say, people seem to be the same only different. I mean, I see people show a difference from the east to the west on both sides of our border. Of course big difference in the people from the north in comparison to ones down south. Canadians are very diverse, as are Americans.

BN: What do you think you would be doing if you were not a musician?

Harpdog: Hmm, good question, now at my age I see no options, but if I had taken a different path, maybe if I didn't see Cotton when I was seventeen? Knowing me as I do now, I would say this. I need people; I get bored easy, too easy, so I would need something that requires little routine, with an element of people. I could find my happy place with whatever provided that.

BN: What artists blow you away on stage or on record?

Harpdog: When you say blow me away on stage or record I assume as a fan, not as a musician. Then my next question is alive or dead?

BN: Who have you really enjoyed sharing a stage with?

Harpdog: First big moment was back in about 1983 when I sat in with Matt Murphy, he called me back for two more songs. I was thrilled to say the least. I backed up Pinetop Perkins at the King Eddy in Calgary in 1993. That was a highlight no doubt. Shared stage with Dutch Mason, B.B. King named him the "Prime Minister of the Blues" up here in Canada when they first did a show together. Amos Garrett more than a handful of times. John Juke Logan sat in with me and my Bloodhounds in Portland, OR back in '94. Curtis Salgado sat in with me in Edmonton back around '02 or '03 maybe. I have been blessed over the years, Li'l Jimmy Reed just a few years back, we talk about touring together some day. Jimmy Duck Holmes, oh and of course while hanging in Clarksdale back in 2017 I sat in, sang and played harp for Leo Bud Welch at Reds. Recently at a festival up here, Popa Chubby asked me if I'd like to sit in on a song, and yes I did that as well. Sweet guy, Teddy!

BN: What has been your most memorable performance?

Harpdog: They are all memorable to me. I have no one preference or place, I give it all I have no matter where, when, who, how big, etc.

Harpdog Brown, con't. from P. 5

BN: What allows you to really connect with your fans?

Harpdog: Being approachable. I'm in the people business after all.

BN: What is the strangest, funniest or scariest thing that has happened to you on the road or during a performance?

Harpdog: I'll never forget the time, hmmm, damnit, I just forgot. Ok, I remember this though, but if I told you, well I'd have to call you a



liar!

BN: What do you consider to be your greatest achievement?

Harpdog: Staying true to me, and not becoming someone I think I should be.

BN: Who is the person you would most like to meet that you have not already?

Harpdog: Tom Waits.

BN: When and where are you happiest?

Harpdog: I love my naps, but I think my happiest place and time is in the driver's seat on the highway, travelin with a bunch of out of work comedians, who play damn fine blues!

BN: What is your greatest extravagance?

Harpdog: I don't really have one, let me think. I do believe in living with quality over quantity but I really live a modest life. Never been much of a material guy.

BN: What has been your biggest regret?

Harpdog: I live with few to no regrets; however, now that you got me thinking, after sitting in with Matt Murphy, the boys in the band joined me at my table and his nephew Floyd Murphy, who was drumming for him then, and the young white bass player, both encouraged me to come to Chicago. They said there is always a gig for a harp player with a big voice. I would have been about 22 maybe, and lacking in confidence I didn't take that risk. I guess it took me a few more years before I started calculating risk, and thankfully, taking some! Actually I have taken my share of risk, and have no regrets... other than maybe not trying to make it in Chicago in my 20s.

BN: How have you been keeping sane during the pandemic?

Harpdog: Ya know what? This is the most sane I have been in years. I was averaging over 45,000 miles driving all over North America, doing on average 250 shows per year, just the last five years. Living the cowboy life, "sleep when you can, perform tired" Now, that being said, the world seems crazier than ever. Sadly I feel like I'm on the sidelines for these crazy days of humanity.

BN: Ok Harpdog, something our readers really enjoy are reading the answers to what we call rapid fire trivia. So here we go!

BN: Favorite album of all time?

Harpdog: *Nighthawks At The Diner*, Tom Waits

BN: Favorite quote?

Harpdog: "We miss 100 % of the shots we don't take." - Wayne Gretzky

BN: Favorite movie?

Harpdog: Too many to name, short list, *Ray*, *Field of Dreams*, *A Bronx Tale*, *Harold and Maude*.

BN: Favorite food?

Harpdog: It would be easier to tell you the few things I don't like. Let's just say I loves my groceries!

BN: Favorite book?

Harpdog: *Low Man on the Totem Pole*, H. Allen Smith

BN: Favorite drink?

Harpdog: Water, but I do like my brown liquors, and I guess that includes beer.

BN: Favorite guilty pleasure?

Harpdog: BBQ

BN: Favorite City?

Harpdog: Not able to chose just one

BN: Weirdest place you have ever been?

Harpdog: The time I woke up under the transmission of my 65 Mustang at a bush party back when I was 16.

BN: One thing you can't live without?

Harpdog: Love.

BN: What poster, if any, did you have on your bedroom wall growing up?

Harpdog: Tony Esposito, goaltender of the Chicago Blackhawks.

BN: If you could snap your fingers and change anything in the world, what would it be?

Harpdog: Put an end to greed!

Thank you Harpdog! We can all still watch the "*In the Dog House*" on Harpdog's youtube channel. And catch him here:

<https://www.harpdogbrown.com/>, <https://www.harpdogbrown.com/in-the-dog-house>, <https://www.youtube.com/c/HarpdogBrownLIVE/videos>, <https://www.facebook.com/HarpdogBrownLIVE>, <https://www.instagram.com/harpdogbrown/>, <https://twitter.com/harpdogbrown>, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harpdog_Brown.

Celebrating Mick Martin's 72nd Birthday with a Spring Fling at Swabbie's!

By Barbara Katen

May 1st was the first time I have been to see and hear live music in over a year. It was food for my soul!

Chris Barabino, Swabbie's owner, and Tommy King promoted and hosted this awesome musical Birthday bash for our very own Mick Martin. Swabbie's allowed limited seating (sold out!) and enforced mask requirements, making it safe for many of us to return to some semblance of normalcy in this changed world.

Mick Martin's Birthday, con't. from P. 6

The Sacramento Blues Society had a membership and merchandise table there. Much appreciation to Sally Katen and Liz Walker who (wo)manned the table and did an awesome job of promoting SBS.

But let's get back to brass tacks--the music! The show opened with Jimmy Pailer and Lew Fratis playing a couple of sets. These two SBS Hall of Famers were at the top of their game and entertained an enthusiastic audience. I swear, it was almost as if I heard a collective sigh of relief when the music started up. In a sense, we were home again!

After an intermission and before Mick Martin and his band of merry music makers took the stage, SBS's Liz Walker circulated through the audience with Birthday cupcakes in celebration of

Mick's 72nd trip around the sun, followed by a rousing rendition of "Happy Birthday" for the birthday boy.



In addition to Mick, Mick's Big Band for the show consisted of Andrew Clayton, Jim Caseli, AJ Joyce, Jimmy Pailer and was joined for a song or two by Lew

Fratis. No dancing was allowed but many of us stood up at our respective tables to move to the groove of Mick, the "Godfather" of the current Sacramento Blues musical community.



At the end of the afternoon there were contented smiles on everyone's faces. I just knew we all felt the same elation about how good it was to be out among friends, listening to great live music. It was a very good...no, it was a great day!

SBS Merchandise Update

We don't know how the rest of 2021 will shake out, but one thing's for sure – it's a great year for new merchandise for the Sacramento

Blues Society! We have some great looking enamel lapel pins for SBS in both yellow and white, and one for BITS featuring the Blues in Schools logo.

All the women's and men's t-shirts are updated, and they are awesome! There are also some unisex tank tops, which fit well. Just in time for hot sunny days, we have embroidered SBS baseball caps, as well as tote bags for your beach or poolside stuff.

All our SBS merchandise is available on our website, www.sacblues.org.

The First SBS Live Fundraiser Event of 2021!!! Mark Hummel's Blues Survivors W. Rusty Zinn, Bob Welsh, Wes Starr & Randy Bermudes

What a long, strange trip... and we are back!

Sunday, July 18, 2021, The Torch Club, 904 15th Street, Sacramento

Doors: 3 pm/Music: 4pm-6:30pm

Tix: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/sacramento-blues-society-presents-mark-hummels-blues-survivors-tickets-159391934567>

Limited seating --your \$25 advance ticket will guarantee you a seat in this venerated intimate Sacramento blues club. Note that while we have made great progress, we still got a little bit further to go - Please follow all recommendations for indoor concertgoing, including getting your vaccine. We at the SBS strongly support and recommend this. We will be following the CDC protocols and state guidelines set for us. There may be some tickets at the door day of show for standing room in the back. Those will run \$30. We will have an SBS table for memberships and lots of great new swag. See our ad on the back cover of this issue. And, come say hey!

Thank You Donors

Our donors and members are the life blood of our organization. Without you we would be unable to accomplish our mission. Thank you all, and especially these recent major donors:

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Please join these major donors by making a tax deductible contribution on our new website: www.sacblues.org or by sending a check made out to "The Sacramento Blues Society" to SBS, PO Box 60580, Sacramento, CA 95860-0580. We need your continued support. When you renew your membership, why not add an additional contribution? Every little bit helps!

The Man Behind the Big Blues Bender

Interview with AJ Gross By Barbara Katen

Leaving on a Jet plane....September 8th, yeah, baby! Last year the Katen cousins decided we would splurge and go to our first Big Blues Bender. Sadly, COVID knocked those plans off the calendar. But when offered the opportunity to postpone rather than outright cancel our reservations, we said "yes please!" I cannot tell you how excited we are about attending the Big Blues Bender, September 9 – 12, 2021.

In anticipation, a few months ago I contacted AJ Gross, the man behind the BBB, and asked if he would agree to an interview. I even became FB friends with him and his wife, Laurie. He enthusiastically agreed! Have you ever noticed that blues people are some of the nicest people in the world? AJ is definitely in this category. On that note, read on, SBS peeps.

Blue Notes: The Big Blues Bender is scheduled for September 9-12, 2021 and is an event that festival goers and artists look forward to annually. How did this event come to be, and how many years has it been going strong?

AJ: We held our first Big Blues Bender in September 2014. I had been working producing, managing and touring with blues artists in particular since 1990. It's been great to come back to my first music love.

BN: Las Vegas has proven to be ideal location for the BBB. How did you decide on it? Were you living there before that?

AJ: I always say do what you know, I've lived in Vegas now for almost 35 years and have a good feel for what it does well. We love to show visitors a great time. And it doesn't hurt to have one of the world's largest airports with flights from everywhere.

BN: Can you tell us a little something about your background as a promoter and event coordinator? I believe your wife, Laurie, works with you on the BBB, so please feel free to include her input and background as well.

AJ: I started in the music business in 1990 and never turned back. I have worked in pretty much every aspect of the music business except for performing. You're welcome. LOL. Laurie has been with me since the very first Bender. At first I was apprehensive about working together but it's turned out to be wonderful and we sit side-by-side and pretty much talk about every aspect of the Bender. Her main focus is our social media and outreach to our customers and friends. During the event she also takes on the role as activities director, gracious hostess and loving wife.

BN: The Venue location has changed for the BBB. Can you tell us what to expect? How many stages will there be? How many poolside?

AJ: Expect a fabulous time! We'll use as many as five stages throughout the event, with one of them being a fabulous pool stage. We are very excited for this new venue (Westgate Resort) and some amazing possibilities that it offers.

BN: Who are some of the acts confirmed?

AJ: I guess we're most excited about presenting

Delbert McClinton's final show in the United States. He has decided to retire and also decided to make us his retirement celebration party. It doesn't feel like we have a proper blues fest lineup if we don't have a blues "giant", and having **Buddy Guy** is about as good as it gets. We're so excited to have him back. And no Bender is complete without the Mayor of Benderville, **Tab Benoit**. Without a doubt our most popular artist ever. Please check out our website at bigbluesbender.com to see our complete lineup.

BN: What criteria do you use to decide what artists to book?

AJ: Being fantastic is a great start. LOL. Jimmy Carpenter, our talent buyer, and I want to strike a balance of different blues genres. We bring artists from everywhere, so many different styles are represented. And you absolutely must have diversity!

BN: Are there artists you have found to be more enjoyable to work with than others? And without naming names, have you had artists that you haven't wanted to ask back?

AJ: Absolutely there are artists that are fun to be around who don't take themselves too seriously. I can think of lots of great names. I think you can tell which one those are by who comes back to the Bender. And yes, we have a very short list of artists that we will not invite back. Not everyone plays well with others.

BN: I am a huge Tab Benoit fan, I think most of our readers know this about me, so can you let us know how Tab became known as the Mayor of the Big Blues Bender? And on a personal note, can you introduce me to him? LOL.

AJ: To make a long story short. I have been to a festival many times where they called the returning headliner the king. Well I didn't want to start a monarchy, but I truly believe that Tab is the glue that has helped the Bender succeed. He is what we strive to be: magical, relaxed and fun to be around. I'll be happy to introduce you to Tab, but I recommend just hanging out at the bar after 2 a.m. with a good bottle of cognac to share.

BN: What do you think makes the BBB different from other Blues Festivals?

AJ: Everything, an elevator ride away! Your own private bathroom just a quick ride away or maybe take a nap so you're ready for the big show. It's your Bender. Do it your way!

BN: What are some of the challenges of putting on an event as big and as complex as the BBB?

AJ: When you attend an event like ours, what you see is a big party. Fun, music, and smiles. People naturally assume our everyday lives must just be an extension of that. Like our job is to sit around a big table having fun and talking about how to make more fun for everyone. But what it's really all about is contracts! There is an astonishing amount of paperwork involved in every facet of this project. Be it artists, guests, staff, vendors, unions, hotel, food & beverage, etc. All of these interests are very important and necessary, and the



real trick of an event like this is ensuring that everyone gets what they bargained for. It's a lot to keep track of, and without the proper oversight, things can fall through the cracks which can lead to very unpleasant outcomes. We take pride in our ability to compile tens of thousands of pages of dense legalese and translate that into four days of fun. Or perhaps, our ability to translate four days of fun into legalese and not kill its soul in the process!

BN: What has surprised you the most in all the years you have held this event?

AJ: How much people love, prioritize and hold the Bender in a special place. We consider our attendees family. And they have truly proven to us over and over again how important the Bender is in their lives. From getting tattoos, license plates with our name on it and professing their love to us on a regular basis. It is humbling and the most valuable thing I will ever take away from the Bender.

BN: Last year, 2020, my cousin Sally (current President of the Sacramento Blues Society) and I prepaid to attend our first BBB, which was unfortunately postponed to 2021 due to COVID 19. We are praying that with so many of us being vaccinated by September, the Bender will go on. How does it look for us at this time?

AJ: We are happy to say that the 2021 Bender is a go! Back in April, Clark County Nevada released a COVID mitigation plan that governed large gatherings and included an array of COVID-related protocols based on the percentage of our local population that was vaccinated. That gave us enough confidence to put our remaining inventory back on sale on May 13th. As luck would have it, that was the day the CDC announced masks were no longer required for vaccinated people. A few days after that, the county commission voted unanimously to abandon the COVID mitigation plan in its entirety and open up the city 100%, as of June 1. Naturally, if the numbers start trending in the wrong direction, the county or other authorities may re-implement restrictions, but it sure feels like this is all behind us and there's nothing standing in the way of a "normal" Bender this year!

BN: Hopefully, venues will be opening soon and some may be asking people to provide proof of vaccination. Is this something the BBB will consider doing to ensure the safety of attendees?

AJ: Prior to our May 13 on sale date, we were prepared to implement whatever vaccine proof/PCR testing strategy the county and state required of us. As I explained in reply to your previous question, we are no longer operating under those rules. That's a huge relief considering we are not the kind of company that deals in people's personal medical information, and we were not looking forward to blending that kind of data collection effort into our operations. That said, we sincerely hope that everyone who attends gets vaccinated, or voluntarily wears a mask if they're not able to get vaccinated. The beauty of the Bender is that it's a shared experience among folks from all walks of life that share a love of this music. We hope and expect that any culture clashes over the politics of COVID are left at the door, and we can regain some sense of community that has been fractured over this last year.

BN: What is the cost to attend the BBB and where can readers go to find out more about the BBB?

AJ: If you plan on sharing a room/package with someone the cost is about \$900 per person including room and four days and nights of music. Any available package will be available on our website at bigbluesbender.com.

BN: Now, the following questions are fun, interesting and allow us to get to know a little more about you. We are friends on Facebook and I've been observant and noticed that you and Laurie might be considered "Foodies". Can you tell us the last best thing you ate? Feel free to give a restaurant shout out if you wish.

AJ: We made some awesome street tacos at home last night. So easy and so delicious. But I want to share a couple of great restaurant recommendations that are near the Bender this year. If you like Thai food arguably the best Thai restaurant in the country, called Lotus of Siam, is only a mile or two away. There is also a great place for breakfast called Bagelmania around the corner.

BN: What 3 things that bring you the most joy?

AJ: My wife Laurie, our dogs Romeo and Juliet, The Bender Family.

BN: Name something that you do or not not regret.

AJ: I do not regret starting the Big Blues Bender. Highlight of my professional career! Extremely proud of what we have created.

BN: Recall a time you changed your mind and about something.

AJ: What artists to book. A constant challenge, one minute so-and-so seems perfect and then the next second you're like hold on let's go this way. Until it's all together you don't know what you got.

BN: If you had to do something else, what would you be doing?

AJ: I always jokingly told people that I could've made more money selling insurance then producing concerts.

BN: This is my favorite question. If you were to host an intimate dinner party with up to six guests, living or not, who would be coming?

AJ: Does it suffice it to say that they will all be musicians except for Bill Graham? Hey SBS, thank you for your interest in the Big Blues Bender and we look forward to seeing you in September!

BN: And if ya'll don't think I've haven't started packing my bags already...you are sorely mistaken! And AJ, I will hang out in the bar after 2:00 a.m. but I'm counting on a intro to my man Tab, the Mayor of Benderville! **LATE BREAKING NEWS:** As we go to press it has been announced the Big Blues Bender has sold out!



In Memoriam - Icepick James Harman

(June 8, 1946- May 19, 2021)

By Mindy Giles

Photos by Bob Cosman

This magnificent writer, this creative, exacting perfectionist of the highest order, this Harmonica Tone King, this singer that made girls squeal and boys jealous, this bandleader with the keenest eye for young talent, this hilarious and curmudgeonly caterwauling brilliant observer of humanity...this guy had so much inside him, no wonder he had to travel. From Anniston, Alabama, then Florida, NYC, Chicago, then southern California—and out to the world.

For six years, from 1991-1996, I worked with James on four dazzling Black Top Records (BT) studio releases: **Do Not Disturb** (1991), **Two Sides to Every Story** (1993), **Cards on the Table** (1994), and **Black & White** (1995). He was in Los Angeles or on the road, I was in Chicago or on the road; we'd meet at blues festivals and occasionally we were both in New Orleans, where the BT home



James Harman, con't. from P. 9

office "paved the way to your soul." The special side of the MANY sides of James Harman that I got to experience was his complete immersion in shaping the story of each upcoming record. From central theme to cover image graphics to font style to the compelling tag line on a promotional postcard/poster/ad mat, he was all in. And it was always excellent.

I often wished I had endless blank checks and could just let him CREATE. He was the blues personification of "Sock and Buskin," that ancient Greek tragedy/comedy pair of masks. "Dionysus is not the God behind the mask. He is the mask." wrote psychologist Ginette Paris. Such was James. His intense magic on stage, legendary among his musician peers and fans alike, was cathartic. He gave an authentic SHOW.



On October 18, 2017, James was my very first artist to inaugurate the "Blues & Bourbon Wednesdays" Series at the Momo (now the Starlet Room) upstairs at Harlow's in Sacramento. He dazzled as usual and set a high bar for every Wednesday to come. It was my wish and plan to bring him back if he were able, to kick off the series comeback in this "post-pandemic" world of ours.

Now what we have are precious memories, great records on a number of independent labels, and thank God some off-the-chart YouTube videos of live performances—here is one you MUST see: <https://youtu.be/3PMsfrnQv5w> James and Those Dangerous Gentlemen (Hollywood Fats AND Kid Ramos, Willie J. Campbell, and Stephen Hodges) are ON FIRE. Even on a computer screen, they will make you sweat and howl.

This smart, loving appreciation was published in January 2021, as

word of James' diagnosis of Stage 4 esophageal cancer became public knowledge: <https://nofightin.com/2021/01/04/james-harman-needs-our-help-ice-picks-story-2021/>



And here is another important appreciation: http://www.blues-junctionproductions.com/an_appreciation_of_james_harman

I miss him...I am grateful I have his raconteur storytelling, his fabulous music, his friendship.... All I can

truly muster in my heart is his line, "Thank you, baby."



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