Written by Karen McFarland
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In November, bluesman Michael "Hawkeye" Herman will spend a week at a festival. At night, he'll perform in concert halls and clubs. During the day, he'll play in schools, jails, halfway houses, and other social-service institutions.

That probably sounds similar to the Blues in the Schools residencies that the Mississippi Valley Blues Society has been hosting for the past seven years. But Herman's November gig is in Paris, France.

And Blues Sur Seine has invited Hawkeye to come early to its 2007 festival to conduct a retreat for European blues musicians who want to become involved in blues-education programs.

A Quad Cities native now residing in southern Oregon, Hawkeye is a blues artist who's written scores for two plays (*El Paso Blue* and *Handler*), penned a song about the Mississippi River flood of 1993, and performed his own composition about Hurricane Katrina for the BBC.

But he's also been going into schools for 30 years, performing for and teaching children about the blues. Now he's expanded his aim to include instructing musicians and teachers how to become blues educators.

Hawkeye is excited that he's going back to Blues Sur Seine after performing there last year - the only artist asked to return out of approximately 250 over nine years. The festival "asked me to do a two-day workshop similar to the one I'll be doing in the Quad Cities on Saturday, October 6," he said in a recent phone interview. This workshop for musicians and teachers will show them "how to get involved in Blues in the Schools according to their skills and background."

The Mississippi Valley Blues Society (of which I am a board member) is presenting Hawkeye's free workshop on Saturday from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. at the River Music Experience in Davenport. Blues musicians and educators can register by calling (563) 322-5837.

Hawkeye decided to set up workshops for musicians and teachers because he got so many requests for going into schools that he couldn't fulfill. "There's a huge need for more blues educators," he said. "There are only a few of us who travel nationally and do blues education. Yet every child should have the advantage of knowing the history of our culture.

"What could be better than to create more people who know how to do what I do so that the message can get out about the blues being the watershed of American popular music? And kids deserve to know that. So I decided a couple of years ago to do a workshop, a seminar for adult musicians and educators, on how to take their own skills - whether it be on guitar or harmonica or piano or whatever - and their own background - whether they've been to college or not, or even had training as a teacher - ... [to] create a curriculum that is useful and [that]

they feel confident in doing."

And that can be difficult. "Although people might think that performing for children is a snap and is easy, the truth is that it's actually much harder than performing for adults," Hawkeye noted. "When you're performing for adults they'll allow you to warm up. If you're in a club they'll have a beer, sit and talk for a while. Children give you their undivided attention because you're a stranger and you have a guitar. But if you lose their attention, they're not coming back, they're not going to refocus on you. If you bore them for a split second, they don't give you a second chance."

That's one lesson for musicians. But they also come in with a huge advantage over their teachers: "One of the reasons the musician has the classroom in the palm of his hands the minute he walks in is because he's a stranger, and he brought a musical instrument. The power of that is: I can say the same thing that the teacher tells them every day but they listen to me - because I'm a stranger, and because I have a guitar. The students have empowered that person, they're listening harder to that person, because that person is not there every day.

"You have to take that responsibility into consideration when you get in front of the kids. You have to realize that they're really gonna remember this. You're as important to them as if an astronaut came into the classroom. They're gonna remember everything about you, from the way you dress to everything you say. And sometimes," he said with a laugh, "the teacher is a little disturbed by that."

Hawkeye himself has informal training as a teacher. His sister has been department head of student teaching at the University of Iowa for the past 15 years, "and she has coached/tutored me on curriculum-building, teaching techniques, teaching tools, and teaching skills," he said. "Also, I have gained a great deal of experience by having done blues education for the past 30 years, in over 350 schools, from elementary to college level, for over 350,000 students in 20 states and five foreign countries."

Hawkeye explained that the educators who attend his seminar already have teaching tools but need information on the history of the blues. In part one of the workshop, he presents an overview of blues history, blues music formats, and blues poetry formats. At the same time he helps musicians with a strong background in blues to organize their knowledge into an efficient educational curriculum.

MICHAEL "HAWKEYE" HERMAN

The musicians at the workshop generally already know the history of the music, so what's valuable to them are the teaching skills that Hawkeye can demonstrate. In part two he shows musicians teaching tools and how to use them, while at the same time reminding educators of techniques that they may have mothballed "due to the pressure of the testing system that is now in place in many school districts." The idea is to reveal "many of their previously abandoned teaching skills that make the educational process fun and exciting for both the teachers and the students."

Hawkeye believes that the need for blues education "is created by a failing in the system that trains teachers. Most music teachers on the college level are still taught that Western classical music is what needs to get respect. It means that you can go to school and get a degree, a BA in music, and come out with no experience in blues or jazz, if you elect to not take those courses. And if there aren't any courses offered in blues or jazz, then you don't know anything about it.

"I think it would be really great if in the music curriculum there was a sense of respect for the impact of the music that was created here via the African-American experience that changed all other musics forever. Some people would say blues didn't change classical music, but I as a musician would say that definitely it did. There are two notes in the blues scale that weren't previously used - the flatted third and the flatted seventh - but after blues music those no longer sounded dissonant to classical composers, and they started to include them in their own compositions. ... Stravinsky would say the same thing: 'This music influenced my music.'"

Stravinsky himself described his *Ebony Concerto* as "a jazz concerto with a blues slow movement." According to Graeme Kay of the BBC, Stravinsky went to the jazz clubs of Harlem and also heard the music played by black musicians in Chicago and New Orleans.

"Students and teachers," Hawkeye continued, "are starting to realize that blues is the roots [of contemporary music] and everything else is the fruits, and they want to know about it, yet at the same time the college curriculum is not turning out teachers that are trained in that history. We should be standing up for our own culture rather than looking toward Western classical music as the pinnacle of creativity."

Hawkeye Herman is in the Quad Cities through October 6 for a Mississippi Valley Blues Society Blues in the Schools residency. He will also give three performances that are open to the public: Wednesday, October 3, at the River Music Experience at 7 p.m.; Friday, October 5, at the Moline Public Library at noon; and Friday, October 5, at Borders in Davenport at 7 p.m.