

Elvin Bishop, who lived outside the small town of Elliott, Iowa, as a child, attributes his connection with the blues community to his rural upbringing. "The reason I fell in so easy with the old blues guys," he said, "is because I knew the feeling of being out in the country and not much going on. ... You grew up with kerosene lamps and wood-burning stoves and shit like that."

After Bishop's family moved to Tulsa when he was 10, he started listening to blues on the radio. " You couldn't go to a blues festival like you can now. The only place a white person was going to hear the blues was on the radio, " he said, adding that when he first heard Jimmy Reed's " Honest I Do" played, it " just knocked" him over. Bishop had never heard blues music and was captivated by Reed's distinctive electric guitar.

Outside of the blues community, the 65-year-old Bishop is perhaps best known for his 1976 single "Fooled Around & Fell in Love," and has been labeled by some as a one-hit wonder, a tag that doesn't bother him. "I have no control over the structure of the world and how things work in the media," Bishop said. "What's the alternative - not ever having a hit?"

Bishop offers both pounding guitar riffs and relaxed, smooth licks on his 2007 live release, *Bo oty Bumpin'* -

melodies of difficult chords and interesting note pairings. His deep, gnarled voice elaborates on the instrumental implications of each song. In the Roy Milton cover " Keep a Dollar in Your Pocket, " for example, the slow, driving rhythm of the bass is compounded by

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Bishop's leisurely but tempered vocals, and the chorus is almost a chant. The eight-piece band behind Bishop delivers depth to each track and creates an even more inviting atmosphere, suggesting a whole family standing in the doorway instead of one man.

Bishop had an early interest in learning to play blues guitar, even if he had little help. "There was nobody in my family that was musical, nobody in the neighborhood I knew who knew how to play the blues, and I got no encouragement," he said. "I'd quit for a couple of months and then I'd take another look and I'd see the girls flocking around the guitar players, and I'd pick it back up and work on it some more."

Excellent grades helped Bishop qualify for a National Merit Scholarship after high school; he decided to attend the University of Chicago to study physics in 1960. " It was my ticket to get out of Tulsa, and I heard Chicago was where all the blues was happening, " he said.

In Chicago, he found the musical environment he was craving. "When I got to Chicago and I made friends with the blues guys," Bishop said, "and you could actually see their fingers on their guitars and get some encouragement, boy, things started happening real fast."

Soon after relocating to Chicago, Bishop joined the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, before starting a solo career in 1968. He also played with the Allman Brothers Band in a series of concerts.

Bishop learned a lot of things from other musicians' concerts, including the "borrowing" tendencies of blues players. "I said to Bobby Blank's guitar player once at a show, 'Well, I guess you know I'm out there stealing your licks.' He looked at me and said, 'Motherfucker, you can't steal my licks.' I looked at him and said, 'Why not, sir?' He said, 'Most of them don't belong to me.'"

As for the songwriting process, Bishop has used many different techniques. " You're just living and things pop into your mind, " he said. " Even if it's a bad situation, if you can nail it good enough in a song, it makes you feel better. "

A Whole Family Standing in the Doorway: Elvin Bishop: Thursday, 11 p.m., Main Stage

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That's how Bishop's songs often sound, like lyrical unhappiness with therapeutic tones and rhythms. On "Halfway Out the Door," Bishop sings, "Last time I saw that woman, she was halfway out the door / Had a child in her arms, said she wouldn't be back no more / She took my girl, took the best part of me." While Bishop sings in sorrow, piano keys plink lightly, horns blare, and a guitar hits short notes with a quick tempo.

During our conversation, Bishop said, "I just finished a recording project that's pretty cool," and spoke about the new record *The Blues Roll on,* slated for a September 23 release. "I got to thinking about the guys I played with when I started out. I was lucky. I got to play with 'Hound Dog' Taylor, Junior Wells, [Paul] Butterfield, people like that, and I went back and got some of their tunes and got the young guys to sing them." B.B. King and George Thorogood, among other older blues players, also contributed to the album.

Charlie Daniels once sang, " Elvin Bishop's sittin' on a bale of hay / He ain't good-lookin' but he sure can play. " Bishop's relaxed songwriting technique has finally delivered a response to Daniels: " Charlie Daniels called me ugly right there on his record / He was too big to fight so I just had to accept it. " The lyric is on " All the Way from Oklahoma, " a track off Bishop's upcoming CD.