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In 1980, *Living Blues* magazine founder Jim O'Neal approached left-handed guitarist Eddy Clearwater about making an album for his new label, Rooster Blues.

That's when everyone started calling Eddy "The Chief," he said in a recent phone interview, "because I wanted to wear my headdress and ride a horse for the artwork, for the cover." The headdress has since become a signature piece in Clearwater's stage shows.

The original Native American headdress was bestowed on him by a friend who told Eddy that "'I'll give it to you as a good-luck charm providing you never part with it.' So we shook hands on it, and I gave her my word, and I still have it as we speak - it's hanging on the wall in my basement. I have several that I've bought since then. But the authentic one I got from her; I never wear it because I don't want it ripped apart. It came right from the reservation in Cheyenne, Wyoming. It was the Chief Jimmy Coyote, it was his. I'm part Native American - my grandmother was full-blooded Cherokee, and my grandfather - on both sides they were."

Eddy Clearwater is sure to be sporting a headdress when he performs at the Redstone Room in downtown Davenport on Friday, November 7. The show is a fundraiser for the Mississippi Valley Blues Society, with all profits going toward the $50,000 needed to ensure a blues festival in 2009. (Full disclosure: I am secretary of the blues society.)

Since the time of the appropriately titled *The Chief* on Rooster Blues, Eddy has traveled the world and recorded for various labels, with the latest release his first for the Alligator label: *West Side Strut*, released in March and produced by guitarist Ronnie Baker Brooks. The CD features guest appearances by the producer as well as Lonnie Brooks, Billy Branch, Otis Clay, and Jimmy Johnson.

Billboard has called Clearwater's music "a focused mixture of T-Bone Walker cool and distinctly Chicago riffage. Uncanny grooves, satisfying, funky." *The New York Times* raved: "Clearwater is equally adept at Chuck Berry-style guitar as he is at deeper blues style. He's a fine singer who puts on a wild, exciting show - the sort of exuberant entertainer who can turn a concert into a party."

Clearwater is a practitioner of the west-side Chicago blues sound. "It's a rough, kind of raw type of blues with minor chords," he said.

But Edward Harrington grew up in the South, born in Mississippi in 1935. "My uncle had an old acoustic guitar, so every chance I would get I would pick it up and try to make different chord changes on it," he said. "And I just started from there."

He was living in Birmingham, Alabama, at the age of 15, playing in gospel groups, when he got the call to come to Chicago. He had an uncle in the Windy City who knew that Eddy "always had the desire to play and perform," Clearwater said. "It's always been my lifelong dream to be in music as far back as I can remember.

"He wrote me a letter and said, ‘If you come to Chicago, I will see to it that you meet people like Muddy Waters, Jimmy Reed, Howlin' Wolf, and Little Walter, because they all live here and I know them; I got to meet all of them.' So I wrote him back and said send me a ticket and I'll be on my way. He sent me a ticket for the Greyhound bus - it was $15 at that time. That was September 1950."

Eddy lived in his uncle's apartment, got a job as a dishwasher, went to school at night, and eventually saved enough money to buy an Epiphone guitar and amp from a pawnshop for $175. He didn't have a band then, so he practiced guitar at home. But he also went out to see the blues legends who were playing in Chicago during that magic time; his uncle got him into the blues clubs because Eddy was underage.

"Yeah," Eddy said, "I still played gospel, but I was always going to clubs to hear blues bands. My main influences were Muddy Waters and Jimmy Reed. I was heavily under the influence of Magic Sam and Otis Rush. I kinda got blues religion! They were real heroes."

In 1957 Eddy came under the spell of Chuck Berry. "I really admire Chuck Berry," he said. "He's one of my all-time heroes, you know. I like his style, and he has such substance in his songs. The things he writes about are just true things in life. His music and his lyrics coincide so beautifully."

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