

2010 Blues Fest -- Saturday, July 3: Tent

Written by Administrator

Wednesday, 23 June 2010 05:44

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Little Brother Jones, 1:30 p.m.

LittleBrotherBlues.com



I must start out this bio admitting I have not witnessed this gentleman in person. Sometimes it is better that way. I *do* know by listening to his CDs and reading his stories that this guy is going to be the real deal. This guy is a bluesman in every sense of the word. This is going to be another one that you will be saying, "Where do they find these folks? Little Brother Jones is great!" Well, thank Bob Covemaker for this one.

It seems Doug Jones was drawn to the early blues style from the beginning. He has studied his craft very well, and it shows in his songs that he writes and performs. He combines exceptional lyrics with an authentic tone that he has developed and honed over time. This is a guy you possibly could hear on the corner if you went back in time and walked down the street. I think I would just sit on down and listen for a while -- probably for a long while. Little Brother Jones plays to your soul. He plays that old-time country blues while keeping with Piedmont style. I usually don't compare these guys to one another, but to give everyone an idea, it has been written by Cora Mae Bryant that "he plays that song just like I heard Tampa Red play it. He's got it right." Be looking to hear some great music from the old acoustic-guitar collection this guy has.

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And don't forget that Little Brother Jones will present a workshop on Sunday at 5:30 p.m. He'll concentrate on Georgia pre-war blues. -- *Michael J. Livermore*

Olga Wilhelmine with Cody Dickinson, 3:30 p.m.

LaOlga.com

Two newcomers to the Fest this year will be Olga Wilhelmine and Cody Dickinson. While it is true they are new to our fest, they are not new to the blues.



Olga, originally hailing from San Francisco, currently resides in New Orleans. A multi-talented artist, she is equally adept as a musician or as an actress. As a musician she has proven herself a writer, any style from pop to straight-up hill-country blues. As an instrumentalist she's mastered guitar, piano, and violin to name a few, and as a vocalist she has a soulful voice. Among her many early influences are such notables as Bessie Smith, Ella Fitzgerald, Junior Kimbrough, and Memphis Minnie. A more recent friend and mentor was the late, great Jessie Mae Hemphill, whose likeness graced the front of last year's Fest shirt.



Joining Olga for both her Tent-stage and workshop performances will be none other than Memphis resident Cody Dickinson. Cody, best known for his role as the drummer with the driving beat behind the North Mississippi Allstars, is a multifaceted artist as well. In addition to his work with the Allstars, he is an accomplished guitar player, songwriter, and producer. Much in demand, Cody somehow finds time between the 180 or so live shows he performs each year to work on several studio projects as well.

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Together these two "newcomers" bring a vast variety of talent and influences that will not only prove to be entertaining but will show that the blues can be both unique yet respectful of the traditional artists of the past. Their workshop at 1 p.m. on Saturday will focus on the hill-country blues of northern Mississippi. -- *Bob Covemaker*

Little Joe McLerran Quartet, 5:30 p.m.

LittleJoeBlues.com



I first heard Little Joe McLerran as the winner of the solo/duo competition at the 2009 International Blues Challenge in Memphis. But he also comes highly recommended by Blues Sis Jeanie Webster of Tulsa, Hawkeye Herman, and Vicki Price. Bob Kieser of *Blues Blast* notes: "Little Joe plays Piedmont blues and since the death of John Cephas may be the heir to the crown of 'the best' around. For a guy that is only 25 years old, he oozes with talent."

Besides winning at the International Blues Challenge, Little Joe (he stands six feet tall!) has issued four albums, toured throughout the U.S. and Europe, and recently was listed by Roots Music Report as the most-listened-to blues player in America. Even at age 25, Joe is a veteran of blues music; at age nine he was playing the blues with his brother Jesse in Boulder, Colorado, shopping malls. When he was 15, the McLerrans moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma, where Joe took the name "Son Piedmont" and his brother became "Washboard Jesse." A regular Sunday-afternoon gig at the River's Edge Bistro in Tulsa led to more restaurant jobs and private parties, as well as the Oklahoma Blues Festival.

But Jesse died in an accident in 2003, and that devastated Joe. Eventually Joe returned to performing, working his way up through coffeehouse jobs to blues festivals and tours -- sometimes solo, occasionally fronting groups.

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This spring, the Little Joe McLerran Quartet (Little Joe on guitar, his dad Robbie Mack on bass, Ron McRorey on drums, and BlueSKool star David Berntson on harmonica) toured the Saudi Arabia peninsula for three weeks as part of the U.S. State Department's Rhythm Road program bringing American music abroad. They performed concerts as well as playing in schools. I'm sure they'll have many stories to tell! -- *Karen McFarland*

Ruthie Foster, 7:30 p.m.

RuthieFoster.com



If you've never seen Ruthie Foster live, here's your chance to catch the "it" singer of the blues with her band. Her 2009 release, *The Truth According to Ruthie Foster*, was nominated for a Grammy for Best Contemporary Blues Album. Last year she was on tour with the Blind Boys of Alabama, so that should give you an idea of what Ruthie's all about. Ruthie's music has been called a hybrid of blues, gospel, roots, and folk; her strong, pure, soulful voice has actually been compared to that of Ella Fitzgerald and Aretha Franklin.

Geoffrey Himes in the *Washington Post* gives this description of seeing Ruthie live: "When Ruthie Foster performed at the South by Southwest music conference two weeks ago, the short, dreadlocked singer demanded attention with the sheer power of her mezzo-soprano. With an acoustic guitar strapped around her neck and singing the Lucinda Williams song 'Fruits of My Labor,' Foster resembled a folk singer on the verses. But when she tilted back her head and belted out the chorus, she revealed her background in the New Hope Missionary Baptist Church in Caldwell, Texas." He also points out that Ruthie's blend of singer/songwriter folk music and African-American gospel is similar to what distinguishes Odetta and Richie Havens.

On *The Truth According to Ruthie Foster*, the heat of soul music burns at its core. It was recorded in Memphis with a small city of notable musicians who began work on the day of Isaac Hayes' funeral, trying to convey the energy of Ruthie's performances, cutting almost everything live, going for feeling above all else.

Blues Revue

notes that "the truth, according to this remarkable album, is that Ruthie Foster is one of America's finest soul-blues artists."

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-- Karen McFarland

Billy Branch & the Sons of Blues, 9:30 p.m.

BillyBranch.com



Billy Branch has performed for MVBS at two festivals and four blues educational residencies during the past 10 years and has proven to be a most exciting, dedicated, blues-loving performer and educator.

William Earl Branch was born in Great Lakes, Illinois -- just north of Chicago -- on October 3, 1951. However, he was reared in Los Angeles. Billy returned to Chicago to attend the University of Illinois, where he eventually graduated with a degree in political science. Billy spent a great deal of time at legendary blues clubs such as Queen Bee's and Theresa's Lounge, where he learned from all-time-great harp players such as Big Walter, James Cotton, Junior Wells, and Carey Bell.

Billy first gained recognition for his harmonica playing in 1976 as the result of a harmonica battle at the Green Bunny Club, when he beat Chicago legend Little Max Simmons. Not long after, Billy replaced Carey Bell in Willie Dixon's Chicago Blues All Stars, a real blues-education gig for Billy that lasted six years.

During the '70s, Billy formed the "Sons of Blues" featuring Lurrie Bell (son of Carey) and Freddie Dixon (son of Willie). They toured Europe, played at the Berlin Jazz Festival, and recorded for Alligator Records' Grammy-nominated *Living Chicago Blues* series.

For more than 30 years Billy has been passing on the blues tradition through his Blues in the Schools program. During that time he has taught in the Chicago school system as part of the

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Urban Gateway Project. Billy will display his blues-educational skills and Chicago harp playing at a free workshop Saturday starting at 5:30 p.m.; harps will be provided to attendees. -- *Jimmie Jones*