

LOUISIANA MUSIC:

A PRIMER

Volume 1, No. 4: BLUES

Blues may not be the first music that comes to mind when people think about Louisiana. New Orleans is renowned as the birthplace of jazz and Southwest Louisiana is noted for its homegrown zydeco and Cajun styles. It's nearly impossible, however, for a state bursting with music not to have a strong dose of blues in its DNA.



Buddy Guy

Louisiana has produced a wealth of bluesmen, perhaps most notably the now legendary Buddy Guy. The Grammy-winning guitarist, vocalist and Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee was born in the small town of Lettsworth near the Atchafalaya River. Guy moved to Chicago when he was 21 and built his reputation as an electrified Chicago blues guitarist and influenced a next generation of greats from Clapton to Hendrix. Yet to this day, Guy's Louisiana roots can

be realized in his style and particularly in his showmanship.

Another Louisiana bluesman who's renowned for getting a crowd involved is Bobby Rush. The guitarist and vocalist was born in Homer, in the southeastern part of the state. Though he also moved away, he retained the area's musical flavors and showed his love on his latest album *Down in Louisiana*.

Both Guy and Rush were given a big welcome home when they performed at New Orleans' Crescent City Blues & BBQ Festival. The free event, presented in the autumn (October 18-20, 2013), by the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation, features three days of non-stop blues. The aroma of barbeque and blues vibrations fill the air on the festival site at Lafayette Square in the heart of the New Orleans business district.

Naturally, there's an abundance of this city's purveyors of the blues at this fest including Walter "Wolfman" Washington who also plays weekly at the Frenchmen Street club, d.b.a. Washington typifies the R&B-tinged, late night blues that remains core to New Orleans. It is carried on by his protégé, guitarist/vocalist Kipori "Baby Wolf" Woods.

Larger ensembles are well-represented by Deacon John & the Ivories and Luther Kent & Trick Bag. The veteran leaders are native New Orleanians with guitarist/vocalist Deacon John (Moore) known for his jump blues and Kent for a more swingin' style. Little Freddie King, while not born in Louisiana, has lived in New Orleans since he was 14. His country blues technique is considered an original.

Up the Mississippi, Baton Rouge is considered the hub of Louisiana blues. It gained its reputation, in part, by being the home to the legendary Tabby's Blues Box, which was owned by guitarist/vocalist Rockin' Tabby Thomas. Many great blues musicians have passed through the doors of the Blues Box. Thomas, who continues to host a Saturday afternoon radio show of the same

name, is the father of Grammy-winning guitarist/vocalist/composer Chris Thomas King. Many might recognize King for his role in the movie *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

The Neals are another important blues family from Baton Rouge. The patriarch, the late Raful Neal, played a mean harmonica, dug in on some earthy vocals and raised a whole clan of musicians. His son, guitarist and vocalist Kenny Neal, is the best-known of the group and plays what has been appropriately dubbed "swamp blues." Kenny's brother Noel Neal plays bass with harmonica man James Cotton.

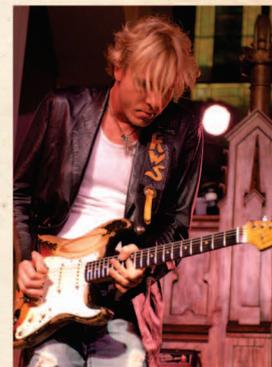


Slim Harpo

Another Baton Rouge native, guitar/vocalist/composer Tab Benoit, who played alongside both Rockin' Tabby Thomas and Raful Neal as well as Louisiana blues legend pianist/vocalist Henry Gray, is recognized not only for his musicianship but for his work in coastal preservation. In that effort, he leads the all-star band Voice of the Wetlands that has focused national attention on the erosion of Louisiana's shoreline.

Baton Rouge annually celebrates with its Baton Rouge Blues Festival (April 13), and the annual Slim Harpo Awards (May 1), named after the blues guitar and harmonica virtuoso. Born in Lobdell, Louisiana as James Moore, Slim Harpo's songs have been covered by everyone from The Rolling Stones to Pink Floyd.

Just down the highway in Lafayette, Louisiana was where slide guitar master Sonny Landreth grew up. Landreth, who continues to live in the small town of Breaux Bridge, dazzles with his stunning, unique approach to his instrument. Many guitar players consider Landreth to be the master of slide guitar and are in the audience for his club and festival gigs including those at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival (April 26 - May 5, 2013). A large tent at this Fest is dedicated solely to blues.



Kenny Wayne Shepherd

Shreveport is the birthplace of young blues guitar phenom Kenny Wayne Shepherd, whose father was a local radio personality and promoter. Shepherd started playing guitar at a young age, and was invited on stage when he was only 13 by New Orleans bluesman Bryan Lee, where Shepherd stunned the audience with his playing. His first professional performance was at the Red River Revel in Shreveport.

No mention of the blues would be complete without heralding two of New Orleans most important artists, the late guitarists and vocalists Snooks Eaglin, Guitar Slim and Earl King. Their music, like Eaglin's classic "Young Boy Blues," Slim's "The Things That I Used to Do," and King's "Big Chief," live on in the repertoires of the next generation of musicians.

Be it swamp blues, jump blues, urban blues, swing blues, Delta blues, funk blues, or blues-based jazz, the blues abound from the swamps to the cities in Louisiana.

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