

March 2026

# Bluesletter

Washington



**HARD LOSSES**  
**STEVE RAIBLE**  
**SEAN DENTON**

**JOHN KESSLER**  
**TALKS NU BLUES**

**BB AWARD BALLOT**  
**IS HERE**

# Letter from the Editor



Hello Blues Lovers-

I am super excited. One of my longest held dreams for the WBS has been realized. We just counted up all the nominations and there were more than twice as many as last year. As a result, you may notice some differences in the people nominated. I see names on the ballot I haven't seen in years, and I don't see names that we have seen regularly in recent years. I also see people and events that have never been nominated to my memory and that are long past due. Thank you, WBS members.

Let me take you behind the scenes. The nominations were due 36 hours ago. This edition of the Bluesletter was due this morning. Kevin Young and Casey Sutton, vice-president and president of the WBS, respectively, nearly killed themselves counting up all the nominations and putting them in a beautiful spreadsheet. They got them to me at 7 p.m. last night. There were four nominees for each category, except for where there were ties, they explained, in which there were as many as six nominees. That sounded easy enough. The edition was done, all but the ballot form and this letter from the editor, which I knew I was going to write about the BB Awards ballot, but I still had a couple hours of day job work to do, so I didn't get to the e-mail with the BB ballot until 10. I started laying the ballot form out, thinking I'd have the edition off to the press by 1 am or so. Then I started to realize I had a lot of questions.

You might remember that earlier this year the Blues Society busted their tails to clarify the rules for the nominations. But I immediately saw one festival was nominated in two categories. Hadn't we just clarified the categories? I looked at the list of Hall of Fame nominees. A person can only win once in life; hadn't I seen one or two of those names in the Hall of Fame already? And I knew at least two of the images nominated as photo/video were in fact not photos or videos but designs, and therefore in the wrong category. There was no way I could sort it myself. I sent out an emergency call for a 10 am Zoom meeting, kept working to midnight, and went to bed.

This morning I sat down to the computer in my PJs and got on Zoom with four other volunteers who have worked on the BB Awards process for several months this year and were up to speed on the new rules. I am here to tell you that there is not one thing that this publication does in a year that is more labor intensive than the BB Awards Ballot. For several hours, we went through the nominations line by line.

"Hey, do you guys know who this DJ is? Is this a Washington DJ? I know there's a DJ by that name in Maine."

"I don't know, can you find one of the people who nominated this DJ?"

"Yeah, hold up, I've got the paper ballot right here. Oh, I know this person, I'll call her."

10 minutes later...

"That DJ does what show? On what station? Awesome, I didn't know they did blues!"

In the meantime...

"Wait, wasn't that album released in 2024? Somebody Google it."

"Yep, 2024, it doesn't qualify."

"Now we only have three nominees in the category. What's the next album on the nomination list?"

"You sure that band doesn't live in Idaho?"

And so on.

We made sure all the nominees for lifetime achievement had been playing in the area for at least 25 years. That took a LOT of Googling. We made sure that the festivals on the regional list had national acts on the lineup. We tried to identify the names of all the artists who had made the graphics and images on the list, and to clarify the names of the images. We still, at press time, did not know who designed the awesome poster for the 2025 Kitsap Blues and Brews Festival, but if it wins, we'll know by the time we need to get the plaques engraved!

I'm very proud of the work we did. This list has been checked over six ways from Sunday. Every nominee is qualified, every nomination is in the correct category. And I am SO proud of the work that you did, WBS members. This is a more inclusive list of nominees than we have seen in years.

But the magazine is going out a day late.

One day, this whole process will be seamless. What? I can dream!

Congratulations, nominees!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Polly O'Keary".

Polly O'Keary, Editor



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## Inside...

Once again, the Washington Blues community has lost two more well-respected members, and this month we reminisce with friends, fans, and band mates of Steve Raible and Sean Denton.

Eric Steiner recaps the 2026 IBCs that resulted in strong finishes for entrants from several Washington Blues Societies, not least our own.

Long time blues artist Dana Lupinacci joins the writing team on the Bluesletter this month with a discussion with KSER's John Kessler about his new radio show Nu Blues.

Steve Pearse reports from the February Blues Bash, and Kirk Anderson visits the Salmon Bay Eagles retirement party of Houserockers bassist John Lee.

Above: The Jim Allchin Gallery at the Blues Hall of Fame in Memphis is a nice place to visit when attending the IBCs. Photo by Eric Steiner.

Cover: Steve Raible (left, credit unknown) and Sean Denton (credit Gordy Mitchell) in February. Both musicians were long time members of the Washington blues community.

Cover design: Sean Donovan, Gatorboyproductions.com

## Washington Blues Society December Board Meeting

**THURSDAY, MARCH 12**

**5 p.m.**

**Location: APEX Everett**

**El Sid Cocktail Lounge**

**Address:**

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**Everett, Washington 98201**

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Please remove any watermark or branding information from all photos. Do not send low-resolution images, social media photos or collages.

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**MISSION STATEMENT**

The Washington Blues Society is a nonprofit organization whose purpose is to promote, preserve, and advance the culture and tradition of blues music as an art form. Annual membership is \$25 for individuals, and \$35 for couples. The Washington Blues Society is a tax-exempt nonprofit organization and donations are tax-deductible. The Washington Blues Society is affiliated with The Blues Foundation in Memphis, Tennessee.. Our website is [www.wablues.org](http://www.wablues.org). The Washington Blues Society received the Keeping the Blues Alive Award from The Blues Foundation in 2009.



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BLUES  
· ALIVE ·**

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**SEATTLE, WA 98127**

# Live Blues @ the Aurora Borealis

Keith Scott, Joel Astley, and The Joe Cook Blues Band a treat at Feb. Blues Bash!

By Steve Pearse

February's Blues Bash at the Aurora Borealis was a huge success, to the surprise of no one who showed up that Tuesday night! Playing to a large and enthusiastic crowd, three of the best blues performers to hit the all-ages AB's stage in Shoreline started the Fat Tuesday and Valentine's Day month off in grand style. As is the case for all Washington State Society Blues Bashes, the evening featured homages to the many great performers, past and present, who have enriched and supported the blues in all its forms over the years.

I began my visit to the AB with a pre-set sit-down chat at the performers' table, checking in with Keith Scott, Joel Astley, and Joe Cook. A few moments later, Blues Ambassador Christi Michelle grabbed the mic and reminded everyone to fill out those nomination ballots and tip generously—proceeds going to the musicians who donate their time and talent for this special event. Christi also took a moment to acknowledge special guests in attendance, including 'Salmon Dan'—Dan Abernethy—host of the Salmon Bay Eagles in Ballard. "Now get ready to see how powerful soulful, simple music can be!" enthused Kristi. Let the show begin!

## Keith Scott & Joel Astley

For the opening set, Chicagoland bluesman Keith Scott (Keith Scott and the Electric Blues Junkies) teamed up with fabulous

songwriter, singer and harp master Joel Astley (Wa Blues Society's "Best Harmonica," 2018 & '19) to present a fascinating mix of blues traditions and styles, including upbeat tunes from their respective treasure troves—the best of the blues.

Keith Scott's forty years in the business were on display from the get-go: this 'heavy blues' singer and guitarist honed his considerable skills with some of the greats, including Jimmy Dawkins, Buddy Guy, and Hip Linkchain. The 'fishin' musician' is a tireless tourer, leaving his Chicagoland roots for the Northwest each year, in addition to performing around the world. And throughout this first set, it was obvious to everyone that Scott enjoys jamming and collaborating with other first-rate blues musicians. Putting a varied set together with the legendary (26 'Best of the Blues' awards in seven years!) Joel Astley was clearly an inspired choice. Trading riffs (Keith on guitar, Joel on the harp), lyrics, and harmonies, these two seemingly laid-back blues legends kept their listeners on the edge of their seats. Following a slow rollin' number featuring Joel's soulful harp, the duo dove into "Addiction" from Keith's newest CD release, *Back to State Street*. Joel's magnetic, moving harp solos were a perfect complement to Keith's sweeping guitar riffs, his gritty, heartfelt lyrics and voice, a vibe that continued through several additional tunes. And then Astley's memorable "Carmen"—"It may take awhile, but you reap what you sow," Joel sang, then blew his magical harp up through at least two octaves. Amazing!

## The Joe Cook Blues Band

Featuring guitar man Tim 'Stoop Down' Sherman, bassist Patty 'Mighty Mite' Mey, drum master Conrad 'El Machete' Ormsby, and the astoundingly talented Joe Cook on vocals and harp, The Joe Cook Blues Band weighed in with an all-star performance for this second Blues Bash set. This erstwhile truck-driving, Minneapolis-based bluesman restarted his already stellar career in Seattle ten years ago. And Seattle-area blues fans are so much the richer for that decision! Voted "Best Blues Band" and "Best Traditional Blues Act" by the Washington Blues Society in 2024, The Joe Cook Blues Band brought its mix of Chicago and West Coast blues—with a shot of 'Texas Twist'—to the Aurora Borealis stage with gusto!

Starting off with a swingin' blues number, Joe jutted his right foot forward, leaned back, brought his harmonica to his lips, and ripped off a searing blues riff, igniting a varied and engaging performance that never waned for the duration of this fantastic Bash. A truly outstanding blues ensemble, The Joe Cook Band's presence on stage is the proverbial well-oiled machine, with each musical voice chiming in with perfect timing, creative vibe, and dramatic intensity. Clearly appreciating the audience's enthusiastic response to the music, Joe's focused, smooth voice caressed those great lyrics, while Tim Sherman's Fender Strat countered with some terrific Les Paul-like strums. Conrad Ormsby's

*Continued on pg. 17*



Joel Astley (left) and Keith Scott. Credit Steve Pearse



The Joe Cook Band. Credit Steve Pearse

# 25 Years ago this month....

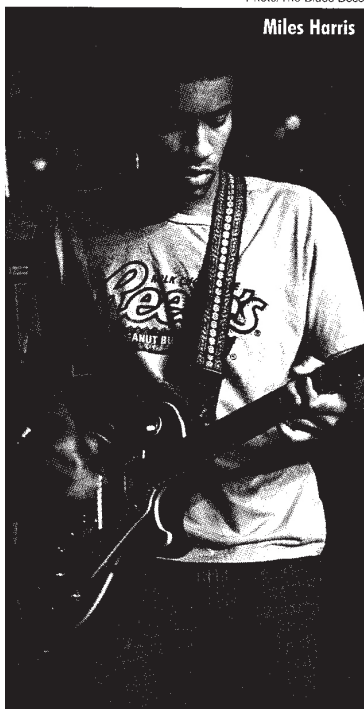
## BIG CITY *Rhythm &* BLUES Society

### Washington State Blues Society

By ERIC STEINER *President,  
Washington Blues Society*

It's been a busy year for blues music in the upper left hand corner of the country. We started off the year with the "Beale Street Kickoff" fundraiser with the South Sound Blues Association to help send competitors to the International Blues Challenge in Memphis. While snow blanketed our region, it didn't keep blues fans away from supporting blues music. Each blues society's Memphis-bound acts put on a great show. The acoustic duo of Randy Norris and Jeff Nicely refined their set in the solo/duo competition. The Wired! Band delivered a set that showed the audience why they are representing the Washington Blues

Photo/The Blues Boss



Miles Harris

58 Big City Rhythm & Blues • February-March 2012

Society in Memphis for the second year in a row.

The Red Hot Blues Sisters played their Memphis set, and Jumpin' Josh and Felicia honed their skills as they prepared to represent the South

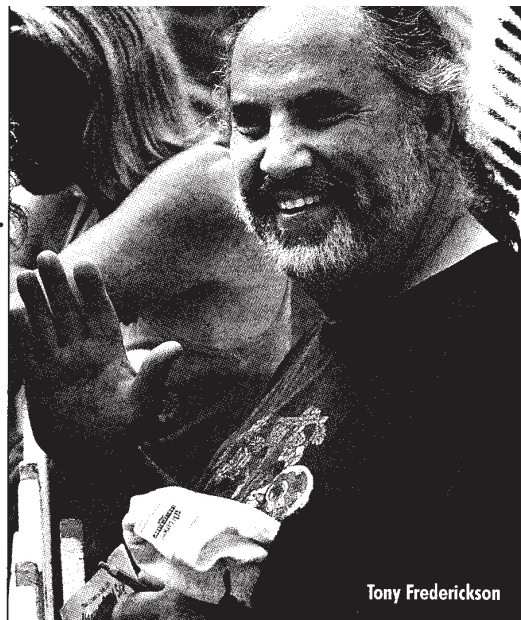
Sound Blues Association in the solo/duo category. Jumpin' Josh has played the Youth Showcase before, but this year, South Sound judges selected him to represent in the solo/duo category (and it's worth noting that these young people were not selected for the Youth Showcase, but the adult competition).

When I learned that Ted Todd of Spokane's KKZZ-FM would receive the 2012 Keeping the Blues Alive Award in the Commercial Radio category, I was thrilled! The Washington Blues Society Board unanimously agreed to nominate this legend from the Inland Empire Blues Society, just three years after John Kessler, host of the All Blues weekend radio program at National Public Radio affiliate KPLU-FM at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, received the award in the Public Radio category. Ted's Blues Blowtorch show is on a Clear Channel affiliate, and that station has long held top ratings for rock and roll programming. Ted's also active in the Blues Foundation and was a key part of our 2011 statewide blues competitions.

Thanks to the leadership of Merchandise Director Tony Frederickson, several blues societies in Washington State collaborated on a multi-venue series of competitions across the state. Local competitions were held at Daley's Cheap Shots in Spokane, at the UnTapped Blues and Brews Festival in the Tri-Cities, and at two award-winning western Washington blues clubs: Oxford Saloon in Snohomish and the Highway 99 Blues Club in Seattle. Taste of Music Festival in the historic town of Snohomish hosted the finals. Tony is already planning to expand

our "Road to Memphis" statewide for next year's competitions on Beale Street. Tony also coordinates a strong blues society presence at over 40 events throughout the Pacific Northwest and he's a dedicated blues cruiser on the Legendary Rhythm and Blues Cruise every winter and fall.

The *Bluesletter's* new editor, Jesse Phillips, is fresh out of the Art Institute of Seattle, and her graphic design skills have immensely improved this monthly 32-page publication. Each issue features coverage of the blues society's monthly "Blues Bashes" for all ages. The WBS board dispensed with calling these events "meetings" because more people show up for a "bash" than a "meeting." Recent blues bashes at the Red Crane Restaurant in Shoreline have featured two-time International Blues Challenge competitor J.D. Hobson, the Blues Buskers, Kevin Selfe and the Tornados, Miles Harris and Triple Threat, the Joseph Barton Trio, "Too Slim" Langford, and Lloyd Jones.



Tony Frederickson

Photo Margene

Music Director Suze Sims is actively recruiting youth bands to perform at the monthly showcase, and 2012 will feature a number of opportunities for younger bands to play.

Washington State may be better known for its exports in computer software, transportation, and coffee. But if you read the Washington Blues Society's redesigned *Bluesletter*, you will find a thriving blues presence across seven regions of the Evergreen State, with a Talent Guide spotlighting 140+ performers and a Venue Guide with over 100 listings. The *Bluesletter* also features blues CD reviews, interviews, stories, and a calendar designed to showcase the variety of blues opportunities around Washington State.

Contact: [www.wablues.org](http://www.wablues.org) or  
Eric Steiner, [president@wablues.org](mailto:president@wablues.org)  
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Photo Margene



The Wired! Band

# In Good Company: Blues in the Evergreen State

*"Our blues society's relationship with the Keeping the Blues Alive Award is an important one..."*

By Eric Steiner

En route to Memphis for this year's Keeping the Blues Alive Award luncheon, I distracted myself from a bit of turbulence aboard what I consider a "baby plane," an Embraer 175 jet, by reflecting on our state's history with this important Blues Foundation recognition.

The Washington Blues Society just might be one of the leading Blues Foundation affiliates in supporting blues recognition for select blues festivals, DJs, promoters and other blues partners that work to preserve and promote blues music related to this very prestigious award.

Our blues society's relationship with the Keeping the Blues Alive Award is an important and historic one, and I am very pleased that the Washington Blues Society has been directly responsible for nominating, nurturing or supporting over 10 recipients of this prestigious award. The following is a quick summary of my research in that "baby plane" between Dallas and Memphis earlier this year.

**2026**

Blues Venue: Jazz Alley, Seattle, WA.

**2022**

Promoter: Can't Stop the Blues, Bellevue, WA.

**2017**

Photography: Suzanne Swanson, White Rock, B.C., Canada (in partnership with the White Rock Blues Society and the Fraser Valley Blues Society, British Columbia).

**2017**

Blues Venue: Highway 99 Blues Club, Seattle, WA.

**2015**

Blues Festival: Winthrop Rhythm & Blues Festival, Methow Valley, WA.

**2013**

Blues Festival: Mt. Baker Rhythm & Blues Festival, Deming, WA.

**2012**

Blues DJ (Commercial): Ted Todd, KKZX-FM, Spokane, WA (in partnership with the Inland Empire Blues Society, Spokane, WA).

**2009**

Blues Foundation Affiliated Organization: Washington Blues Society, Seattle, WA.

**2009**

Promoter (Special Award): Barbara Hammerman, Gig Harbor, WA.

**2009**

Blues DJ (Public): John Kessler, KPLU-FM, Tacoma, WA.

**2007**

Art & Photography: Jef Jaisun, Seattle, WA.

**2000**

Blues DJ (Commercial): Marlee Walker, Seattle, WA.

**1994**

Blues DJ (Commercial): Roberta Penn, Seattle, WA.



The Keeping the Blues Alive Award for Jazz Alley, nominated by Eric Steiner, rests on a table at the KBA Award luncheon. Photo by Eric Steiner.

I heartily encourage Washington Blues Society members and Bluesletter readers to explore the rich history behind the Keeping the Blues Alive Awards of The Blues Foundation each time they visit the Blues Hall of Fame Museum in Memphis in person or virtually online at [www.blues.org](http://www.blues.org).

Any member of The Blues Foundation may nominate candidates for a Keeping the Blues Alive Award, and I hope that Washington Blues Society members who have joined The Blues Foundation will consider nominating venues, artists, events and individuals with a significant track record in preserving and promoting blues music, art and culture in the Evergreen State.

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# John Kessler talks Nu Blues at KNKX

*The new addition to the long-running show All Blues showcases blues with appeal to younger audiences*

By Dana Lupinacci

I had the good fortune of spending time talking with John Kessler recently about his 27-year history with KNKX (formerly known as KPLU) to learn, among other things, about his journey to become the long running and prime-time host of All Blues. All Blues is mostly comprised of Vintage Blues, Jump Blues, Classic Blues, R&B and Rock Blues. Along with many fond memories of tuning into All Blues over the years, feeling inspired, informed and grateful for the fact that the Blues remained alive and well over the airwaves with his singular, engaging delivery and encyclopedic knowledge, I also noticed that there was a burgeoning element in tunes that John was playing occasionally on All Blues.

In August 2025, John Kessler debuted a show called Nu Blues, now airing on Saturdays and Sundays from 9 PM-Midnight, following All Blues from 6 PM-9 PM. He explained that over the last 4-5 years on All Blues, he had been introducing tunes that were in the realm of Nu Blues. The Nu Blues show has completely new playlists (with a few exceptions being played such as Buddy Guy and Irma Thomas) and a new catalog of artists. Nu Blues is an expansion on the continuum of playing Blues music. Both All Blues and Nu Blues shows are available on demand at KNKX.org.

In asking about the reasons for the programming change, I learned that the analytics showed that the average age of the All Blues

listener was 65 and older, hence the audience was aging out. To stay viable in a changing market and attract new and younger listenership for years to come, Nu Blues was born in collaboration with KNKX's brilliant Director of Music Content, Carol Handley, as well as John's hard work, passion and dedication. Nu Blues is the new cool; still with the same integrity, journalistic, and musical excellence that is the gold standard of NPR Public Radio.

I asked John what he had to do to prepare for the Nu Blues program and he said he needed to source new material to the tune of 300-400 new songs which was a monumental challenge as this genre is still experimental, and somewhat on the fringe. In addition to sourcing from on-line playlists and platforms including Apple Music, Google Music, SoundCloud, BandCamp and anywhere else he could find, John stated that the two main criteria he abided by in sourcing this new music was that he found any rabbit hole he could and dove down it! Additionally, he imagined himself as a 20-something year old and when he was listening to tunes, he asked himself – is this cool? I love that! He continues to source weekly for 10-20 more new tunes to add to the Nu Blues playlist.

I also asked John what criteria qualified tunes and what defines Nu Blues? He said it needed to have some direct connection to the roots of the Blues. Other names to describe it are Bluestronica or ElectroBlues. Examples of ElectroBlues bands are Slo Leak, Little Axe and The Soul of John Black.

He stated that Nu Blues features producers influenced by electronic dance music (EDM) with vintage recordings. He mentioned British producer Charlie Beale who sampled Robert Johnson, adding drum machines and loops and Dutch producer miXendorp, who works with delta blues player in real time, adding new beats to their tunes. RL Burnside had been one of those players when he was alive. John said there is a finite amount of this music out there, but a younger audience member that heard,



John Kessler, Credit Rick Bower

for example, a traditional Muddy Waters tune, may not be as interested in it because it was before their time, but they may have an interest in it when new and key electronic components are added.

John also listed four new categories that fall under Nu Blues as follows:

1. **Electronica:** Drum machines, samples, loops
2. **Hard Blues:** leaning heavily on Electric guitar
3. **Soul Blues:** he noted the band Southern Ave as an example
4. **Nu Blues Americana:** It combines elements of the other categories but has more of an acoustic component

In 2016, many of you will remember that Pacific Lutheran University (PLU) was going to sell KPLU to KUOW. All Blues was going to be eliminated. A grassroots fundraising campaign was started and this great Blues community of ours collectively raised their voices in protest, acted, and contributed greatly to the fact that an unprecedented 8 million dollars was raised and KPLU re-branded to KNKX.

You can collectively share your voice again and let younger generations know about Nu Blues. Let's help turn it into a "tastemaker" program!



WASHINGTON BLUES SOCIETY  
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**Doug Cooper \* John Cuttitta**  
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# Steve Raible's death in February shocks the blues community

*The Seattle multi-instrumentalist was a fixture of the music scene for almost 50 years*

By Polly O'Keary

There are few musicians with roots as deep in Seattle as Steve Raible had. His father, Dr. Peter Raible, was a reverend at Seattle's University Unitarian Church, and his mother was a local celebrity known as Dee Dee Rainbow, an artist and teacher once voted the Second Most Eccentric Woman in Seattle for her elaborate rainbow costumes. Raible grew up among Seattle's creative community in the 1960s and '70s, and among his childhood friends was Steve Metcalf, son of the legendary bassist and Seattle Jazz Hall of Famer, Chuck Metcalf. Raible's music career began early, and since the late 1970s, he has performed blues, jazz, and R&B with most of the area's most well-known musicians. In February, Raible died suddenly of natural causes while in his winter home of Tucson, and his friends and band mates, past and present, shared their memories of his long career.

"I am very shocked," said Scotty Lind, who worked with Raible in the Charles White Band, one of the great Seattle blues powerhouses of the 2000s. "He was just an all-around great guy. We had some very fun times over the years. I'm going to miss him very much."

Raible was a musician's musician, professional and exceptionally skilled, Lind said.

"He was so multitalented, on the ball, always on time, Lind said. "He was fantastic, not only good at bass, but he could play guitar. Then I saw him get behind the drums, and he could play those too. We did the Pilchuck River Festival, and I had my own band, and he played before us, and he was playing slide guitar. He filled in good with everyone. It was



Steve Raible (left) as a long-haired teenager in Seattle. Photo courtesy of Bill Blackstone

a pleasure working with him."

Art Watkins worked with Raible longer than anyone else, beginning in the late 1970s and collaborating off and on until the two wound up together in the 10-piece horn band Mojo Cannon, the band Raible was with when he passed.

"I've known him for almost 50 years," Watkins said. "We gigged over in Bellevue around 1978." The two were in a band called RPM in the early 1980s, led by keyboardist Steve Minzel, then worked together in the Marva Scott Show toward the end of the decade.

"Then we got into Freddy Pink and the High Tops," Watkins said. "We played a lot in the Pioneer Square days. That was a fun band. We warmed up for Sly with Freddy Pink." After that, Raible worked in a reggae band for a while before forming a group with Watkins called The Ray Watts, for Raible and Watkins. It was the first group they'd been in where Raible played guitar; previously, he was always a bass player. After Charles White died, Raible and Watkins reconnected in a traditional big band called the 88th Street Big Band, which became the band Soul Purpose.

Raible also released a solo album in 2000 called Fat Flea, Watkins remembered. "I think he played all the instruments," he said.

Of all those projects, Mojo Cannon was Watkins's favorite experience working with Raible.

Craig Daly of Mojo Cannon also loved working with Raible and remembers hiring him as a stroke of good fortune.

"We lost our guitar player, Danny Hoefler from Tower of Power," he said. "We were lucky enough to get Steve; he was splitting his time between Tucson, Arizona, and here. We would have Steve come back in May, and then we had Mark Nofsker from Red House for the rest of the year. Him and Steve complemented each other well."

Daly said that he couldn't imagine Raible doing anything but playing music.

"He's been a musician all his life," Daly said. "That's all he's done."

Bill Blackstone, another alumnus of the Charles White Band, agreed.



Steve Raible, credit April Dawn

"He was effortless to work with as a talented, skilled bassist, guitarist, and singer, a true reliable professional, a team player," he stated.

Blackstone remembers Raible's colorful mother fondly.

"Steve's Mom was notably famous at Washington fairs, and festivals, in full costume spreading happiness as 'The Rainbow Lady,' he said. "She was a pure dose of joy every time I chatted with her

Family stayed important to Raible all his life, Blackstone said.

"His wife Susan and his daughters were also top shelf people. His wife retired from a career as a lead nurse," he said. "His daughters both succeeded in college, and are now doing well. Steve was proud of them and spoke of them often."

In recent years, Raible and his wife Sue had been fixing up a place in Tucson, Daly said.

But it was always good to see him when he came back to the Pacific Northwest each year, Blackstone said.

"I enjoyed Steve's birthday last summer" he said. "There were many folks there from our Seattle blues musician community. He will be missed. May he rest in heavenly peace."

# In remembrance of Sean Denton

*Members of the community share memories of the well-loved singer, songwriter, and guitarist*

By Rick Bowen

Tacoma-born singer, songwriter and guitarist Sean Denton passed peacefully in his Anacortes home February 6, 2026 after a long battle with illness. Denton was a friend to everyone in the Pacific Northwest music community, having been a founding member of a dozen area bands including The Gryffyn Band, Pop Mechanix, Hard Times, Big Dog and the Boogiemans, Blues Playground, The Usual Suspects, MaD BoJo, and fronting his own Sean Denton Band. He played with Jeff Nicely in Blues Playground for more than 12 years. And Denton was the anchorman of several notable long-running Blues Jams and House Band residencies at venerable Washington clubs, including CCR, The Cedar Stump, The Stanwood Hotel, The Madison Ave Pub, and The 907 in Snohomish. Denton earned five Best of the Blues Awards, from the Washington Blues Society, including the Lifetime Achievement award in 2024.

Since news of his passing went out, members of the music community have shared remembrances of him

Cookie Spirk, a country and Americana artist and former club owner, said that Denton used to support the Northwest Music Foundation, an Arlington-based organization focused on charitable works in the music community.

“I first met Sean at the Stanwood Hotel Sunday night jams back in the early 2000s,”

she said. “He was definitely one of the ‘good guys.’”

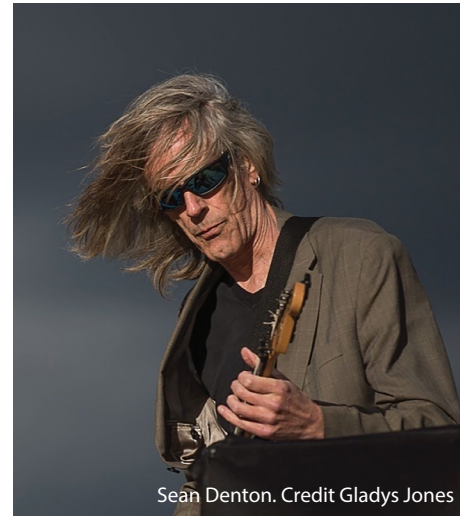
Friend Dawn Gill, who credits Denton with introducing her to the local music scene after they met at the Stanwood Hotel, mourned “the huge hole his loss represents to the music community and everyone who was lucky enough to be touched by his kindness and grace.”

Gill is not the only person who gives credit to Denton for bringing them into the world of music. “I was 19 and showed up to a jam at Cyndy’s Broiler,” said musician Jake Rattet. “I had never been there and knew almost nobody. I was scared as hell. Sean encouraged me, brought me up, and we jammed. He showed me how to play songs on the fly and made me feel comfortable. Like I belonged, and from that I was accepted into an amazing blues community with open arms.”

“I loved playing music with this fellow,” said music colleague Tom Henry. [He was a] very kind man, great player and singer of the blues.”

Jeffrey James Williams remembers fondly giving Denton the nickname Mr. Smooth, a nickname that former band mate Tom Jones recalled as being especially appropriate for the lanky, dapper artist.

“In all my years of playing music I have never met anyone like Sean,” Jones said. “We played over 250 shows together and recorded an



Sean Denton. Credit Gladys Jones

album together. In all that time, we never had a bad night. We always went home with a smile on our faces. He was always calm, collected, and smooth as silk, hence the nickname Mr. Smooth. He was always a gentleman, well-dressed, and never had a bad word to say about anyone. In a world where most guitarists have a pedalboard that takes up a quarter of the stage, his tone came from his fingers. My time playing with him will never be duplicated. I miss him dearly.”

Perhaps no one had more history with Denton than Rick Mutter of the Gryffyn Band.

“For 55 years, I had the privilege of sharing stages and making music with Sean, an exceptional talent and even better friend” he said. “From our early days with The Gryffyn Band—which reformed in various iterations and members over the decades—through Hard Times, Big Dog and the Boogie Men, and countless reunion gigs, his gift as a singer, songwriter, guitarist, and performer never ceased to inspire me. The Gryffyn Band produced two CDs together, a testament to the band members’ creative partnership and Sean’s songwriting talent. Playing alongside Sean in that collaboration was one of the great joys of my musical life. Beyond his considerable talents, what I’ll remember most is his kindness, his unwavering support, and the joy he brought to every performance. The music lives on, but I’ll miss my friend deeply.”



Sean Denton, credit Denise Hathaway

# International Blues Challenge: A Proud History

*"Taj picked up a ukelele and described the history of this uniquely Hawaiian instrument..."*

By Eric Steiner

I am particularly proud that the Solo/Duo and Band entrants of the Washington Blues Society in Seattle and the Inland Empire Blues Society in Spokane made it to the International Blues Challenge Semi-Finals this year in Memphis. Our Solo/Duo competitor, Pittman & Sutton reached the finals at the historic Orpheum Theatre, and Jonathan Pitman received the award for Best Harmonica.

Let me try to succinctly recognize the hard work that these blues acts did to get to Memphis after qualifying in their local Blues Foundation affiliate's local competition.

## A Little Context...

A total of 73 Blues Foundation affiliates from 14 countries entered 56 solo/duo and 65 bands into the International Blues Challenge (not including 14 youth blues acts).

Of these 73 affiliates, only 11 blues societies' solo/duo and band entrants advanced together from Thursday's quarterfinals to Friday's semifinals. While 65 bands entered the competition, 29 advanced to the semifinals, and of the 56 solo/duo acts who started, only 20 made it to the semifinals.

I am pleased to report that both the solo/duo



An interactive hologram of Taj Mahal at the Blues Hall of Fame museum allows visitors to converse with the artist. Credit Eric Steiner.

and band entrants from both the Inland Empire Blues Society and the Washington Blues Society were in that group. While I didn't see the solo/duo representative from Spokane's blues society, Backbeat Slam (Sammy Eubanks and Steve Sarkey), I congratulated Bobby Patterson when I saw him Club 152 on Beale. I thought that each of our semifinalists, Pitman & Sutton and the Joel Astley Band, certainly upped their game, too. I just wished the Joel Astley Band had joined Pitman & Sutton at the finals on Saturday!

Given the sheer scope of the world's largest gathering of blues acts in Memphis, I have always thought that making it to the semifinals gives those performers special bragging rights not only for their electronic press kits but also their day-to-day promotional materials as they make their way in what I consider one of the most difficult ways to make a living as a performing artist.

I hope that Jonathan and Kevin market this achievement to land gigs and professionally pursue the passion that sparked their initial interest in the first Washington Blues Society blues competition that got them to the finals in Memphis.

## A Quick Trip...

As I found a substitute caregiver to assist my wife in her recovery from ankle replacement surgery in early January, I felt lucky to have two nights in Memphis for the award luncheon and the semifinals. Since 2007, I had always bought the "All Access" ticket to enjoy the workshops, impromptu jam sessions, and networking opportunities facilitated by The Blues Foundation. Instead, I bought the award lunch ticket and a \$10 wristband to see acts in 15 Beale Street venues over two nights.

I returned to the Blues Hall of Fame Museum. For me, each visit is special. Selfishly so. When I was on the board of The Blues Foundation from 2010-2013, I served on the committee that "Raised the Roof" to make this dream a reality.

After thanking Little Milton who welcomed me from a bench outside the front door, I descended to the galleries downstairs. My first stop was the one sponsored by Washington Blues Society member Jim Allchin (and Blues Foundation Charter Member). The gallery reflects Jim's passions as a guitarist and I marveled at the presentation of Luther Allison's guitar, CD and LP. I then made a beeline for the hologram at the end of the hall. I couldn't wait to see Taj Mahal.

I learned about this one-of-a-kind hologram from a presentation that featured Blues Founda-



Bruce Iglauer of Alligator Records (left), Benny Turner, and Lee Oskar. Credit Eric Steiner.

tion President and CEO Kimberley Horton and "Blues Music" magazine Editor Art Tipaldi on my first Legendary Rhythm and Blues Cruise two years ago.

She was right. Interacting with the hologram was just like talking to Taj Mahal himself.

I had the good fortune of hanging out with Taj Mahal in the Neptune Lounge aboard the blues cruise, and his hologram was a remarkable way to learn from him again.

After checking with a Blues Hall of Fame Museum docent nearby, I asked Taj (the hologram) to tell me a little bit about the ukelele.

Taj picked up a ukelele and described the history of this uniquely Hawaiian instrument. He must have talked, laughed, and strummed for about three or four minutes. I was simply amazed at my first experience interacting with a hologram. It was almost just like being with him back in the Neptune Lounge on the cruise!

I couldn't believe it.

As Taj set the ukelele down, the docent asked me if I'd like to ask Taj Mahal anything else.

"Taj," I said. "Thank you very much. I just love your music."

He smiled and nodded.

"Why, that's nice," he said. "I'm glad. Thank you, too."

*Continued on Page 22*

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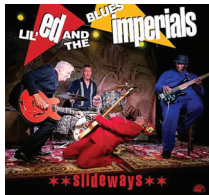


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# Album Reviews

Jimmy Carpenter, Blue Moon Marquee. Eric Bibb, Teresa James, Lil' Ed and the Imperials



Lil' Ed and the Imperials  
*Sideways*  
(Alligator Records)

Representing their 10th album release and demonstrating an amazingly polished musicality and verve established over a nearly-40-year run, Lil' Ed & the Imperials has turned out a masterful collection of 12 original tunes and one glorious cover. Ranging from deeply-blue laments to joyous, romping up-tempo numbers, "Sideways" reflects Chicago electric blues at their best, featuring standout instrumental performances and engaging, soulful vocals.

Ed Williams has to be one of if not the best slide guitar-playing bluesman in the business. His guitar is alternately incendiary ("Bad All By Myself"), soul-searing ("Homeless Blues," "What Kind of World Is This?"), and seemingly frenetic but always under control ("One Foot On the Brake, One On the Gas"). And the Imperials, each a superb musician in his own right, form a tight, interactive force, creating a seemingly telepathic wall of blues.

Romping, stomping "Bad All By Myself" rockets this CD off the ground. Heavy bass and guitar hits, then "Hey!"—and a 7-note riff says 'take-off'! "I came home late last night with whiskey on my breath," Lil' Ed declares, "my baby said she was leaving me ...I could do better my myself...Now she's gone." Interspersed by the slide guitar's gritty echo, this opener is jet-fueled.

Following the high-energy "One Foot On the Brake, One on the Gas," the album's third entry, "The Flirt in the Car Wash Skirt," pulls together keyboard boogie (Ben Levin) with Chicago-style shuffle—perfect for this rollicking number. "I fell in love with the girl in the car wash skirt!" Lil' Ed yells, slide guitar in free-solo mode with those driving boogie keys underneath. What fun!

As we know, slow, emotive laments also characterize the Chicago blues. With its note-bending guitar work and pulsing organ-mode keys, this "Homeless Blues"

cover features superb voice and instrumental mixing. A tale of misery and heart-break, Lil' Ed & the Imperials' version defines greatness. The complementary guitars (Mike Garrett, rhythm), Kelly Littleton's delicate percussion work, and bassist James 'Pookie' Young's pulsing play underscore lyrics of despair: "...they had children, had suitcase and clothes and they were searching, couldn't find no place to go."

Lil' Ed's voice is impassioned, engaging, authentic. How he makes that happen while striding along on the slide guitar is just short of miraculous.

Original and raw, yet always under total control, "Sideways" defines high-energy, gritty Chicago blues. Decades of innovation, expertise and performance, and it shows. Blues Hall of Famers, indeed!

—Steve Pearse



Blue Moon Marquee  
*Get Your Feathers Ready*  
(Self Released)

Hard on the heels of their multiple Maple Leaf Blues Award-winning 2024 album *Scream, Holler & Howl*, the Vancouver Island duo Blue Moon Marquee have embarked on a career defining collaboration with The Northern Cree Singers for landmark release "Get Your Feathers Ready." Drawing inspiration from his own roots growing up in Northern Alberta and the recent film "Rumble," about the indigenous influence on North American music guitarist A.W Cardinal sought out the Pow Wow and Round Dance drum and singing group based in Maskwacis Alberta for a once in a lifetime session that blends Prewar Folk and Country Blues with native Cree rhythm and melodies in a freewheeling trance like tone poem reinterpretation of Gospel and Delta Standards along with original vignettes. The upright Bass of Jas Collette holds the global center while the five Cree warriors howl and wail in tantric joy responding to Cardinal's gritty slide playing and guttural storytelling that channels Charlie Patton, John Lee Hooker and Chester Burnett in their Glory.

The tracks ebb and flow seamlessly in the live off the floor recording from intimate interludes to Raucous foot stomping dance tracks that merge the juke joint with the campfire in a sacred circle. The rag time number "Put Your Feathers On," is a date night call out that reflects the optimism of the album title that tell us to prepare ourselves for something special. When Cardinal launches into "Rollin' and Tumblin," and "Soul Of A Man," and Northern Cree respond the 20th century is met with echoes from hundreds of years before creating a sound that is both primeval and post-modern.

—By Rick J Bowen



Eric Bibb  
*One Mississippi*  
(Repute Records)

Grammy-nominated Eric Bibb has done it again: re-invented himself with this just-released, meticulously crafted album. Produced by (also Grammy-nominated) Glen Scott Uppsala, Sweden, this is an engaging, polished collection of original numbers and covers featuring Bibb's nuanced, articulate baritone voice and superb acoustic guitar work. Across these 16 (13 original) cuts, 73-year-old Bibb tells stories born of the past as they meet the present, each addressing the theme of our desperate need for justice and peace in a cracked-up world.

The album features British virtuoso Robbie McIntosh, whose guitar provides dramatic harmonic and melodic riffs across many of this collection's songs; Greger Andersson, harp master; and gorgeous backing vocals by Shameka Simon and Sara Bergkvist Scott, together with superb supporting studio musicians.

Bibb's version of Fred Koller's and childhood friend Janice Ian's "One Mississippi" swirls along like that mighty river's ever-varying currents, serving as the album's central metaphor. Like the primordial river, the ebb and flow of the South's often cruel history keeps speaking to us:

"Deep in the heart of Dixie where cotton is still the king / if your slide on down to the

delta, you can hear the banjos ring . . . a poor boy down on Parchman Farm...[notorious Mississippi state prison near the site of martyred Emmett Till's murder] ...another day in ball and chain."

Bibb's soothing, easy-going voice would seem to relieve the pain of the Jim Crow South, but it's this acoustic Americana Blues man's way of engaging us as he addresses facts and images we cannot afford to ignore.

This is roots music, embellished by Bibb's resonant voice, storytelling mastery, and engagement of a substance and style that pulls us along, one historically-centered blues number at a time.

The next number, "Muddy Waters," opens with a searing harp riff, then glides into a call-and-response refrain against McIntosh's slide guitar: "I got muddy waters in my shoes; I get muddy waters all in my blood... I've been down in Alabama, the way they treat me is more than I can bear," Bibb cries. "Things ain't exactly like they used to be, but I'm still blue." The river, the journey, the reminder that what's passed is still true.

An album high point, "Crossroads Marilyn Monroe" is a poignant lament that retells the tragedy of Emmett Till, alluding to the 14-year-old victim's white accuser's vicious lie that resulted in his grisly death.

This one commingles white America's icon of beauty with an allusion to great bluesman Robert Johnson's elemental story of his deal with the devil. Amid a sweep of harmonic strings, Bibb relates the tale of the erstwhile "Mississippi delta queen" who finally confessed to her lie—50 years too late.

And now for an apparently completely different tack: "Change" opens with energetic guitar riffs, accompanied by snappy drumming and bass as Eric Bibb picks up the pace. But that essential theme remains: "We're gonna change our way of thinking. . . The way we see each other, the way we treat one another . . . we're gonna change our way of living," intones Bibb, followed by a guitar solo evoking the feel of delicately plucked strings, and enhanced by the perfect harmonics of singers Simon and Bergkvist Scott.

So much more terrific variation on a class blues theme here, but I want to call out the

album's third cut, "This One Don't," for its amazing, soaring strains across a single chord! Even as Bibb laments the inability of many to discover some sort of unity out of today's many divisions ("Turn to the left,

turn to the right, tell me what do you see, whole lotta folks gettin' all riled up... not one single thing can they agree"), this is a joyous, inspirational track. Here McIntosh's guitar is on fire, and Andersson's harp rings across, through and around that beautiful blues chord, accompanied by those luxuriant choral sounds, Americana's roots. A fantastic collection, well worth listening to and pondering on.

-By Steve Pearse



Teresa James and the Rhythm Tramps  
*Bad at Being Good*  
(Momojo Records)

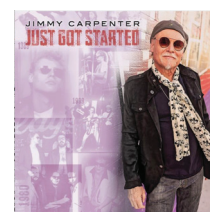
The L.A based Grammy nominated band Teresa James, and the Rhythm Tramps return with their 14th career album, *Bad At Being Good*, continuing their legacy as masters of the rockin' roadhouse blues that has become their signature sound. Award-winning producers Terry Wilson and John Porter (Buddy Guy, Taj Mahal, Keb Mo) assembled highly skilled and seasoned players to once again stretch the boundaries of their Texas Blues roots with touches of soul and hints of New Orleans style.

For the dozen new tracks partners in crime Teresa James (piano/vocals) and Terry Wilson (bass), augmented the core group of Billy Watts (guitar) Darrell Leonard (trumpet), Paulie Cerra (saxophone) and Tony Braunagel (drums), with Grammy winners keyboard master Kevin McKendree, and drummer Jay Bellerose while keeping things in the family by inviting James and Wilson's son-in-law, Richard Millsap (John Fogerty's touring drummer) to play percussion throughout. Session guitar master Dean Parks adds flavor as James offers advice to a friend on the smokey R&B track "Trouble in Paradise", David P. Jackson, named California Country Music Associa-

tion's Best Instrumentalist in 1996, adds accordion to the swamp blues "Anytime is Alright." The singular sounds of Grammy-winning pianist and New Orleans legend Jon Cleary along with slide guitar from producer John Porter join the party for extra special treatment to the title track.

Opening track "Love's A Full Time Job," is a jaunty number with hot horn jabs and rollicking piano. The brooding "Is Anything Alright," showcases James' emotional range, while the slinky groove of "I Got This Thing," helps her spell out her affections for her lover man. The topical "All About The Benjamins," rocks hard and cuts to the bone with its provocative commentary. James sings the praises of a dear one during "Angel On My Shoulder." The slow blues lesson to the lovelorn "Treat Her Like You Want Her To Treat You," are words we all need to hear. More great horns lines fill out the Philly soul inspired "Say What You Will," and James and her piano lead the fellas thru the honkey tonk party anthem "We Came To Rock." The sorted tale of a wandering husband "Close Down The Blues Bar," ends the set with sass and style.

-Rick J Bowen



Jimmy Carpenter  
*Just Got Started*  
(Gulf Coast Records)

Jimmy Carpenter's third album on Gulf Coast Records, "Just Got Started," is a lively and diverse record with blues, funk and soul aplenty from one of the premier sax players on the blues scene today. This 2024 release caught my attention right from the start with "(Feels Like) I Just Got Started," co-written by producer-guitarist Christoffer "Kid" Andersen from the unique perspective of a working musician. Other originals standout, too, including one about his home town since 2016, "I Only Gamble with My Heart," the soulful love song, "Live Again," and the high energy instrumental,

Continued on Pg. 16

## CD Reviews

Continued from pg. 15

“Jimmy Shimmy.” Exceptional covers include King Curtis’ classic “Midnight Blue,” Allan Toussaint’s funky “Night People,” and Delbert McClinton’s soulful “Leap of Faith,” where guest vocalist Lisa “Little Baby” Andersen flat-out steals the song from the dream team Greaseland Studio band! Since 2014, Jimmy’s garnered 10 Blues Music Award nominations for Blues Instrumentalist – Horns with well-deserved wins in 2021 and 2022. This recognition builds on Grammy recognition for co-writing “Tomb Tune” on the New Orleans Night-crawlers’ “Atmosphere,” winner of the 2020 Grammy Award for Best Regional Roots Music Album. In addition to leading the Las Vegas Blues Society in his 46th year as a pro musician, Jimmy’s the Music Director of the Big Blues Bender’s HART Party benefitting the Handy Artists Relief Trust. He also in the Bender Brass Band, and since 2016, the Big Blues Bender’s HART party has contributed \$750,000 to this important Blues Foundation initiative.

It was a thrill for me to sit at Jimmy’s table

at the 2022 Keeping the Blues Alive Award luncheon in Memphis when blues maven Art Tipaldi announced that the HART Party received a KBA! The CD’s core band features Jimmy on sax and vocals, Christoffer “Kid” Andersen on guitar and organ, Jim Pugh on keys and Derrick D’Mar Martin on drums and percussion, and one of the nine guest artists is bassist Jerry “Groovemaster” Jemmott, who played with legendary tenor sax player King Curtis on the legendary Atco label in its heyday. This CD landed in the Billboard Top 10 and Apple iMusic Top 40 two years ago, and when Jimmy’s not keeping the blues alive at Las Vegas’ Sand Dollar, he’s on tour with his own band or Bill Murray & His Blood Brothers (feat. Gulf Coast labelmates Mike Zito and Albert Castiglia). I might be a little late to Jimmy Carpenter’s party with this review, but I think that good music like the dozen cuts on “Just Got Started” are timeless.

-By Eric Steiner



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# Houserockers bassist John Lee retires with a party

*Friends and fans gathered at the Salmon Bay Eagles to celebrate with a jam session*

*By Kirk Anderson*

“Seattle Houserockers bass player and founding member John Lee is retiring. We’re having a party for him, and you are invited!”...

...read the invitation from Dan Newton.

The date: Sunday, February 1, 2026

The start time: 3 p.m.

The place, The Salmon Bay Eagles, Seattle’s longest continuously running blues club, the hippest “dive bar” in town.”

The info: “All star guest performers, including:

- The Seattle Houserockers
- The Vududes
- Plus monster jam session.”

The Salmon Bay Eagles Club is a living legacy of the Fraternal Order of Eagles, which was founded in February of 1898 by six theater owners who gathered in the shipyards to discuss a musician’s strike. As time went on, they remained together as a positive force for Seattle and the Seattle music community. On Saturday March 29, 2025, the Salmon Bay Eagles club celebrated its 92nd anniversary.

## Live Blues @ the Aurora Borealis

*Continued from pg. 5*

steady, drum worked in perfect sync with Patty Mey’s rich, spot-on bass. Magic!

Listening to Joe’s voice, everyone could tell that he not only wrote but also had lived those lyrics. An engaging performer, Joe connects with his audience in a highly personal way. Which might explain why so many folks walked over to the dance floor and started strutting and spinning to the music! Nominated many times for “Best Blues Harp,” Cook is a master of tonal inflection, hitting sweet chords and individual notes alike with the ease and passion that emerges through absolute mastery. And Tim Sherman on guitar could easily be a headliner himself—what a superb musician! From one tune to the next, the band made

Bluesletter readers already know the Seattle Houserockers (Core members John Lee, Dan Newton Marty Lockwood and John Marshall) as one of the best regional blues and rhythm & blues bands. Formed in 2010, their musical history in the community goes back further as each member of the Seattle Houserockers were already journeymen. John Lee’s own history here covers 50 years of laying down bass lines. Their set was full of warmth as each of their individual talents again melded together for one last time, officially. The feelings of so many warm memories (and lost memories) flowed from the stage throughout the gathering of family and friends.

There was an impromptu off-line-up jam between with Billy Reed and Gary Charles that just kind of started up during the intermission which kept spontaneity at the forefront of this tribute afternoon.

The VuDudes are not only long-time friends of John Lee but also seriously respected musicians in the Seattle music grounds. Originally formed in 1997 as the successor to local band Fat Cats, the VuDudes bring their unique style to stages across the region. Pat Gossan, Dan Newton, Major Darst and James Busch form the VuDudes ran through many musical memories during the retire-

each complex, seemingly choreographed number come across naturally, organically, memorably. And the infectious energy coursed throughout the set, from hoppin’ stompin’ tunes to moments when the band slowed things down a little, taking us into the slow, smoldering blues we all love.

Once again, the Washington Blues Society organized and hosted a fantastic Tuesday night Blues Bash at the Aurora Borealis. What a treat it was to see and hear three blues masters—Keith Scott, Joel Astley, and the Joe Cook Blues Band—on the same stage, and all in fine form. More evidence that The Blues truly is very much alive and kickin’ in our part of the musical universe.



ment party set

The all-star jam including John Stephan, Steve Bailey, Mark Dufresne, Zak Stoldt and Major Darst, ran through a great set of their common knowledge.

I know I repeat myself here, but the Seattle community of blues and rhythm & blues players is so much more robust than I ever could have imagined when I moved here eight years ago. Being able to have had the distinct pleasure of being in the room where so much respect and love flowed is one of the top musical experiences I have been privileged to be part of.



# Blues on the Road: March

Selected touring acts headed to the Evergreen State this month

By Eric Steiner

This month's Blues on the Road preview of nationally touring blues artists features Ronnie Baker Brooks, Sugaray Rayford, Mindi Abair, Devon Allman's Blues Project, Tony Furtado, Ruthie Foster and The Record Company. This is an admittedly personal set of suggestions for live blues shows that sparked my interest as I worked toward our "deadline dash," and I hope that readers will consider these shows on their blues calendar this month (and next, too!).

## Ronnie Baker Brooks



After playing the Alberta Rose Theatre in Portland on March 2, Ronnie Baker Brooks returns to Seattle's Jazz Alley on March 3 and 4. Ronnie was on the cover of the Bluesletter last year in February, and that issue included Editor Dr. Polly O'Keary's preview of his Jazz Alley debut and my enthusiastic review of his newest release on Alligator Records, "Blues in My DNA." Last May, the album won several prestigious Blues Music Awards, including Contemporary Blues Album of the Year and the title track, "Blues In My DNA," won Song of the Year. In addition, Brooks also won the Contemporary Blues Male Artist of the Year award. Later this year, Ronnie Baker Brooks will play the North Atlantic Blues Festival in Maine and return to the Legendary Rhythm and Blues Cruise No. 45 on the Mexican Riviera. (Photo by Eric Steiner)

## Sugaray Rayford



On March 6, Sugaray Rayford returns to our region at Airport Tavern Music Hall in Tacoma followed by the Winter Music Festival at the Milwaukie Elks Lodge in Oak Grove, Oregon the next day. On March 8, Sugaray will play the Blue Frog Recording Studio in White Rock, British Columbia, then play the State Room in Salt Lake City and the Sapphire Room in Boise before finishing this leg of his tour at the Walla Walla Guitar Festival. His latest CD on Forty Below Records, "Human Decency," was named Apple Music's "Funk/Soul Blues Album of the Week" and is a follow up to "In Too Deep," which won the Blues Music Award in the 2023 "Soul Blues Album of the Year" category. Earlier, Sugaray received the "Soul Blues Artist of the Year" in both 2019 and 2020 and "B.B King Entertainer of the Year" in 2020. Sugaray Rayford headlined our blues society's "For the Love of Music & Musicians," Musicians Relief Fund benefit at the Historic Everett Theater in 2018 with harmonica legend Lee Oskar. (Photo by Andrzej Ligusz).

## Devon Allman's Blues Project



Building on the success of "The Blues Summit," released on Ruf Records last summer, Devon Allman's Blues Summit plays the Bing Crosby Theatre in Spokane on March 4, followed by shows at the Donna Morris Theatre in the Field Arts and Events Hall in Pt. Townsend, the Admiral Theatre in Bremerton, and the Historic Everett Theatre in Everett. Jimmy Hall, Larry McCray, and Laka Soul will join Devon Allman for what promises to be one of the region's most eagerly anticipated blues tours. If this show is anything like the inaugural Allman Betts Family Revival at Seattle's Moore Theatre in 2024, it'll be an evening of exceptional live blues. I just hope they play Willie Dixon's "Wang Dang Doodle," one of my favorite songs on "The Blues Summit" CD. (Photo of Devon Allman and Kirk Anderson by Eric Steiner).

## Mindi Abair



Grammy-nominated saxophonist Mindi Abair returns to Seattle to celebrate 25 years' performing at Jazz Alley with four shows, March 5-8, before joining the Dave Koz Friends at Sea cruise that departs from Sao Paulo, Brazil, later this month. Her latest CD, "Based on a True Story" is her fourteenth album was released last June on her own Pretty Good for a Girl records. (Photo Courtesy of Jazz Alley).

## Tony Furtado



Last month, Tony Furtado played shows in Port Townsend at on Whidbey Island, and this month, the Triple Door presents this Americana-Roots-Blues artist at the Rabbit Box on March 6, one of downtown Seattle's newest live music venues that opened during the pandemic at 94 Pike Street in Pike Place Market. The team behind this intimate, 99-seat venue, Tia Matthies and Robynne Hawthorne, have deep connections to many important, local cultural spaces, including Belltown's Rendezvous and the OK Hotel and Columbia City's Royal Room and Lottie's Lounge. Another Americana virtuoso, the late David Lindley appreciated Tony Furtado: "He has his black belt in voice, bottleneck guitar and his banjo playing scares the crap out of me." (Photo by Alicia J. Rose).

**Ruthie Foster**



Welcome Ruthie Foster back to Seattle for two special shows at Seattle's Jazz Alley on March 17 and 18. Last year, her latest release on the legendary Sun Records label, "Mileage," won Best Contemporary Blues Album at the Grammy Awards. This was Ruthie's fifth Grammy nomination and her first award. "Mileage" was also the first time a Sun Records release received music's highest honor. After her shows at Jazz Alley, Ruthie plays the Alberta Rose Theatre in Portland on March 20 before joining Joe Bonamassa's Keeping the Blues Alive at Sea XI cruise in Miami. (Photo Courtesy of the Winthrop Music Association).

**The Record Company**

Ten years ago, I put "Give It Back to You" in my CD player. I played it nonstop for a week! It had a ragged, roughhewn production



quality that reminded me of Alligator Records' Hound Dog Taylor & The House Rockers, and the trio's songwriting kept me coming back. It was the Concord Records debut of The Record Company, a Southern California blues power trio featuring Chris Vos on vocals, guitars, lap steel, pedal steel, and harmonica, Alex Stiff on bass, guitars, piano, vocals; and Marc Cazorla on drums, piano, vocals. Fast forward three albums and 10 years later, the band will play an expanded "Give It Back to You" in its entirety on a very special tour with Taj Mahal's own "Wonder Boy," Jontavious Willis. Willis is no stranger to the Pacific Northwest as he's been the Artistic Director for the Port Townsend Acoustic Blues Workshop since 2020. On March 19, this innovative twin bill plays Portland's Aladdin Theatre, followed by shows at Seattle's Crocodile, Vancouver's Commodore Ballroom, and Bellingham's Wild Buffalo House of Music. (Artist Courtesy Photo).


*Next Month...*

I used to write in many April issues about "the only band that mattered." No, not The Clash, but Milli Vanilli. No, that's not a typo. Some years in these pages, I'd also add the Glimmer Twins' shows at Seattle's Salmon Bay Eagles to our calendar on April 1, too.

That said, I'm excited about three acts that have gigs booked next month (no April foolin'). Vanessa Collier plays the Belfry in Sisters, Oregon on April Fool's Day before Portland's Alberta Rose Theatre the next night. She returns to Seattle's Triple Door on April 3, and plays the Creekside Theatre in Lake Country, British Columbia on the fourth (don't miss this exciting young blues artist in these rare regional dates). Blues ukelele master Jake Shimabukuro returns to Seattle's Jazz Alley on April 2-5 and this 2026 Keeping the Blues Alive Award-

honored venue welcomes the Highway 99 All-Stars on April 14-15 with Bob Corritore on harmonica, Lisa Mann on bass, Robin Moxey and Ben Rice on guitars, Jeff Conlin on keys and Highway 99 blues club co-owner Steve Sarkowsky on drums. On April 16, two of my favorite singer-songwriters, Paul Thorn and Will Hoge, begin their "Songs & Stories" tour in our region at Boise's Shrine Social Club followed by Portland's Alberta Rose Theatre the next night. On April 18-19, the duo plays Seattle's Tractor Tavern and Tacoma's Airport Tavern Music Hall.

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# March 2026 Live Blues Music Calendar

Submit calendar information to [wablues.org/events/washington-blues-societys-events](http://wablues.org/events/washington-blues-societys-events)

## MARCH 1

**Peabo's, Mill Creek:** Sunday Music Revue 7 p.m.  
**The Spar, Tacoma:** Sunday Blues 7 p.m.  
**Jazz Alley, Seattle:** Saje 7:30 p.m.  
**Edmonds Arts Center, Edmonds:** Women of American 7:30 p.m.  
**Sea Monster Lounge, Seattle:** Randy Weeks 6 p.m., Ron Weinstein Trio 9 p.m.

## MARCH 2

**El Sid, Everett:** Blues Ambassadors 7 p.m.  
**Madison Ave Pub, Everett:** Mad Bojo 7 p.m.  
**Royal Room, Seattle:** The Wayne Horvitz Ensemble 7:30 p.m.  
**Blue Moon, Seattle:** Andy Coe Band 9 p.m.  
**Owl 'N Thistle, Seattle:** Aquilizer 9 p.m.  
**Sea Monster Lounge, Seattle:** La Luz 10 p.m.

## MARCH 3

**Bishop Block Bottle Shop, Port Townsend:** Jazz w Jonathan Doyle & Friends 5 p.m.  
**Blackwater Brewing, North Bend:** Nick Mardon 7 p.m.  
**Madison Ave Pub, Everett:** Blue Healers 7 p.m.  
**Jazz Alley, Seattle:** Ronnie Baker Brooks 7:30 p.m.  
**Billy Blues Bar and Grill, Vancouver:** Ben Rice and the Hustle 8 p.m.  
**Sea Monster Lounge, Seattle:** Joe Doria Presents 10 p.m.

## MARCH 4

**CCR, Snohomish:** Usual Suspects 6 p.m.  
**North City Bistro, Shoreline:** Di and the Blue Hearts 7 p.m.  
**The Spar, Tacoma:** Jazzy Wednesdays 7 p.m.  
**Bing Crosby Theater, Spokane:** Devon Allman's Blues Summit 7:30 p.m.  
**Jazz Alley, Seattle:** Ronnie Baker Brooks 7:30 p.m.  
**Royal Room, Seattle:** Roman Goron Trio 7:30 p.m.  
**Seamonster, Seattle:** Weinstein Wednesday 10 p.m.

## MARCH 5

**Metier Brewing, Seattle:** 5 p.m.  
**Bad Albert's, Seattle:** Annie Eastwood and Friends 6 p.m.  
**Madison Ave Pub, Everett:** Blues Ambassadors 7 p.m.  
**North City Bistro, Shoreline:** Alex Dugdale Quartet 7 p.m.  
**Jazz Alley, Seattle:** Mindi Abair 7:30 p.m.  
**Black & Tan, Seattle:** Hilman City Sway 8 p.m.  
**Salmon Bay Eagles, Seattle:** Di and the Blues Hearts 8 p.m.  
**Snapdragon, Vashon:** Steve Itterly and Friends 8 p.m.  
**Owl & Thistle, Seattle:** Danny Godinez Presents 9 p.m.

## MARCH 6

**Terramar, Edison:** Daddy Treetops 6 p.m.  
**Airport Tavern, Tacoma:** Sugar Ray Rayford 7 p.m.  
**Chinnie's, Everett:** Michele D'Amour and the Love Dealers 7 p.m.  
**Crossroads, Bellevue:** Three Guitars 7 p.m.  
**Port Gardener Bay Winery, Everett:** 7 p.m.  
**Third Place Commons, Lake Forest Park:** John Stephan Band 7 p.m.  
**Admiral Theater, Bremerton:** Devon Allman's Blues Summit 7:30 p.m.  
**Jazz Alley, Seattle:** Mindi Abair 7:30 p.m.  
**Royal Room, Seattle:** Brittany Davis & Ellie Grace 7:30 p.m.  
**Aurora Borealis, Shoreline:** Nite Wave 8 p.m.  
**Bakes Place, Bellevue:** Brian James 8 p.m.  
**Mermaid Lounge, Seattle:** Wes Weddell & Alicia Healey 8 p.m.  
**Madison Ave Pub, Everett:** Shortcutz 8 p.m.  
**Salmon Bay Eagles, Seattle:** Blue Skies 8 p.m.  
**Seamonster, Seattle:** Sgt Splendor 8 p.m. Funky 2 Death 10 p.m.

## MARCH 7

**Milwaukie Elks, Milwaukie OR:** Winter Music Festival 3 p.m.  
**Terramar, Edison:** Daddy Treetops 5 p.m.  
**Crossroads, Bellevue:** The Guise 7 p.m.  
**Third Place Commons, Lake Forest Park:** Honkey Tonk Sweethearts 7 p.m.  
**Aurora Borealis, Shoreline:** Orlin Goranov 7 p.m.  
**Leif Erikson Hall, Seattle:** Stickshift Annie with Kimball and the Fugitives 7 p.m.  
**Madison Ave Pub, Everett:** Criminal Squirrel Orchestra 7 p.m.  
**Route 2 Taproom, Monroe:** Eric Madis 7 p.m.  
**Broadway Performance Hall, Seattle:** Blue Street Voices w Johnaye Kendrick 7:30 p.m.  
**Everett Theater, Everett:** Devon Allman's Blues Summit 7:30 p.m.  
**Jazz Alley, Seattle:** Mindi Abair 7:30 p.m.  
**Rockfish, Anacortes:** Naughty Blokes 7:30 p.m.  
**Salmon Bay Eagles, Seattle:** Youfouric 8 p.m.  
**Wild Buffalo, Bellingham:** G Love and Special Sauce 8 p.m.  
**5x5 Bistro Bar, Mukilteo:** The B Sides 8 p.m.

## MARCH 8

**Crossroads, Bellevue:** Woods Creek 12:30p.m.  
**Peabo's, Mill Creek:** Sunday Music Revue 7 p.m.  
**The Spar, Tacoma:** Kara Grainger 7 p.m.  
**Blue Frog Studios, White Rock:** Sugar Ray Rayford 7 p.m.  
**Jazz Alley, Seattle:** Mindia Abair 7:30 p.m.  
**Triple Door, Seattle:** Lady Blackbird 7:30 p.m.  
**Sea Monster Lounge, Seattle:** Red Dress 5 p.m., Ron Weinstein Trio 9 p.m.

## MARCH 9

**El Sid, Everett:** Blues Ambassadors 7 p.m.  
**Madison Ave Pub, Everett:** Mad Bojo 7 p.m.  
**Royal Room, Seattle:** The Wayne Horvitz Ensemble 7:30 p.m.  
**Blue Moon, Seattle:** Andy Coe Band 9 p.m.  
**Owl 'N Thistle, Seattle:** Aquilizer 9 p.m.  
**Sea Monster Lounge, Seattle:** La Luz 10 p.m.

## MARCH 10

**Bishop Block Bottle Shop, Port Townsend:** Jazz w Jonathan Doyle & Friends 5 p.m.  
**Aurora Borealis, Shoreline:** WBS Blues Bash 7 p.m.  
**Blackwater Brewing, North Bend:** Nick Mardon 7 p.m.  
**Madison Ave Pub, Everett:** Reji Marc 7 p.m.  
**Jazz Alley, Seattle:** Omar Sosa trio 7:30 p.m.  
**Billy Blues Bar and Grill, Vancouver:** Ben Rice and the Hustle 8 p.m.  
**Sea Monster Lounge, Seattle:** Joe Doria Presents 10 p.m.

## MARCH 11

**CCR, Snohomish:** Usual Suspects 6 p.m.  
**North City Bistro, Shoreline:** The Jump Monkeys 7 p.m.  
**The Spar, Tacoma:** Jazzy Wednesdays 7 p.m.  
**Seamonster, Seattle:** Emerald City Ragtime Band 7 p.m.  
**Jazz Alley, Seattle:** Omar Sosa trio 7:30 p.m.  
**Hidden Hall, Seattle:** Charlie Hunter Trio 8 p.m.

## MARCH 12

**Bad Albert's, Seattle:** Annie Eastwood and Friends 6 p.m.  
**Black & Tan, Seattle:** Hilman City Sway 8 p.m.  
**Madison Ave Pub, Everett:** Songwriter Showcase 7 p.m.  
**Jazz Alley, Seattle:** Madeleine Peyroux 7:30 p.m.  
**Salmon Bay Eagles, Seattle:** Mark DuFresne 8 p.m.  
**Snapdragon, Vashon:** Steve Itterly and Friends 8 p.m.  
**Owl & Thistle, Seattle:** Danny Godinez Presents 9 p.m.  
**Seamonster, Seattle:** Paige Sandusky Band 10 p.m.

## MARCH 13

**Olympia Farmers Market, Olympia:** Michele D'Amour and the Love Dealers 11 a.m.  
**Whitman Hotel, Walla Walla:** Walla Walla Guitar Festival 5 p.m.  
**Crossroads, Bellevue:** 85th Street Big Band 7 p.m.  
**Third Place Commons, Lake Forest Park:** Mosquito Fleet 7 p.m.  
**Port Gardener Bay Winery, Everett:** 7 p.m.  
**Jazz Alley, Seattle:** Madeleine Peyroux 7:30 p.m.

**Bakes Place, Bellevue:** Bake's Place All Stars 8 p.m.  
**North City Bistro, Shoreline:** Pearl Django 8 p.m.  
**Salmon Bay Eagles, Seattle:** Trouble At Home 8 p.m.  
**Madison Ave Pub, Everett:** Dana Osborne 8 p.m.  
**Seamonster, Seattle:** Funky 2 Death 10 p.m.

## MARCH 14

**Dusty Strings, Seattle:** Blues Guitar Workshop 11 a.m.  
**Whitman Hotel, Walla Walla:** Walla Walla Guitar Festival 12 p.m.  
**Bertelsen Winery, Mount Vernon:** Savannah Woods 5 p.m.  
**Crossroads, Bellevue:** Solid Gold 7 p.m.  
**Third Place Commons, Lake Forest Park:** Mach One Jazz 7 p.m.  
**Madison Ave Pub, Everett:** 7 p.m.  
**North City Bistro, Shoreline:** Carys Marie 7 p.m.  
**Port Gardener Bay Winery, Everett:** 7 p.m.  
**Jazz Alley, Seattle:** Madeleine Peyroux 7:30 p.m.  
**Arcadian Public House, Conway:** Petunia and the Vipers 8 p.m.  
**Bakes Place, Bellevue:** Point of Sail 8 p.m.  
**5x5 Bistro Bar, Mukilteo:** Davanos 8 p.m.  
**Miller's Carnation:** For Shane Again 8 p.m.  
**Salmon Bay Eagles, Seattle:** Karyn Michaelson Band 8 p.m.

## MARCH 15

**Whitman Hotel, Walla Walla:** Walla Walla Guitar Festival 11 a.m.  
**Crossroads, Bellevue:** Feire Warning 12:30 p.m.  
**SeaTac Airport's North Terminal Marketplace, Sea Tac:** Eric Madis 12:30 p.m.  
**Aurora Borealis, Shoreline:** Hamilton Loomis 6 p.m.  
**Royal Room, Seattle:** The Swingtones 6 p.m.  
**Peabo's, Mill Creek:** Sunday Music Revue 7 p.m.  
**The Spar, Tacoma:** Michele D'Amour and the Love Dealers 7 p.m.  
**Jazz Alley, Seattle:** Madeleine Peyroux 7:30 p.m.  
**Sea Monster Lounge, Seattle:** Randy Weeks 6 p.m.  
Ron Weinstein Trio 9 p.m.  
**Salmon Bay Eagles, Seattle:** Haggis Bros 8 p.m.

## MARCH 16

**El Sid, Everett:** Blues Ambassadors 7 p.m.  
**Madison Ave Pub, Everett:** Mad Bojo 7 p.m.  
**Blue Moon, Seattle:** Andy Coe Band 9 p.m.  
**Owl 'N Thistle, Seattle:** Aquilizer 9 p.m.  
**Sea Monster Lounge, Seattle:** La Luz 10 p.m.

## MARCH 17

**Bishop Block Bottle Shop, Port Townsend:** Jazz w Jonathan Doyle & Friends 5 p.m.  
**Blackwater Brewing, North Bend:** Nick Mardon 7 p.m.  
**Madison Ave Pub, Everett:** Unbound 7 p.m.  
**Jazz Alley, Seattle:** Ruthie Foster 7:30 p.m.

**Lincoln Theater, Mount Vernon:** Mark Hummel's Blues Harmonica Blowout 7:30 p.m.  
**Billy Blues Bar and Grill, Vancouver:** Ben Rice and the Hustle 8 p.m.  
**Sea Monster Lounge, Seattle:** Foleada 7 p.m. Joe Doria Presents 10 p.m.

## MARCH 18

**CCR, Snohomish:** Usual Suspects 6 p.m.  
**The Spar, Tacoma:** Jazzy Wednesdays 7 p.m.  
**Jazz Alley, Seattle:** Ruthie Foster 7:30 p.m.  
**Seamonster, Seattle:** Weinstein Wednesday 10 p.m.

## MARCH 19

**Bad Albert's, Seattle:** Annie Eastwood and Friends 6 p.m.  
**Black & Tan, Seattle:** Hilman City Sway 8 p.m.  
**Madison Ave Pub, Everett:** Songwriter Showcase 7 p.m.  
**Jazz Alley, Seattle:** The Wooten Brothers 7:30 p.m.  
**Seamonster, Seattle:** How Now Brown Cow 7:30 p.m.  
**Seattle jazz Fellowship, Seattle Jacqueline Tabor 7:30 p.m.**  
**Salmon Bay Eagles, Seattle:** Blues Harmonica Extravaganza 8 p.m.  
**Snapdragon, Vashon:** Steve Itterly and Friends 8 p.m.  
**Wild Buffalo, Bellingham:** The Motet 8:30 p.m.  
**Owl & Thistle, Seattle:** Danny Godinez Presents 9 p.m.

## MARCH 20

**Crossroads, Bellevue:** No Rules 7 p.m.  
**Third Place Commons, Lake Forest Park:** Fricken Chickasee 7 p.m.  
**Blue Frog Studios, White Rock:** Miss Emily 7 p.m.  
**Jazz Alley, Seattle:** The Wooten Brothers 7:30 p.m.  
**Madison Ave Pub, Everett:** Jet City Players 8 p.m.  
**Bakes Place, Bellevue:** Jazz Overhaul 8 p.m.  
**Crocodile, Seattle:** The Record Company w Jontavious Wilis 8 p.m.  
**Salmon Bay Eagles, Seattle:** Rod Cook and Toast 8 p.m.  
**Seamonster, Seattle:** Funky 2 Death 10 p.m.  
**Showbox, Seattle:** Band of Horses 8 p.m.

## MARCH 21

**Bakes Place, Bellevue:** Brohamm 6 p.m.  
**Crossroads, Bellevue:** Fabulous Orchids 7 p.m.  
**Third Place Commons, Lake Forest Park:** Market Street Dixieland 7 p.m.  
**North City Bistro, Shoreline:** Donna Ray Band 7 p.m.  
**Madison Ave Pub, Everett:** Tumbling Dice 7 p.m.  
**Port Gardener Bay Winery, Everett:** 7 p.m.  
**Treehouse Café, Bainbridge:** Ranger and the Re-Arrangers 7 p.m.

**Edmonds Arts Center, Edmonds:** Cherry Poppin Daddies & Davina and the Vagabonds 7:30 p.m.  
**Jazz Alley, Seattle:** The Wooten Brothers 7:30 p.m.  
**Salmon Bay Eagles, Seattle:** Jill Newman Band 8 p.m.  
**Showbox, Seattle:** Band of Horses 8 p.m.  
**5x5 Bistro Bar, Mukilteo:** Stacy Jones Band 8 p.m.

## MARCH 22

**Crossroads, Bellevue:** Rod Cook 12:30 p.m.  
**Milwaukie Elks, Milwaukie OR:** CBA Muddy Awards 4 p.m.  
**Kilworth Chapel, Tacoma:** Blues Vespers w Doug Lynn Band 5 p.m.  
**Peabo's, Mill Creek:** Sunday Music Revue 7 p.m.  
**The Spar, Tacoma:** Sunday Blues 7 p.m.  
**Edmonds Center for the Arts, Edmonds:** Delfeayo Marsalis formed the Uptown Jazz Orchestra 7:30 p.m.  
**Jazz Alley, Seattle:** The Wooten Brothers 7:30 p.m.  
**Wild Buffalo, Bellingham:** The Record Company w Jontavious Wilis 8 p.m.  
**Sea Monster Lounge, Seattle:** Randy Weeks 6 p.m., Ron Weinstein Trio 9 p.m.

## MARCH 23

**El Sid, Everett:** Blues Ambassadors 7 p.m.  
**Madison Ave Pub, Everett:** Mad Bojo 7 p.m.  
**Blue Moon, Seattle:** Andy Coe Band 9 p.m.  
**Owl 'N Thistle, Seattle:** Aquilizer 9 p.m.  
**Sea Monster Lounge, Seattle:** La Luz 10 p.m.

## MARCH 24

**Bishop Block Bottle Shop, Port Townsend:** Jazz w Jonathan Doyle & Friends 5 p.m.  
**Blackwater Brewing, North Bend:** Nick Mardon 7 p.m.  
**Madison Ave Pub, Everett:** 7 p.m.  
**Jazz Alley, Seattle:** Richard Bona 7:30 p.m.  
**Billy Blues Bar and Grill, Vancouver:** Ben Rice and the Hustle 8 p.m.  
**Sea Monster Lounge, Seattle:** Joe Doria Presents 10 p.m.

## MARCH 25

**North City Bistro, Shoreline:** Shape Shifter 4:30 p.m.  
**CCR, Snohomish:** Usual Suspects 6 p.m.  
**The Spar, Tacoma:** Jazzy Wednesdays 7 p.m.  
**Jazz Alley, Seattle:** Richard Bona 7:30 p.m.  
**Seamonster, Seattle:** Weinstein Wednesday 10 p.m.

## MARCH 26

**Bad Albert's, Seattle:** Annie Eastwood and Friends 6 p.m.  
**Madison Ave Pub, Everett:** Songwriter Showcase 7 p.m.

*Continued on pg. 23*

# March 2026 Live Blues Music Calendar

*Continued from pg. 22*

**Jazz Alley, Seattle:** Kandace Springs 7:30 p.m.  
**Black & Tan, Seattle:** Hilman City Sway 8 p.m.  
**Pono Ranch, Seattle:** True Romans 8 p.m.  
**Salmon Bay Eagles, Seattle:** 8 p.m.  
**Snapdragon, Vashon:** Steve Itterly and Friends 8 p.m.  
**Owl & Thistle, Seattle:** Danny Godinez Presents 9 p.m.

## MARCH 27 -

**Stone's Throw Brewery, Bellingham:** Michele D'amour and the Love Dealers 6 p.m.  
**Crossroads, Bellevue:** Jazz Etc. 7 p.m.  
**Third Place Commons, Lake Forest Park:** File Gumbo 7 p.m.  
**North City Bistro, Shoreline:** Annie Eastwood All Star Band 7 p.m.  
**Port Gardener Bay Winery, Everett:** 7 p.m.  
**Jazz alley, Seattle:** Kandace Springs 7:30 p.m.  
**Royal Room, Seattle:** Eugenie Jones 7:30 p.m.  
**Seattle Jazz Fellowship, Seattle:** 7:30 p.m.  
**Bakes Place, Bellevue:** Nick Mardon 8 p.m.  
**Hidden Hall, Seattle:** Tom Hamilton Band 8 p.m.  
**Madison Ave Pub, Everett:** One Island Drop 8 p.m.  
**Miller's Carnation:** Taylor Made 8 p.m.

**Seamonster, Seattle:** Funky 2 Death 10 p.m.

## MARCH 28 -

**The Keg and I, Chimaquum:** Michele D'Amour and the Love Dealers 6 p.m.  
**Cellar Cat, Kingston:** Annie Eastwood All Star Band 6:30 p.m.  
**Crossroads, Bellevue:** Phantoms of Soul 7 p.m.  
**Third Place Commons, Lake Forest Park:** Seattle Solid Gold 7 p.m.  
**Madison Ave Pub, Everett:** Souled Out 7 p.m.  
**Jazz Alley, Seattle:** Kandace Springs 7:30 p.m.  
**Bakes place, Bellevue:** Wild Boys 6 p.m. Beat Division 8 p.m.  
**Salmon Bay Eagles, Seattle:** Ryan Higgins 8 p.m.

## MARCH 29 -

**Crossroads, Bellevue:** Larry Murante 12:30 p.m.  
**Peabo's, Mill Creek:** Sunday Music Revue 7 p.m.  
**The Spar, Tacoma:** Sunday Blues 7 p.m.  
**Jazz Alley, Seattle:** Kandace Springs 7:30 p.m.  
**Sea Monster Lounge, Seattle:** Randy Weeks 6 p.m., Ron Weinstein Trio 9 p.m.

## MARCH 30 -

**El Sid, Everett:** Blues Ambassadors 7 p.m.  
**Madison Ave Pub, Everett:** Mad Bojo 7 p.m.  
**Royal Room, Seattle:** Blue Monday 7:30 p.m.  
**Blue Moon, Seattle:** Andy Coe Band 9 p.m.  
**Owl 'N Thistle, Seattle:** Aquilizer 9 p.m.  
**Sea Monster Lounge, Seattle:** La Luz 10 p.m.

## MARCH 31 -

**Bishop Block Bottle Shop, Port Townsend:** Jazz w Jonathan Doyle & Friends 5 p.m.  
**Blackwater Brewing, North Bend:** Nick Mardon 7 p.m.  
**Madison Ave Pub, Everett:** Tom Jones & Friends 7 p.m.  
**Purdy's, Sumner:** South Sound Blues Assoc. Showcase 7 p.m.  
**Jazz Alley, Seattle:** Lakecia Benjamin and Phoenix 7:30 p.m.  
**Royal Room, Seattle:** Critical Mass Big Band 7:30 p.m.  
**Billy Blues Bar and Grill, Vancouver:** Ben Rice and the Hustle 8 p.m.  
**Sea Monster Lounge, Seattle:** Joe Doria Presents 10 p.m.

# International Blues Challenge: A Proud History

*Continued from pg. 12*

## A Quiet Refuge

I returned to my favorite spot in the Blues Hall of Fame Museum, a small nook next to a shelf of books about the blues in front of an old piano downstairs. On the wall above Pinetop Perkins' piano is a quote from Pine himself: "You know, they call me a blues legend. It looks like they like what I do."

Each time I see our blues society's name engraved on the wall not far from that piano, I fondly remember former Merchandise Director Tony Frederickson's work leading a multi-year sales campaign, three dollars at a time selling Washington Blues Society-branded ear plugs, that raised \$10,000 to build the Blues Hall of Fame Museum.

I scanned the bookshelf and the first title I noticed was "Survivor: The Benny Turner Story," by Benny Turner and Bill Dahl. Dahl is one of my favorite blues writers from Chicago and he is a recipient of a 2000 Keeping the Blues Alive Award for Blues Journalism. The book tells the story of Turner's six decades in the blues and I appreciated the way Benny and Bill tell the story of Benny's half-brother and band mate, the late Freddie King.

"Wait a minute," I thought. "Was this a coincidence?"

Just the day before I returned to the home of

The Blues Foundation, I sat just one table behind Sallie Bengston, who received a Keeping the Blues Alive Award for NOLA Blue Records. I later learned that Sallie was Benny Turner's manager, and the first record released on NOLA Blue was "Journey" by Benny Turner in 2014.

My night in Memphis after visiting the museum was very special. I bumped into Olympia's Clint Morgan, a Charter Member of The Blues Foundation, reconnected with former Washington Blues Society presidents Rhea Rolfe and Tony Frederickson who ran venues for The Blues Foundation. I shared a meal with former International Blues Challenge band leader Kevin Sutton of The WIRED! Band at the Blues City Café and ran into the Kansas City Blues Society's Stacy Jeffress and the Windy City Blues Society's David "Mad Dog" Madelener. "Mad Dog" thanked me for helping him with a few grant applications decades ago, and I congratulated him on his most recent achievement in securing seed monies for a blues festival celebrating the 250th anniversary of the USA this from our current Administration later this year.

Many years ago, "Mad Dog" was instrumental in getting the very first local Blues Foundation affiliate's flag to fly at the world's largest free blues festival in his home town of Chicago. He went through all the necessary steps to secure permits and approvals, and by the time I reached the Windy City Blues Society tent,

volunteers flew their flag proudly the length of the festival. It took some doing, bureaucratically, but it added some pretty good visibility for the local blues society.

## A Proud History

In addition to beginning this article recognizing the achievements of our blues challenge representatives this year, I'll close with a look back at our blues society's exceptionally strong showing at the world's largest gathering of blues acts.

In 2019 at the 35th International Blues Challenge, Sammy Eubanks & The Work'In Class placed second in the band competition, and three years earlier, Ben Hunter & Joe Seamons placed first in the solo/duo category. In 2012, The WIRED Band took first place in the band competition, and in 2011, Nick Vigarino's Back Porch Stomp made it to the finals.

As I left the Home2Suites downtown for the airport, I wished I would have stayed for the finals to see Pitman and Sutton on perform in the International Blues Challenge finals on what I consider the blues community's most important stage at the Orpheum Theatre.

Next time, I'll get that "All Access" ticket to enjoy all that International Blues Challenge week has to offer!

# Best of the Blues Award Ballot

Ballots must be **received** by mail or online by April 14 (Can be hand delivered at the April Blues Bash)

Emails with link to online voting will come out in March for those who prefer to vote electronically

## Male Vocalist

Mark Dufresne  
Kevin Sutton  
CD Woodbury  
Joel Astley

## Kathi McDonald

### Female Vocalist

Mary McPage  
Annie Eastwood  
Christi Michelle  
Mercedes Nicole  
Leah Tussing

## Electric Blues Guitar

Billy Stapleton  
Dan Abernethy  
CD Woodbury  
Anthony Estrada

## Slide Blues Guitar

Billy Stapleton  
Eric Rice  
CD Woodbury  
Rod Cook

## Acoustic Blues Guitar

Brian Butler  
CD Woodbury  
Chris Stevens  
Dan Abernethy

## Blues Bass

Guy Quintino  
Howard Hooper  
Walter White  
Rob Baker  
Paul Quilty  
Kelly Leifer  
Patrick McDanel

## Blues Drummer

Steve Peterson  
Rick Jacobson  
Rick Bowen  
Aaron Hennings  
Greg Lerner

## Blues Harmonica

John Kuhlmann  
Joel Astley  
Bill Davis  
Jonathan Pitman

## Blues Piano/Keyboard

Billy Reed  
Mark Hurwitz  
Kevin Sutton  
Sheri Roberts Greimes

## Blues Horn

Lonnie Williams  
Ron Hendee  
Mike Marinig  
Dream  
Don Weaver

## Blues Instrumentalist - Other

Angelo Ortiz  
Leanne Trevelyan  
Laura Hardman  
Annie Eastwood  
Mark Lagen

## Blues Rock Band

Stacy Jones Band  
CD Woodbury Trio  
Ryan T Higgins  
Annie Eastwood  
McPage/Powell

## Little Bill & The Blue Notes

### Traditional Blues Band

Mark Hurwitz & Gin Creek  
Cold 102s  
Stevie and The Blue Flames  
Joel Astley

## Best Solo/Duo

Sutton/Pitman  
McPage/Powell  
Blue Healers  
Eastwood/Stapleton  
Brian Butler

## New Blues Act

Sutton/Pitman  
Nikhil Bagga  
Snakebite  
Christi Michelle and her Hired Guns

## Patti Allen Blues Performer

Kevin Sutton  
Mary McPage  
Stacy Jones  
Mark Hurwitz  
Joel Astley  
Annie Eastwood

## Blues Songwriter

Kevin Sutton  
Ryan T Higgins  
Rick Bowen  
McPage/Powell  
CD Woodbury  
Billy Stoops  
Joel Astley

## Blues Recording

Annie Eastwood And Her All Star Band  
-Annie Eastwood and Her All Star Band  
Mercedes Nicole  
-Too High A Price to Pay  
Jill Newman  
-Little Bits of Luck

## Blues Jam

Unbound  
Salmon Dan's Jam  
Lucky 7 Blues Jam  
192 Brewing Jam  
Dawson's

## Blues Writer

Kirk Anderson  
Eric Steiner  
Carrie Parduhn

## Blues Image (Photo/Video)

Dennis Brown  
-Image of Joe Gabaldon's Daughter-  
Dennis Brown  
-Image of Joe Gabaldon  
Dennis Brown  
-Sutton/Pitman at the Triple Door  
Steve Mitchell  
-Image of Tab Benoit, Too Slim and Corey Duplechin  
Linda Wolf  
-Bluesletter Cover, Taj Mahal

## Blues Graphic (Edited photo or graphic image)

Annie Eastwood  
-Annie Eastwood and Her All Star Band Self-Titled CD Cover Art  
Sean Donovan  
-Winthrop R&B Fest Poster 2025 (Artist as yet unidentified)  
-Kitsap Blues Fest 2025 Poster  
Sean Donovan  
-Blues Letter Cover Bobby Inocente

## Blues DJ

John Kessler  
Leslie Fleury  
Clancy Dunigan  
Michael Murphy  
Ron McElroy  
Leo Schumaker

## Keeping The Blues Alive

Susan Dodd  
Anthony Estrada  
Tom Jones  
Kevin Sutton

## Blues Hall of Fame (Individual)

Sheri Roberts Greimes  
Annie Eastwood  
Brian Butler  
Billy Barner  
John Stephan

## Blues Hall of Fame (Band)

John Stephan Band  
Mark Dufresne Band  
Two Scoops Combo

## Regional Blues Festival (National and Regional Acts)

Winthrop Rhythm and Blues  
Sunbanks Blues Festival  
Gorge Blues & Brews Festival  
Centrum Traditional Blues Workshop and Festival  
Walla Walla Guitar Festival

## Community Blues Festival (Local and Regional Acts)

Ebey Island Freedomfest  
Poulsbo Blues and Jazz Festival  
North Bend Blues Walk  
Poverty Bay Blues and Brews

## Lifetime Achievement

Tony Frederickson  
Mark Hurwitz  
Mary McPage  
Sheri Roberts Greimes

## Non-Festival Blues Event

University Place Music on the Square  
Madison Ave 25th Anniversary  
Blues is the Root Wide Open Mic  
Jones Family Christmas  
Sheri Robert's Greimes Memorial Blues Vespers





P.O. Box 70604  
Seattle, WA 98127

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The Washington Blues Society is a proud recipient of a  
**2009 BLUES FOUNDATION**  
KEEPING THE BLUES ALIVE AWARD



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