

THE MUSIC MAKER RAG

Official Newsletter of the Music Maker Relief Foundation, Inc.

VOLUME TWO, NUMBER TWO,
Fall/Winter 1996



CAPTAIN LUKE

photo: David Spitzer

INTRODUCTION

Dear Friends,

The tremendous support the foundation has received in the past few months will enable Music Maker to not only continue the work in 1997 but to expand the foundation's aid programs. Our goal for the New Year is to search out more artists, discover their hopes and try to find a way to help them get their music out in the world.

We are proud to announce the birth of our first child Lucas Allen who was born on August 17th at 4:30 AM. We are enjoying the challenges of parenthood and are very busy in our new family life. Not surprisingly, we have not spent as much time on the road this fall but our work with Music Maker continues. After years of traveling to visit artists we were blessed this Christmas to have blues artists Cootie Stark from Greenville, South Carolina and Carl Hodges and his niece Donna from Saluda, Virginia be with us in Pinnacle for the holiday. We had a great time celebrating, enjoying each other's company and playing some blues. On December 27th Music Maker celebrated it's annual Christmas party. Cootie and Carl were joined by many blues artists from North Carolina and Music Maker family and friends for a festive evening of music.

The foundation's efforts to rekindle the careers of Carl Hodges and Cootie Stark have been successful. Both of these artists' musical careers were at a stand still when we met them in the spring of 1996. The foundation was able to provide them with instruments and promotional assistance. Carl recently completed a triumphant tour of Holland with invitations to return. Cootie has now been performing outside of South Carolina with regularity and has won a new adoring audience of young blues musicians. He is currently in the process of recording the first album of his 50 year old career. Cootie reflected to me, "You sometimes have to wait to have good things happen. I have had a lifetime of broken promises. I believe the good master is watching over us and this project."

We believe our efforts with some 40 musicians has made a difference. Music Maker will keep the hope it offers alive and will strive to bring concrete results to these artists. Thank-you for contributions over the past two years and please keep in touch.

Yours Truly,

Tim & Denise Duffy



Denise & Tim on the porch, Pinnacle, NC
photo:Alex Küzner

ARTIST PROFILES

The blues. Songs of the African American experience. Songs rooted in the everyday encounter with hardship. Yet songs that also speak of hope and joy, of challenge and transcendence, of good times crafted in the face of ceaseless toil and constant insult. The blues captured community spirit and set it to rhythm and rhyme, poetically celebrating day's end and week-ends arrival, inviting arduous conversation onto the dance floor. They were first and foremost music for dancing. And their first home was the houseparty.

In the Carolinas and Georgia, the blues took a different form from their Delta cousins. These guitarists gave their songs a lively, danceable feel, backing the lyrics with fast finger picking and delicately scatted melodies. From their beginnings in the century's early decades, East Coast blues showed a clear debt to the ragtimey "reels" and country dance tunes of the late 1800s.

In the Carolinas and Georgia, the blues is a historical form. Long superseded by other musics, it remains vital only in communities where artists keep the tradition alive by virtue of their sheer excellence. In this newsletter, we shall introduce four such blues musicians—Cootie Stark, Captain Luke, Precious Bryant and John Lee Zeigler.

Dr. Glenn Hinon



Cootie Stark photo: Mark Austin

Cootie Stark at 68 is one of the few authentic Piedmont bluesmen alive today. He grew up hard in South Carolina, working alongside his sharecropper parents. He lost his sight as a young boy and at this early age began to make music. He followed the older men who played blues and frolics in this musically rich area. These men were among the originators the genre now called Piedmont Blues. As a teenager Cootie became an itinerant bluesman performing on street corners

throughout the South. He continued in this life into his 50s traveling from the Carolina's to Boston and to the Midwest. Cootie's repertoire includes 100s of blues and gospel songs, but the real gems are the old songs he learned as a child, which have only been enjoyed by people who have met the man.

Cootie related to me, "I've been playing guitar for 50 years. I was 14 when I got started. I always wanted a guitar. My uncle used to have one and I used to stand beside him and listen to him play. I used to mock music with my mouth. My mother told me I was singing since I was a baby. I started beating on cans before I got a guitar. I used to bend up that can and it came up with some good music. My step-daddy got me a guitar and a man named Tobb Hudson started me off. Then I met Baby Taz and other medicine show musicians such as John Olivee, Slim, Chilly Wind, Walter Phelps, John White, Pink Anderson, Blind Sammy Doolie, and Peg Leg Sam. I learned a great deal from these men. I love music, I always did. Music is a happy thing to me. I just like to make people happier with the little thing I'm doing. If everyone was like that, the world would be a better place."

ARTIST PROFILES

Blues woman Precious Bryant was born in rural Talbot County, Georgia on January 4, 1942. She was born into a family of traditional musicians in a close-knit community in which there were many, many blues players and gospel singers. Traditional Georgia music—especially country blues—has been a part of Precious Bryant's life for as long as she can remember.

Precious recalls a childhood that was filled with many different kinds of homemade music. Her mother was an avid singer of church songs. Her father was a blues player. Several of her male cousins formed a fife and drum, which serenaded at African American community celebrations and on holidays all around Talbot County. All of her sisters are gospel singers.

The first instrument Precious Bryant ever attempted to play was her father's old home guitar, which was so big that the six-year-old Precious could not carry it by herself. Finally, she recalls her father placing the guitar in her lap and encouraging his daughter to "take it up" and learn to play. At age nine, she had advanced in her playing to the point that her dad bought her an instrument of her own—a Silver Tone guitar from Sears and Roebuck.

Precious credits many musical influences as important in her formative years as a player and a singer—she learned blues songs and guitar styles from the radio, records, and players in the community where she lived. But there were two crucial people who coached and encouraged her all along—her father, Lonnie James Bussey, and her uncle, George Henry Bussey. Both were fine country bluesmen.

Precious has a naturally warm stage presence and her lively guitar style, combined with her excellent voice, have quickly won her a devoted audience. Precious Bryant is a rarity. Traditional female blues players, especially those as powerful and as skilled as Precious, have always been few.

Fred C. Fussell
Columbus, GA



Precious Bryant photo: Axel Küstner

ARTIST PROFILES



John Lee Zeigler in Kathleen, GA photo: Tim Duffy

John Lee Zeigler at 67 is one of the most unusual blues musicians in the country. He plays the guitar left-handed with the strings set up for the right hand. Although he has traveled little beyond his native Georgia, his rhythms amazingly seem directly connected to West Africa. His repertoire of pre-blues, blues and original songs are some of the most unique blues one can hear today.

Captain Luke (Luther Meyer), a wonderful baritone singer, jaw harp player, and folk artist, moved to Winston-Salem, North Carolina in 1940. There he met Otis King, who recognized Meyer's talent as a singer and invited him to join his gospel group. It was from King that Meyer learned how to control his lowest notes. In 1972, Captain Luke joined with Guitar Gabriel, playing at fish-fries and drink houses. Luke has a rich deep voice which has won him respect and fans wherever he goes. He also hand crafts terrific ash-trays from beer cans, wood, and staples which can be found in 100s of homes in Winston-Salem. Their geometric configuration and color combinations make them interesting pieces. Luke made a special one for Eric Clapton last spring out of Old English Malt liquor cans. You may obtain Luke's art with a contribution.

Captain Luke photo: Axel Küstner





Eugene Powell photo: Axel Küstner

Mississippi Delta Blues legend Eugene Powell will be celebrating his 88th birthday on December 23. Birthday congratulations can be sent to him c/o M.M.R.E.

After a ten-year hiatus from playing and twenty years retired from touring, Carl Hodges received an acoustic guitar in June from Music Maker and started playing again. This November he will fly for the first time to perform in Holland at the prestigious Blues Escaferre. His performance was superb and he was asked to come back to Europe by many other festivals.

Willie Mae Buckner was given a bottle of Lucky Oil by Mark Levinson this July. Since summer's end Willie has won the numbers three times, twice for \$1,500 and once for \$1,000.

Axel Küstner will have a published book of photo postcards of blues artists he has photographed over the past 20 years coming out soon. Axel visited us in Pinnacle this October and we met up with the very elusive Winston-Salem bluesman Jahue Rorie.

We met Cora Mae Bryant, the daughter of Atlanta blues legend Curly Weaver, this summer. In October she visited us in Pinnacle for 5 days, accompanied by Mudcat, Cootie Stark and all the musicians from Winston-Salem came up for a day of music and celebration.

Robert "Wolfman" Belfour from Memphis, Tennessee appeared at Centrum Blues Week in Port Townsend, Washington. This annual event is organized by Peter McCracken. Contact: 206-385-3102.

Sweet Betty from Atlanta, Georgia recorded some great material with Bob Margolin and Tad Walters here in Pinnacle this summer. Betty is a protegee of the late Fats Jackson.

Jerry McCain received a grant from the Rhythm and Blues Foundation based in Washington D.C.

David Burcham of King, North Carolina donated a guitar to blues guitar wizard John Ferguson Jr. of Beaufort, South Carolina.

Charles Bristol, a 75 year old blues guitarist and singer was brought to our attention by Tad Walters. We visited this haunting blues singer and guitarist in his home town of Morganton, North Carolina.

Precious Bryant had a grand time performing at festivals in Lugano, Switzerland, East Hampton, New York, Villa Rica and Thomasville, Georgia this summer. Kathy Fussel was kind enough to accompany her.

The Blind Willie Festival in Georgia featured Neal Pattman, John Lee Zeigler and Precious Bryant. Their performances were a knock-out!

Carl Rutherford put on a fantastic show at the Lincoln Center Out-of-Doors Festival in New York in late August.

Cootie Stark, Willie Mae Buckner, Macavine Hayes, Mr. Q and Captain Luke cast a spell over the National Furniture Market crowd when they performed on the streets of High Point, North Carolina this October.

The Augusta Heritage Workshops invited Mr. Q, Macavine Hayes and Willie Mae Buckner to be special guests at their Blues Week in Augusta, West Virginia this past summer.

Algia Mae Hinton has a new CD entitled Algia Mae Hinton, Honey Babe: Blues Folk Tunes & Gospel from North Carolina, produced by Lightnin' Wells. To purchase contact: 919-754-8849.

We met 87 year old blues veteran Frank Edwards in Atlanta, Georgia this summer. He started his recording career in the 30s. He remains full of vigor and still is a powerful guitar & harmonica player and a very funny song-writer.

MUSIC MAKER NEWS

We are looking for donations of fine guitars and other musical instruments to provide to **ARMS**.

Norman Hewitt, artistic director of the Blues to Bop Festival in Lugano, Switzerland called right after another hugely successful festival to confirm that he wanted to feature Music Maker artists again next year.

The Sunday, June 30, 1996 New York Times featured the story of M.M.R.F. Inc. It was nearly a full page! This article coincided with a series of performances at London Jewelers in East Hampton at the new Cello Music & Film Systems Showroom. These exclusive performances showcased Captain Luke, Big Boy Henry, Willa Mae Buckner, Precious Bryant, Cootie Stark and Rufus McKenzie.



Algia Mae Hinton
photo: Axel Künstler

Max Watson of the Jazz Oral History Program at the Smithsonian Institution will be interviewing Mr. Q for their archive. Max's goal is to create an oral history archive of blues artists.

Country blues guitarist extraordinaire Paul Geremia visited Music Maker in Pinnacle for a few days this October. Paul found delicious edible mushrooms on the top of Pilot Mountain.

Southern Heritage Festival will honor blues artists Cootie Stark, Frank Edwards, Cora Mae Bryant and Neal Pattman in Atlanta, Georgia on December 7th. The festival starts with a Gospel brunch at 1:00 and will continue until late at night. This event is organized by Danny Dudeck and held at The Northside Tavern. Contact (404) 874-8745.

Evan Wilson featured blues women Cora Mae Bryant and Precious Bryant (not related) at the Thomas A. Dorsey Gospel Festival in Villa Rica, Georgia. This is an annual event. Contact: (770) 459-7019.

Cootie Stark, Big Boy Henry and many fine blues acts will be performing at The Charleston Blues Bash, February 7-16. Contact: Gary Erwin at (803) 722-3263 for schedule.



Frank Edwards photo: Tim Duffy

Michael Parrish is in reproduction for his new album.

Lighthin' Wells has a great new CD entitled Bull Frog Blues. (919) 756-8849.

Bull Durham Blues Festival included a write up on M.M.R.F. Inc. in its brochure and mentioned our work on stage.

MUSIC MAKER DONATIONS

CONTRIBUTION FORM

- \$25 Subscribing Supporter (receive newsletter and event information)
 Donation to support foundation
 Donation to Guitar Gabriel Memorial Fund
 \$100 Music Maker Patron
 \$1,000 Music Maker Angel

(For donations of \$100 or more choose one of the following: Captain Luke ashtray, a poster size color print of Guitar Gabriel, a Willa Mae Buckner Snake Lady/Black Gypsy video documentary of this very frank blueswoman by videographer Gal Velez or a Guitar Gabriel neck tie hand-printed by folk artist Sam McMillen.)

Name _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone (____) _____





Recipients of Music Maker Grants are:

Big Boy Henry, Willa Mae Buckner, Precious Bryant, J.W. Warren, John Lee Zeigler, Rufus McKenzie, George Daniels, Robert Thomas, Elder Anderson Johnson, Essie Mae Brooks, James Davis, Bishop Dready & Marie Manning, Maravine Hayes, Lucille Lindsay, Algia Mae Hinson, Neal Patton, Jimmie Lee Williams, Cora Fluker, David Johnson, Jack Owens, Eugene Powell, Luther Mayer, Robert "Wolfman" Belfour, Cuccell Settle, Othar Turner, Jerry McCain, Jessie Mae Hemphill, Big Bad Smitty, Samuel Turner Soewens, John Ferguson Jr., Carl Hodges, Jolly Walls, Bo McGhee, Frank Edwards, Cora Mae Bryant, Juhue Rona, John Dee Holeman and Charles Bristol.

Special thanks to William Kraslovsky, Marty Greif & Eric Sandler, Russ Rosen, Tony DiSalvo, Livio Carozzi & family and Dave & Betty Jones.

MISSION STATEMENT

Music Maker Relief Foundation, Inc. is a non-profit organization founded by audio pioneer Mark Levinson and musician/folklorist Timothy Duffy in April 1994, and is dedicated to helping forgotten blues and folk musicians living in the South. Now in their 70s and 80s, these artists represent the end of an era. Sadly, many are suffering from extreme poverty and need food, shelter, medical care, and other assistance. Our goal is to keep administrative expenses under 25% of our total budget. All other funds go directly to these artists in need, in the form of cash or in-kind grants.

Written by Timothy and Denise Duffy. Edited by Kay Hill.
Design by Brian Golden. Design Associate is Judy Palumbo.
The Music Maker Rag is published by
Music Maker Relief Foundation, Inc.
Rt. 1 Box 567 Pinnacle, NC 27043
Tel (910) 325-3261 Fax (910) 325-3263
©1996 Timothy Duffy. All Rights Reserved.