

THE MUSIC MAKER RAG

Official Newsletter of the Music Maker Relief Foundation, Inc.

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GUITAR GABRIEL, October 12, 1924 - April 2, 1996

photo: John Gallagher

INTRODUCTION

Dear Friends,

It has been an intense time for Music Maker since our last newsletter, filled with highs and lows. We are deeply grieved by the passing of Guitar Gabriel and Pernell King. They shared a father, a passion for their art and a commitment as musical ambassadors to their community. That we should lose them both in a month's time is a great sadness, but inspires us to reaffirm our commitment to spreading the message of the musical legacy they have left us.

We were fortunate to spend many happy hours with Gabe & Pernell this past fall and winter before they hit the road for the last time. At the suggestion of Capt. Luke we had an impromptu Music Maker picnic on Labor Day in a pine grove behind our home in Pinnacle, NC. Many friends came to share the company of artists Mr. Q, Wills Mae Buckner, Capt. Luke, Macavine Hayes and Guitar Gabriel. After the food and drink we had a spontaneous blues festival and the music was enjoyed by all. We enjoyed each other so much we decided to do the same on Christmas Day and enticed Mark Levinson and E.V. Funke to come down from New York City and join in the festivities. The most recent North Carolina Music Maker event was held to honor the visit of Benjamin Tehoval from Sorbusbourg, France on February 10th. Benjamin came to visit the artists with whom he had shared the festival stages of Europe over the past few years. Ever gracious and enthusiastic, the artists gave Benjamin a dose of blues and Southern hospitality he won't soon forget.

The following week Music Maker got on the road to accompany Big Boy Henry and Benjamin Tehoval to performances at the Charleston, SC Blues Bash. We also paid a visit to the Penn Center, situated on the Sea Islands off the South Carolina coast. Now a cultural center, this institution opened its doors in 1862 as the first school for freed blacks in the nation and a favorite site of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. for reflection and speech writing. We met with the Center's cultural director to discuss possible joint ventures for the future.

Music Maker still managed to get out and visit artists throughout the South including John Lee Zeigler, Othar Turner, Robert Belfour, Jack Owens, Eugene Powell, Rufus McKenzie, James Davis, Jerry McCain, Carl Hodge, John Dee Holeman, Etta Baker, Coodie Stark and John Ferguson Jr.

The Music Maker story was recently the subject of a feature article in the Hartford Courant (CT) by Kevin Hunt. The story was so well received in Hartford that they put it out on the wire service and it was picked up in Stamford, CT; Charlottesville, VA; Mobile, AL; Little Rock, AK; Saginaw, MI; Milwaukee, WI and Ann Arbor, MI. We were flooded with inquiries and support from all of these locals, confirming our suspicion that people really do care, if you give them an opportunity to express it.

We send a special note of appreciation to our friends and patrons who have been so supportive through the difficult recent times. The generosity of Music Maker patrons enabled Guitar Gabriel to be buried with the dignity he deserved. Donations in Guitar Gabriel's name are still appreciated, as Music Maker's commitment to the funeral home has not yet been fulfilled in its entirety. We would also like to raise additional funds for a suitable headstone.

Thank you for your interest and support.

Yours Truly,

Timothy & Denise Duffy



Denise & Timothy Duffy on the road, Sylvester, Ga.
photo: Tim Duffy

IN MEMORIAM

Pernell King died on March 23, 1996. Pernell was a gifted singer and can be heard on the Come So for CD. I met Pernell while he was finishing out the last two years of a 27-year jail sentence. Gabe and I would go and visit Pernell, Gabe's younger brother, when he was working on the inmate road crews. Gabe related to me that in their younger days the two of them would hobo the country, singing and playing the blues in black neighborhoods in small towns throughout the South. Pernell could never really adjust to life on the outside. He was a good friend to all of us here in our small Winston-Salem community and he is greatly missed.



Pernell King photo: Axel Küstner



Mary MacDuffie photo: Kevin Hoppe

Mary MacDuffie died on February 28, 1996 at the age of 82. Mary was a legendary proprietor of a "drink house" for over 50 years in Winston-Salem. When I first met Gabe we would go to Mary's and sit in her living room and play her the blues. Gabe told me that Mary made the best potato liquor and blackberry wine in town. She loved the local musicians and opened her home to any of them when they were in need. She had a pleasing voice and she loved to sing a few blues with Gabe every time we stopped by.

IN MEMORIAM

On April 2, 1996 Guitar Gabriel died of natural causes. He was born in 1924, the son of an itinerant bluesman/share-cropper in rural Georgia. Gabriel lived hard, travelled constantly and saw a great deal in his life. Gabe was a profound artist who dedicated his entire life to music. He was the original inspiration to create this foundation. No one spoke more eloquently about the blues than Gabe. Here are a few words he left us with:

"When I make other people happy, then I am happy. About music—it keeps you out of violence. Blues is special because it takes a lot of animosity out of your heart.



Guitar Gabriel photo: Tim Duffy

Music is a difficult thing if you do not understand it. Music is a feeling. If you can't feel what you are doing you can't do it. If you don't like what you are doing you are not going to do it. You can do it, but you won't be good at it. Like a preacher. You take a city preacher, he'll say "Ladies and gentlemen." No one wants to hear that shit. You get one of those old country preachers—he will start screaming. He is going to do it from his heart. Make them feel what you feel. Once you do that you are all right. Other than that... you might as well hang it up.

I'm good but I don't brag it. I am not afraid to get in front of anybody. I know I am good. When you know something you do not have to ask nobody. As long as I feel it in my heart that I am good, I am good. I have played so much guitar it could make your ass hurt.

Blues is something that you do not find in no notes. You don't find it on paper. It is something which is in your heart. You got to feel it to do it. If you live it you know what I'm talking about. Sometimes we can be happy, sometimes we can be blue. It's only what life chooses for you. You can wake up in the morning going to your job, doing your daily occupation. Twenty-four hours or eight hours. That's the blues. When things don't go right, seems like everything you do is wrong, that's the blues. You can be in your home and have the blues. You can be on the train. You can get it, too. That's the blues. Or you can be in New York City with over 20 million people and have the blues, that's what I'm talking about. That's the blues. It explains your mishappenings, it explains your misfortunes, it explains your ups and downs. That's what life chooses, you know. Now blues ain't nothing but a feeling. It's either you have or you don't. It is something that God gives you. Men can't take it away. You know sometime we can be happy, sometime we can be blue, you go down in the wilderness you see little birds cheeping, they got it too. That's the blues... Back in Africa before my time, they used to take a paper sack and play the blues. Yeah. So to experience life, it will tell you all about that, too... My hat is an African hat. And what it is, it brings the story about the culture that you have been through. The things that you have been through. The things that you have seen in life and the trouble that you have experienced, and the people you have been around. So, it kind of gives you the flavor of the blues... so whenever you wear this hat, it gives you a feeling of what you are representing. Anything that you take on to do, got to have a basing to let people know what it is and what it stands for. You can drive a Cadillac but if it don't got Cadillac on it and people don't know what the car is, they still don't know what it is you are driving. So, that is the same thing. That is the story behind that.

Blues will never die because it is a spirit. It is an uplift and the way you feel it, that is the way it is. And it brings a lot of joy to people. Music is made to make happiness, make you smile and forget your troubles. In the Good Book it says to make a joyful noise, just as long as you make one. So that is about the size of it. That is what we are trying to do."

-Guitar Gabriel

REFLECTIONS ON GUITAR GABRIEL

One day (I was living in Chicago) I got a message on my machine from my buddy Tim Duffy in North Carolina. He said, "Mike, I can't talk long, I haven't slept in a week... I just wanted to tell you, I've met this guy, and he's gonna take us straight to the top." A week went by, and Tim called and played me a tape. It literally made my hair stand up on the back of my neck. A few months later we sat in the basement of a Durham restaurant recording some tunes with this Guy. The resultant disc got nominated for a Handy Award with some 300 copies in circulation. We did some road gigs. We'd walk into a Denny's and by the time we'd left everybody in the room would have a smile on their face compliments of Robert Lewis "Nyles" "Guitar Gabriel" Jones. About two years after that, we were on stage at Carnegie Hall. Gabe unceremoniously threw his cane to the floor and brought laughter from a crowd accustomed to polite applause. A year or so later we were in Lugano, Switzerland. Gabe was moving pretty slow in the last few years and we'd have a wheelchair waiting so we could get around fast. We'd sure make the rounds at Lugano, because Gabe was all about meeting people. I never saw anybody capture the hearts of people quicker than he did. After a few days of shows on smaller stages, the time came for the big finale. All sorts of luminaries were at that festival, but somehow it was understood that the man front and center at the close of the festival was to be Guitar Gabriel. Ten or twelve musicians took solos, swapped guitars and generally roamed the stage during that finale... and Gabe sat in his chair, singing the blues. The crowd loved him. But when Gabe got up out of that damn chair (probably the only time anybody in the crowd had seen him walk) and did that Boogaloo, some 10,000 people in that little town square exploded.

When Tim and I were doing a session with Big Boy Henry in Beaufort, we asked him why so few people in the blues community, particularly in North Carolina, seemed willing to pay Gabe respect in terms of publicity, decent paying gigs, or for that matter, any gigs whatsoever. Big Boy replied, "People think they know the blues. Then they see Guitar Gabriel, and they realize he is the blues, and they don't know what he knows, and they can't handle it. So they try to put him down," echoing Gabe's favorite expression... maybe it should be on his tombstone as his last message to us all... "I ain't gonna quit you, but I'm gonna put you down for a while." Gabe never put us down, and he sure never quit.

- Michael Parrish



May 2, 1995 photo: Axel Küstner

I never had a father but I felt like I did with Gabe. He introduced me to a way of life that is free, open minded and sincere. Gabe and Tim introduced people like myself to racial equality and brought black, white, young, and old together with harmony.

- Mark Blackburn

I lived with Gabe down on Claremont Street. It wasn't a hard life, you just had to drink all the time.

- Macavine Hayes

He was a damn good man. He was every man's dream to what they wanted to be, to my knowledge. He was a hell-billed man. He'd been through more damn shit than the world can turn. All Gabe was showing you was true life, that was all.

- Joe Foage

In his music Guitar Gabe grabbed at our souls and spoke to us of what it means to be truly human. He came into my life and shook me up a bit and I am richer for it.

- Sugar Puddin'

ARTIST NOTES

- John Lee Zeigler was a huge success at the Blues Estafette in Holland and a picture of his performance recently appeared in the British blues magazine, Juke Blues.

- Carl Rutherford is the greatest mountain musician to emerge from Appalachia since Doc Watson. This retired coal-miner from War, West Virginia has now devoted himself to sharing his tremendous talent as a song-writer and guitar-picker. Carl will be featured August 24th and 25th at the Roots of American Music Festival at Lincoln Center in New York which is produced by Spike Barkin.

- Bishop and Marie Manning are doing well. The Bishop's congregation is growing with a new church called St. Mark's Mission in Scotland Neck. All are welcome to attend services at St. Mark's or his home church in Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina.

- Wills Mae Buckner is enjoying the company of her two new snakes. Slam is a green and black Burmese Python about 12' long and is the shy retiring type. Pepe, an albino Burmese Python measuring about 10', has a creamy white body with peach colored markings. Pepe likes to hang out on top of the sideboard in the living room where he can observe the household activities.

- Luther Mayer's folk art has recently been accepted for exhibition and sale at The Red Piano Too gallery on St. Helena Island, South Carolina. Luke fashions airplanes, cars, lamps and ashtrays from wood scraps and aluminum cans. The foundation recently purchased a used Chevrolet Caprice Classic for Luke.



Elder Anderson Johnson photo: Axel Küstner

- Algia Mae Hinton, Big Boy Henry and Lightnin' Wells will be at the Eddie Merle Watson Festival on April 27th. Lightnin' and Algia will also perform at the Fort Townsend Blues Festival, June 17-22 and the Great Blue Heron Festival in Jamestown NY, July 5,6,7.

- Carl Hodge, a great bluesman from Virginia, was brought to Tim's attention by Axel Küstner. Tim located Carl and there are plans for him to appear at the Blues Estafette this November.

- Tim just met up with Coodie Stark, the only pure Piedmont bluesman he has ever met. Coodie grew up learning and playing with Piedmont blues legends such as Baby Tate, Pink Anderson, Walter and Ethel Phelps, Blind Sammy Doolie, John Olive and Peg Leg Sam. He has a beautiful voice and is a very strong guitarist.

- Jack Owens turned 92 during his appearance at the Blues Estafette. Blues scholar David Evans accompanied Jack on the trip. At the airport Jack kept buzzing the metal detector, and it turned out that he had a pistol hidden in his boot. Jack had to leave his gun behind, but made the trip and was a highlight of the festival.

- Big Boy Henry is feeling great and back in the swing of things and was featured at the Charleston Blues Bash in February. Big Boy and Lightnin' Wells will be performing at the Moulin Blues Festival in Holland on May 4th. They will be back in Raleigh, NC on May 19th to appear at Artsplosure and at the Museum of History on June 9th at 2:00.

- Maxine Hayes was the pleased recipient of a new electric guitar and amplifier from Music Maker in December.

- Elder Anderson Johnson, Holiness preacher and steel guitar player of Newport News, VA has attracted the interest of Norman Hewitt, artistic director for the Blues to Bop Festival in Lugano, Switzerland.

MUSIC MAKER NEWS

-Please join us in welcoming four new directors to our board this Spring: Dr. Glenn Hinson, Dr. Kay Hill, Coleman 'Spike' Barkin and Lightnin' Wells.

- Brian Golden of Golden Images in High Point, NC, was honored with a Gold Addy American Advertising Award by the Piedmont Triad Advertising Federation for his art direction and package design on the Patron's Sampler CD and Booklet, *A Living Post*.

- Blues lover Eric Clapton arranged to spend an afternoon last November with Timothy Duffy and Mark Levinson at Callo's NY showroom. He had received the Music Maker CDs at a chance meeting in a New York restaurant with Mark Levinson earlier in the fall. He was curious to hear more of the recordings and offered his support to the foundation's efforts.



Eric Clapton and Timothy Duffy photo: Mark Levinson

-Mike Parrish is now residing in New York City and can be seen every Friday night with his band at Jack Dempsey's at 2nd Ave and 4th Street. For further information call (212) 864-2844.

- Lightnin' Wells will be at Hawatha Festival in Michigan on July 19-21. He can also be found on a new Rounder release entitled "The American Fogies, Vol. 3"

MUSIC MAKER DONATIONS

CONTRIBUTION FORM

- \$25 Subscribing Supporter (receive newsletter and event information)
 Donation to support foundation
 Donation to Guitar Gabriel Memorial Fund
 \$100 donation to Guitar Gabriel Memorial Fund
((\$100 contributors receive Guitar Gabriel neck pie hand-painted by folk artist Sam McMillan)

Name _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone (____) _____





- Brian Golden, 1996

MISSION STATEMENT

Music Maker Relief Foundation, Inc. is a non-profit organization founded by audio pioneer Mark Levinson and musician/fiddler 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.

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