

THE MUSIC MAKER RAG

Official Newsletter of the Music Maker Relief Foundation, Inc.

VOLUME FOUR, NUMBER TWO

SUMMER '98



WILLA MAE BUCKNER

photo: Mark Austin

Music Maker Relief Foundation, Inc.
Rt. 1 Box 567 Perdue, NC 27943

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Dear Friends,

Through the efforts of Music Maker volunteer Terry Anderson we have developed a relationship with the advertising agency Long Haymes Carr. Their interest in the blues presently has us working with their client R.J.R.'s Winston cigarette brand. A nine page endorsement of Music Maker featuring photographs and the stories of Beverly Watkins, Cootie Stark, Mr. Q, Willa Mae Buckner, Samuel Turner Stevens, Albert Smith, Thomas Gable and Cora Fluker appeared in *Rolling Stone* magazine's 30th Anniversary issue. Look for a similar ad in the August Issue of *Esquire*.

To bring these ads to life, R.J.R. and Music Maker have taken to the road with the Winston Blues Revival. Our first show was on June 3rd in New York with Madcat, Cootie Stark, and Beverly Watkins. Three more shows are set for Denver, New Orleans and Chicago. This campaign brings unprecedented exposure to obscure blues and country musicians.

People throughout the South have connected us with traditional musicians in their own communities. Letters and contributions are rolling in. This is an historic period! The Music Maker artists are deeply appreciative of R.J.R.'s work on behalf of their community.

Music Maker has been getting lot of press. Peter Cooper attended our Blues Revival in Winston-Salem. His subsequent article for *Oxford-American* is included in this Rag.

We are going forward in all directions! Visit our website, www.musicmaker.org. Thanks to *RollingStone.com* for their generous link to our site.

Blues is on the Move!

Tim and Denise Duffy



From left: Tim Duffy, Cootie Stark, Whistlin' Britches, Taj Mahal - Music Maker Blues Revival.

Photo: Mark Austin

- Cello Recordings is soon to launch a Music Maker Series. They will donate a substantial portion from the sale of each CD to the Foundation. Releases by John Dee Holeman, Etta Baker, Guitar Gabriel, Cootie Stark and Neal Pattman are scheduled with more to follow soon. Grammy winning Taj Mahal will be found accompanying these roots artists on many of these recordings.

- Taj Mahal came to Pinnacle in April for a week and recorded with Cootie Stark and Neal Pattman.

- We were able to help Art & Roman Griswald by pressing 500 copies of their cd, *The Real Deal*. Contact: The Griswalds, 353 Melrose, Toledo Ohio, 43608. (419) 242 7191.

- Axel Kitzner is back in action! He has taken a leave of absence for two months from his German Postal worker position to adventure throughout the American South and South West with his camera.

- We were able to help Othar Turner obtain a quality hearing aid. Approaching the age of 90 he has been traveling and performing more than ever.

- On March 19th we had a Music Maker Blues Revival concert at Ziggy's in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. It was a huge success with outstanding performances from Mudcat, Tatsoo Joe, Willa Mae Buckner, Cootie Stark, Mr. Q, Captain Luke, Macavine Hayes, Roy Roberts, Whizzlin' Broches and Taj Mahal.

- On March 28th the Northside Tavern, Mudcat and Music Maker sponsored a successful,



Mudcat and Friends at the Winston Blues Revival

Photo: Tim Duffy

Giving it Back Festival. Former Inkspot member Eddie Tigner was honored. Cootie Stark, James Davis, Rufus McKenzie, Essie Mae Brooks, Frank Edwards and Cora Mae Bryant all performed to an enthusiastic crowd.

- On June 3rd, at Nell's in New York City, Mudcat, Cootie Stark and Beverly "Guitar" Watkins brought down the house at the first Winston Blues Revival. This show was sponsored by the Rolling Stone and Music Maker artists will be traveling to similar events in Denver, Chicago and New Orleans. Check website for details.

- We have been fortunate to be able to donate Frank Robinson of Crocket, TX a 1949 Gibson acoustic guitar and a Peavey guitar amplifier. Algis Mae Hinson, of Middlesex, NC a 60's Vega resonator banjo,

Albert Smith of Rambert, SC a Kimball upright piano, Jimmie Lee Williams of Poulton, GA a Peavey electric guitar, John Dee Holeman of Durham, NC a new National Reso-Phonic guitar, Mr. Q. of Winston-Salem, NC a Yamaha 88 key electric keyboard, Jahue Forie of Winston-Salem, NC a 1937 KayCraft acoustic guitar, Robert "Wolfman" Belfour of Memphis, TN a new National Reso-Phonic guitar, Willie King of Aliceville, AL a Fender guitar and amp, Little Pink Anderson of Spartanburg, SC a new Fender guitar amp and we were able to repair a banjo for Larry Shores of Jonesville, NC.

- We are honored to have Alfred "Snuff" Johnson (TX), Willie King (AL), Kelvin "Dogman" Blackman (TN), George Higgs (NC) and Hurl Evans (TN) as new recipient Music Maker artists.

Music Maker Profile

by Peter Cooper

"I took a lot of abusing off of people in this life," says Cootie Stark, sitting in the passenger seat of a station wagon that is taking him back to the Woodland Homes public housing projects in Greenville, South Carolina.

"I been through the hassles, man. And a whole lot of phony talk, you know. Phony talk. But I kept on, and I got to that smooth road. You ain't gonna get there if you think getting to the smooth road is easy. That's in life. Something is better out there for you. Sometimes when we get disgusted, we have to just try to hold on."

Cootie's smooth road is still fraught with surface scars. He is a poor, blind, 71-year-old man who draws disability checks and lives alone in a ghetto apartment. Or else he's a forgotten hero of the blues, a direct link to Piedmont acoustic legends Pink Anderson, Sirmie Dooley and Baby



Cootie Stark

— Photo: Tim Duffy

Tate, an artist of international stature and unquestionable importance.

It all depends on who you ask. It all depends on who you believe.

Cootie Stark appears in none of the accepted blues historians' books.

Five years ago, he was unknown, undocumented, unheard. But lately a renegade musicologist/entrepreneur named Tim Duffy has taken Cootie to Europe, the Winston Brand of R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company presented Stark's face to 3.5 million people in the form of an advertisement in *Rolling Stone* magazine, and a CD is in the works that may make the historians look like phony talkers.

"I'm happy about all that, man," Stark says as the car stops in front of his apartment. "I ain't never had it before, so it makes me happy."

"There's a lot of people still living that want to hear this, and they ain't got it on the radio. It should have been 45 years ago, but more likely I'm better now than I was in my 20s. More likely I'm better."

Cootie Stark was born James Miller, but most everyone in Anderson County, South Carolina called him Johnny. Some of them called him Cootie, though he can't remember exactly why. He worked in the cotton fields with his share-cropper parents and dreamed of playing music for a living.

Visits to an aunt in Greenville when Cootie was 12 presented him with the Piedmont blues influences that root his guitar style today.

"Greenville had good talent back then," he said. "Baby Tate used to play on the street there, and that's how I come to know him. Then I got a guitar when I was 14, and I learned songs from my Uncle Chump and a bunch of songs from Baby Tate."

Cootie was encouraged to keep playing, in part because his near-total blindness was considered an impediment to ever working a straight job or gaining an education. "There was a man came to my momma's house when I was a teenager," Stark says. "He talked to Momma about me coming to the Spartanburg school for blind people. I wanted to go, by she didn't let me."

Back in those days she thought they might be mean to me. That's the reason why."

Three years after picking up the instrument, Cootie Miller was playing street corners in Greenville and square dances in the outlying counties. He began what he calls his "traveling years" after turning 20, performing on the streets of Asheville, Knoxville, Greensboro, Columbia and other Southern cities and playing with elder musicians who would one day be recognized as blues legends: Pink Anderson, Simmie Dooley, Peg Leg Sam and Josh White (Cootie knew White as "John White").

But while Tate, Anderson, Dooley, Sam and White each recorded music that still endures, Cootie remained in unrecorded obscurity, moving from town to town, playing for whatever he could get. People would talk about, "Oh, he got a good gift," but all they knew was to give me a drink of liquor or a nickel or a dime or two," he says.

"They didn't have the learning to really help me."

The details of Miller's next 40 years are nebulous, a hazy continuum of struggle and song. If there were few missed opportunities it is because there were few opportunities of any sort. Rock and roll obliterated the way Americans thought about music. Then the 60s folk boom brought first generation blues artists like White, Anderson, Rev. Gary Davis and Lightnin' Hopkins briefly into the national spotlight, though music scholars declined to bestow much significance on second generation players who extended and honored the idiom's traditions. Miller married twice and saw one union broken by death, the other by divorce. He moved back to Greenville in the 1980s, settling into Woodland Homes with little hope of ever finding an audience.

"By then, the real Piedmont blues was pretty much gone," he says. "All them guys was dead and gone, and I wasn't making no headway."

While Cootie's prospects were declining, Tim Duffy was piling Winston-Salem bluesmen into his van and driving them to the cheese lines.

"When I didn't have money to help these people, I gave what I had, which was time and transportation at first," Duffy says. "On check day I'd fill up my van with Guitar Gabriel, Macavine, Hayes, Mr. Q, Willa Mae Buckner and other artists. We'd go to the pawn shop to cash their checks. Then we'd go to the grocery store, go to the cheese line, go to the cigarette store."

Duffy is a blues anarchist of sorts, a folklore scholar who fully believed the poverty-stricken compendium of unknowns in his van were the equals of Howlin' Wolf, Muddy Waters, or BB King. "Guitar Gabriel was as good as anybody. He was the most eloquent poet of the blues from the East coast. Muddy Waters wasn't any better or more important than Gabe. And Macavine, he plays some of the most unadulterated, pure blues I've ever heard. He's a very important artist. Do you validate these artists by record sales? How many great artists never got recorded? Who's setting the criteria here?"

In the early 1990s, Duffy began recording and assisting Guitar Gabriel. When producer and audio pioneer Mark Levinson heard those tapes, he set Duffy up with recording equipment and industry contacts. "Mark came up with the name Music Maker Relief Foundation in 1994."

Duffy says, "And he put up the money for a compilation CD of these artists, and we started working to do something no one has ever done before."

That something was a Peter Pan approach to the blues, with Duffy and wife Denise distributing money from donors directly to artists who needed better instruments, needed help obtaining bookings or simply needed to pay a power bill.

"It's payback time," says Duffy, who now makes his living as a salaried music producer.

"Every major pop star is using blues licks, and it had to come from somewhere. There were a great many people that spawned this music that has turned into billions of dollars for the recording industry people, for Elektra, Sony and Atlantic. Most of these great musicians live for \$4,000 a year, and they're the purveyors of this music, this culture. It's time to write them a royalty check. If we can't get it from the record companies, let's start an organization, raise the money and pay them what is owed."

It was in the spring of 1997, about a year after Guitar Gabriel's death, that Duffy traveled to South Carolina and saw Cootie Miller play electric guitar and sing Fats Domino songs.

"I realized by the way he was playing the guitar that there was something more here than a Fats Domino copycat," Duffy says. "I started asking Cootie, 'Do you know any older songs?' He said, 'Oh, you like those old songs? I had an uncle

Continued on Page Seven

ARTIST NOTES, ETC.



Sammy Blue Photo: Mark Austin

Sammy Blue braved the bitter cold of Portland, Maine to perform for 6 weeks in a play where he provided all the music. He then traveled to Singapore where he performed for 6 weeks and is scheduled to return in August.

• Little Pink Anderson has relocated to Atlanta, Georgia. Paul Geramis and Roy Bookbinder sent me recordings they had made of his father Pink Anderson. Little Pink is thrilled to hear his father tell jokes and pick up on more of his music.

• Mr. Q's house was condemned. On moving day while lifting a freezer he broke a disc in his lower back. While in the hospital, thieves stole many of his possessions. Mr. Q has recovered and is

back to performing and recording.

• Willa Mae Buckner is proud to announce the birth of seven baby pythons on June 10th. If you are interested in purchasing one for a pet, give us a ring in late July. Willa is still looking for a home for the male Siem, who can be seen in the Rolling Stone advertisement.

• If you like Peter Cooper's article you may be interested in his book "Hub City Music Makers." This work tells the stories of the musicians that hail from Spartanburg, South Carolina. Send a \$20 check to the Hub City Fund, PO Box 8421, SC 29305. If you mention you read about the book from this newsletter they will send Music Maker \$10.



Willa Mae Buckner Photo: Neil Palmer

Carl Rutherford writes:

"In regards to the great Slide Guitar Festival, I wish to thank you folks for getting me worked into the 3 days of show & doings. The folks from National guitar were the greatest. They seemed like pure old family. I had owned a National for many years and it always out-talked any guitar in the jam.

You folks at Music Maker are doing such wonderful works in helping pickers with working instruments so they can once again do their magic on the strings, that is only their magic. And getting people like me into doors that I could never swing open on my own and working with greats like Axel Küstner of Germany (one of the boldest and greatest picture takers of the blues & music world), plus a few more.

Timmy & Denise, God will have a place ready for you to rest when he is done with you on this earth & will say as I (Well Done).

Love in Christ,
Carl Rutherford

MUSIC MAKER EVENTS: ONGOING

• Musical every Wednesday night at the Northside Tavern, Atlanta, Ga. Info: 404-874-8743

JUNE

• Oskar Turner's 9th Birthday party June 13th, Seaside, ME

• Jerry "Bongo" McCain - June 20th, City Stage, downtown Birmingham, AL, 4:30-7:00pm Info: 205-822-4502

• Big Boy Henry Beverly "Guitar" Watkins, Carl Mae Bryson, Guitar Gabbi, Little Pink Anderson, Cooke Stark, Capone Luke, Willa Mae Buckner, Mr. Q, Maurice Hayes, John Lee Ziegler, Phyllis Joe, Conary Blues Band & Lightnin' Wells - June 20th, Charlotte Blues Festival, Charlotte, NC, 10:00pm-12:00am, Info: 704-331-9802 Tx: Ticketmaster 704-322-4200 Advance tickets \$10 (\$12 day of show)

• Big Boy Henry & Lightnin' Wells June 23rd, Western Carolina State University, Cullowee, NC, Info: 919-754-8849

• Cooke Stark and Mokea, June 26th & 27th (with Carl Mae Bryson) at Northside Tavern, Atlanta, GA. Info: 404-874-8743

• Cooke Stark, Carl Mae Bryson and Phyllis Joe June 27 at Thomas Dorsey Festival in Villa Rica, GA. Info: 404-433-4921

• Carl Rutherford - Port Townsend Blues Week & Festival, Port Townsend, WA Workshops June 22-28, performance June 24-27. Info: 800-753-3608

JULY

• Big Boy Henry & Lightnin' Wells - July 1, Festival for the Arts, Durham, NC, Info: 919-754-8849

• Big Boy Henry & Lightnin' Wells - July 12-17, Augusta Heritage Festival & Blues Week, Davis & Elkins College, Elkins, WVA, Info: 204-637-1245

• Western Blues Festival in Denver, Colorado. Similar events are scheduled for Chicago and New Orleans. Check website for details.

AUGUST

• Elder James & Mother Pauline Gates from Ridgeway, South Carolina and Esau Mae Brooks from Perry, Georgia will appear at the Lincoln Center Out of Doors American Music Festival, August 29th, New York, NY. This will be the first appearance that these performers have created outside of their home state. Info: 212-875-5108

SEPTEMBER

• Blues in Big Festival, September 4-6th, Lugano, Switzerland. This event features great blues and gospel musicians from the American South. Performers are yet to be announced. Info: 238-125-2322

OCTOBER

• Big Boy Henry and Lightnin' Wells - October 4th, Seaside Festival, Mountaintop City, NC. Info: 919-754-8849

named Uncle Chump and I knew this guy named Baby Tate. He taught me thousands of songs. You want to hear some of those?"

By the time of that meeting, Duffy's Music Maker organization was on solid footing. Levinson had connected the foundation to a number of top-level music industry executives. Duffy had produced two compilation CDs and a full-length disc on Guitar Gabriel, and donations from corporations and individuals brought the Music Maker bank account to previously unthinkable levels. In 1997, Duffy expanded his recipient base to nearly 50 performers and gave away \$100,000.

"A lot of people told me, 'You should put that money back in an endowment and keep it growing,' Duffy says. "But the need was so great, and how is that money going to help these people in ten years, when they're dead? These artists are in their 70s and 80s now."

Within months of hooking up with Duffy, Cootie had a new acoustic guitar, a new stage name (Stark was the last name of Miller's stepfather) and a promising career. The biggest obstacle in the early part of the Cootie Stark/Tim Duffy alliance was convincing Cootie that getting paid good money for playing music didn't mean he would lose his disability check. A former duo partner told him he couldn't make more than \$100 on a gig without repercussions.

"This guy had him living in fear," Duffy says. "I was going to pay him \$1000 once and he was scared. He really wanted the \$1000, but the guy had convinced him that he would lose his check. I had to do some research and bring a social worker down to see Cootie and get it all straight and clear. Cootie didn't think he was allowed to have a bank account, either, but now he's got that."

"Yeah, I told Timmy about the situation I was in with the governor," Stark remembers. "He checked on it for me, and then he said, 'If that's all you're scared about, you don't have to worry.' That's when we went to New

York and I started out with him, and we've been going around together ever since."

Duffy's notion that most traditional blues clubs provide a poor way to turn a buck or garner attention means that his artists are more likely to play Carnegie Hall or the Newport Rhythm and Blues Festival than to appear on small stages. And, whether playing European shows, American festival gigs or a toney jewelry store in the Hamptons, Stark has been universally well-received in his first year as an international blues figure. His abrasive, percussive guitar style melds with a vocal arsenal that ranges from a rough-hewn gospel shout to a tight, pretty vibrato, and his concerts are glorious time warps, direct links to a South long since gone.

"Cootie has taught me stuff I'd never had any idea about," Duffy says. "He knows all these songs from all these rural musicians. It makes you realize that Pink Anderson and Baby Tate were just the tip of an iceberg of a world we don't know anything about. And just because most of the people in that world were never recorded, that doesn't make them any less great. Put Cootie on a stage in Europe singing songs like 'Sandy Land' or 'Jigroo' and people go nuts. They've never seen or heard anything like him, because he's the real thing."

This spring, Duffy continued to find heretofore unheard-of avenues to promote Cootie Stark, Thomas "Guitar" Gable, Wills Mae "Snake Lady" Buckner, Beverly "Guitar" Wadkins and other elderly artists he considers to be of monumental importance. This time, he found a corporate ally in Winston Cigarettes, who featured Music Maker's musicians in an insert ad in *Rolling Stone*.

"We're talking about three and a half million inserts with nine photographs of unknown blues musicians and a paragraph telling the world who they are," Duffy says. "This is the biggest piece of loose literature ever produced on country blues. We've gone right around the Blues Nazis, the people who are supposed to decide



Cootie Stark & Tim Duffy

— Photo Axel Runner

what is and what isn't important. This ad is not even talking to a blues audience. It's talking to mainstream music lovers, and there's a lot more of them than of historians and musicologists."

More people will see Cootie's face in the cigarette ad than have read the books of accepted blues scholars.

On the heels of the cigarette ad, Duffy has secured a record deal for Cootie on Cello Records. Stark's debut CD will be distributed through Warner Brothers and carried in record stores throughout the world.

"They say the older you get, the more fun you gonna have, and I believe them now," Stark says. "I just wish I'd had some of this a long time ago. I've had a lot of wasted time, a lot of time gone. But that was just an old, bumpy road."

(This article appears in the Oxford American, "The Southern Magazine of Good Writing", Double Issue #21-22. Contact: The Oxford American, P.O. Box 1156, Oxford, MS 38655, tel. 601 236 1816.)

DONATIONS

Donation (no premiums, entirely deductible)
All donations of \$20 or more include one year
subscription to MMRF newsletter.

\$20 - Music Maker Relief Foundation, Inc. poster
(\$15 tax deductible)

\$25 - Willie Mae "The Snake Lady" Buckner Tee
shirts, sizes L and XL(circle size) (\$15 tax deductible)

Guitar Gabriel Vol. 1, A Living Past and Came So Far
CDs \$25 each (\$15 tax deductible), \$45 for two
(\$25 tax deductible), \$65 for three (\$35 tax
deductible) (Circle CD of choice) Note A Living
Past and Came So far are available in limited quantities.

Total Donation (no charge for shipping in US,
International donors please add \$5 US)

Note due to IRS regulations the entire amount of a donation is reduced
by the retail value of premiums received by donors.

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If you would like to make your donation by Mastercard or Visa
you may call us at 336-325-2505 (M-F 9-5 EST),
fax: 336-325-3263, e-mail mmrf1@aol.com or write.

Send check or money order with this form to:
Music Maker Relief Foundation, Inc.
Rt. 1 Box 567
Pinnacle, NC 27043

MISSION STATEMENT

Music Maker Relief Foundation, Inc.

is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping the true pioneers and forgotten heroes of Southern musical traditions gain recognition and meet their day to day needs. Today, many such musicians are living in extreme poverty and need food, shelter, medical care, and other assistance. Music Maker's aid and service programs improve the quality of recipients lives. Our work affirms to these artists' that we value the gifts of music and inspiration they have delivered to the world. Our mission is to give back to the roots of American music. Our criterion for recipients is they be rooted in a Southern musical tradition, be 55 years or older and have an annual income less than \$18,000.

Music Maker Relief Foundation, Inc. is a tax exempt, public charity under
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Written by Timothy and Denise Duffy

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