We didn’t know where we were going but we knew what we was leavin’.

-Guitar Gabriel

Dear Friends,

As we work on this edition of the Rag, we think fondly of our Silent Strings, the Music Maker artists that are no longer with us. We remember these artists’ incredible music and spirits that have added beauty and joy to our lives.

We are thinking a great deal about our friend Gabe these days. He always brought us tremendous humor and wisdom as we traveled on this journey. Thanks to the valiant efforts of Gail Weiker, a headstone has been ordered for our sage, so people will know where this great man lies. She also headed the effort to secure a headstone for the late Willa Mae Buckner.

We feel it is important to keep the messages and spirits of artists alive so that future generations may benefit. That’s why we have always welcomed young people to join us in our work.

One such individual is the son of our good friend John Creech. He goes by the name Sol. John took his son to meet Guitar Gabriel and his wife Dot when Sol was just a young boy. That powerful introduction inspired Sol to pursue an education as a recording engineer and musician. Sol spent countless hours helping to make records for MMRF artists, and backed them up on tour playing bass. He’s even ventured out late at night in strange cities to get Cootie Stark a meal.

Sol recently released a CD that honors the men and women of the Music Maker Relief Foundation. All the featured artists love this CD. Cootie Stark presents Sol’s modern arrangement with Cool John at his shows. Mr. Frank Edwards listened to his track just hours before he passed with great enthusiasm. I know that Guitar Gabriel too would be very proud to be included on the album. Gabe told me once,

“When I make other people happy, then I am happy. Music is a difficult thing if you do not understand it. Music is a feeling. 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. It doesn’t say what kind of noise, just as long as you make one. So that is about the size of it. That is what we are trying to do.”

We hope that while you enjoy the summer, you will think of the rich heritage that surrounds us, and celebrate its present and future forms. Please continue to help these true pioneers and forgotten heroes of Southern music thrive.

With warm regards,

Timothy & Denise Duffy
The blues, like the clouds that occasionally blotted out the sun, drifted moody over Ninth Street Sunday as old hands reanimated by the stage banged out soulful chords.

Cootie Stark, a blind bluesman who lives in Greenville, S.C., used to play on the streets of Durham for pennies back in the first half of the last century. On Sunday, he wore a bright orange suit with a shining, royal blue shirt and tie and dark glasses as he sat on a stool ready to play.

Sunday's music festival, the first-ever "Roots on Ninth," was as welcome as the infrequent sun. It's more fun to hear half of the blues than it is to live through them like the characters in a Cootie Stark or "Lightnin'" Wells rendition. "I used to be a wildcat, but this woman done tamed me down," Wells sang from the South Stage near Bruegger's.

The songs all afternoon were about sex and forgiveness and heartbreak and all the other influences - alcohol, unemployment and other people - that upset the apple carts of daily life. Revelry and the pain of infidelity were recurring themes.

"My good woman, yeah... She done quit me, yeah... I hope I don't lose my mind."

"I am blue... Lord, I can't be blue, always - no-no-no... The sun's going to shine in my back door, someday."

Years of living showed in Stark's face as years of experience flowed through his fingertips.

Before Stark's performance, Macavine Hayes, a performer of similar musical vintage, took center stage in the parking lot across from the heart of the Ninth Street shopping district. Hayes waited as Tim Duffy, a younger organizer and accompanying guitarist set up the microphone and tuned the guitar for him. Duffy said Hayes would play some North Carolina drink house music, similar to the juke joints of Mississippi, where "you could listen to music and borrow money from the man until payday."

With three stages and only a few tents, the festival had an innocent feel of something at its beginnings. It was sponsored by the Ninth Street Merchants Association to benefit WINCU 90.7 FM, the N.C. Central University jazz station, and the Music Maker Relief Foundation, a Hillsborough based organization that works to support traditional musicians. The T-shirts were only $5 at the free festival.

As the afternoon progressed, more and more families arrived not just for the music but to visit the kids tents at either end of the street. In one tent, on the south end near the bagel shop, Cheryl Capron prepared for a bubblefest. If Sesame Street ever ran a country fair tent this would be it.

Her husband, Gary Hadden, entertained under the tent at the north end of the street. He wore a balloon top hat he created as he handed the balloons for excited children. The couple owns Balloon Krazy and on Sunday worked for gift certificates. They usually donate their time at children's hospitals and at the Special Olympics, Capron said.

As Cheryl Capron set up the bubble-blowing tent, her 17-year-old daughter, Erica, came to help. "Her friends all know we're down so she's no longer embarrassed," Capron said.

Representatives from the Museum of Life and Science showed live snakes to the children, and storeowners set up tables to sell their wares. But mostly Ninth Street is already set up as a shopping festival; the only thing needed for Sunday's music were the stages.

Martha White, who was sitting on a bench down the street, made her way to the central stage to listen to Stark. The 89-year-old bopped to the music as Stark pulled on the strings. She has always lived in Durham, never anywhere else, and remembers the 1920s and '30s when the Piedmont Blues and Durham's Blind Boy Fuller were making their way into the Southern musical lexicon.

Earlier, White sat on the bench in front of an ice cream store as her daughter shopped around a bit. "The blues was just one part of the music I loved. I promised my daughter that I would sit down so I wouldn't embarrass her by dancing. I embarrass myself in the grocery store," she said as her hand tapped to the beat on her knee.

On the south end of the street, Captain Luke and Cool John played in harmony. Cool John played an electric guitar and Luke sang the blues: "I left my teardrops back in that of lonely room... Yes, I left my broken heart, yeah, back there, too."
Reviews

Who is sol? Some kid, I guess. Then again, anybody would look like a kid if they were pictured sitting at a little table, next to a beer-drinking, truth-telling Cootie Stark and a sunglasses-wearing, cool-singing guitar singer like John Ferguson. That’s the only glimpse we get of sol, and we don’t get that one until we pop open the Volume: Blue CD and remove the disc from its jewel box. Then you see a shot of sol with Ferguson, Iggy, and a Heineken, and that’s probably worth the price of purchase right there.

Once the disc is out of its casing, it might as well go into your CD player. Then sol reveals himself through grooves and samples and even some guitar and bass playing. He’s some kid with good ears, some loopy kid with uncommon understanding; some oddly driven kid who has learned lessons that would seem beyond his years.

For Cootie, Guitar Gabriel, Cool John Ferguson, Neal Pattman, Essie Mae Brooks, Frank Edwards and others, sol is a microphone and a conduit. sol channels blues, altering soundscapes without altering intent. Captain Luke might say a sol construction is “not my type of song,” and Captain Luke (as usual) would be right. But Luke’s messages aren’t lost in sol’s funky, postmodern shuffle. While many young, white musicians attempt to replicate the blues masters’ art, sol steers clear of imitation in favor of excavation and transport. Sounds carry beyond genes, beyond origin and often beyond the grave. Ancient truths of the blues arrive in some new place, through some new voice, through some kid who is sol.

-Peter Cooper, Nashville, TN.

Little Pink Anderson learned first hand from his father who used to take him with when he played medicine shows. Carolina Bluesman showcases a masterful country blues player displaying some exceptional guitar chops and soulful vocals. The songs are drawn almost exclusively from his dad’s repertoire, which includes mainly traditional folk and blues tunes but played with so much good natured charisma and passion that he makes these songs totally his own. Little Pink evokes the relaxed charm of his father tackling songs he obviously played with the old man.

The Georgia Music Hall of Fame’s Blues Came to Georgia includes Guitar Gabriel’s spoken word of “Old Man River” accompanied by piano and mournful fugal horn, Beverly “Guitar” Watkins on the rocking “Miz D.J. Feelgood” featuring her blistering guitar work, Eddie Tigner on a stomping version of “CC Rider” and the joyous Sonny Terry inspired harmonica of Neil Pattman on “Market Blues.” Other gems include fine songs by Precious Bryant, the moving acapella of Essie Mae Brooks on “Rain in Your Life,” among the last recording done by Frank Edwards and the bawdy “Yo-Yo” by ex-snake charmer and tent show performer Willa Mae Buckner.

Both of these CDs evoke the authentic down-home country blues that you would think had vanished a long time ago. By helping these forgotten musicians make ends meet and providing an outlet for their music, Music Maker is performing a heroic service.

-Jeff Harris, Bad Dog Blues (www.baddogblues.com)

Here’s a real treat— an album Tarboro Blues] of acoustic Piedmont blues that sounds like it could have been a long-lost Bluesville session from forty years ago but is actually a new recording by a hitherto unheard artist. George Higgs is a 70-year-old North Carolinian who was inspired to take up the harmonica as a child after hearing Odetta Bailey on the radio and seeing Peg Leg Sam at medicine shows and then learned to play guitar as a teenager… Higgs’ singing and playing have both remained remarkably strong through the years. For lovers of acoustic blues, this should be one of the year’s essential releases.

Jim DeKoster, Living Blues
In 1909, Frank Edwards, elder statesman of Atlanta's blues community, died Friday, March 22, 2002 in Greenville, S.C. He was 93.

Born March 20, 1909, in Washington, Georgia, Edwards left home at 14 after a disagreement with his father, bound for St. Augustine, Florida. He bought a guitar and began learning to play, receiving encouragement from guitarist Tampa Red (a.k.a. Hudson Whitakers). Later Edwards took up harmonica, drawing inspiration from John Lee “Sonny Boy” Williamson and others.

Edwards traveled extensively through the 1930s by bus or train, “roving” when he had to while he learned his trade as a street musician. He moved to Atlanta in 1936. An association with Mississippi bluesman Tommy McGlennan led to Edwards' first recording session in 1941. He recorded again in 1949 and released a full-length LP, 'Done Some Travelin' (later re-issued on CD) on the Trix label in 1973. He also supported himself as a carpenter, painter and plumber, but always played music, except for a two-year period when a house fire left him without a guitar.

In a career that spanned nine decades, Edwards saw blues evolve from an exclusively black folk music form into a commercial entity that was embraced by both whites and blacks. When he began playing music, "didn't nothing like [blues] then but black [people]," Edwards said in a 1998 interview. "Didn't none play it but black. After so many years, white folks caught the blues. Now that's what they want to hear. They liked it all that time, but they was ashamed to listen to it, because nothing played it but black[s]. They'd just buy the records, get in the basement with a gallon of liquor, drink it and listen to the blues. I hear a heap of 'em say it."

Fittingly, the last months of Edwards' life--in fact, the last hours--were spent playing the music that he loved. In fact, he'd enjoyed a relative flurry of activity, performing at the Atlanta History Center for its "Nothin' But the Blues" series and at the Georgia Music Hall of Fame annex at Discover Mills in Lawrenceville, GA.

On the day he died, Edwards had completed a recording session with Tim Duffy. He was returning home, riding with Atlanta area blues supporters Larry Garnett and Lamar Jones, when he suffered a heart attack in Greenville, SC. He died in an ambulance en route to the hospital.

The March 22 session featured seven songs, including new, original material, with John Ferguson playing drums. In support, says Tim Duffy, Music Maker's founder. Duffy says that recording, which included two previous sessions, was complete and Music Maker had planned to "fast track" the CD and have copies in Edwards' hands within weeks.

"He played the best I've ever heard him play," Duffy says of Edwards' last session. "He was blossoming. It was like ancient music from Africa."

Edwards had been working on the Music Maker recording since 1996, Duffy says. Edwards initially recorded a solo session in Atlanta (you can hear his "Chicken Raid" on the recently released Blues Came to Georgia CD, issued jointly by Music Maker and the Georgia Music Hall of Fame) and had recorded in 2001 in a band setting with Danny "Mudcat" Dudek.

Edwards expressed frustration in dealing with the recording industry, but was pleased to work with Music Maker. "Tim Duffy is a pretty fast fellow, "bout the straightest one I met yet," said Edwards in 1998. "Don't none of these record companies believe in paying nothing much. Most of them are deadbeats, cheaters and swindlers. They don't pay nothing, but they make good money."

Locally, however, the Atlanta blues appreciated and acknowledged Edwards' contributions and his stature in the community. On March 20, two days before his death, Edwards was the guest of honor at his annual birthday bash at the Northside Tavern. Organized by Danny "Mudcat" Dudek, the party featured performances by many local blues musicians, including Cora Mae Bryant, Eddie Tigner, Carlos Capote, Ross Peed, Donnie McCormick and others.

The evening concluded with Edwards playing for roughly an hour, backed by Jim Ransone on guitar, Dave Roth on bass and Evan Frayer on drums.

"He was strong, the strongest I've ever seen him play," Dudek says. "Ever since I've known him, he's just gotten better and better. But he was on fire [that night], and I'm not the only one to say that... He went out at the top of his game, with brand new songs, with fire, with a big party. He knew he was loved."

Add guitar player Ransone: "Mr. Frank was such a total inspiration to still be going at it at 93. It was inspiring how much he loved music."

Cora Mae Bryant, daughter of longtime Piedmont blues musician Curley Weaver, recalls Edwards performing with her father and uncle around Conyers and Covington in the 1940s and '50s. "They would play at barbecues and fish fries, play at people's houses. We used to party, got [dressed] sharp and get on out with the music."

continued on page 5
Music Maker News

Music Maker is on the move...in the past year we have doubled our number of donors!

We joyously welcome the energy and expertise of Taj Mahal, Bill Lucado, Bill Puckett and John Price to our Board of Directors.

Fresh from the MMRF garden this summer: zucchini, yellow squash, okra, tomatoes, basil, cucumbers, parsley, dill, cantaloupe, snap dragons, sweet peas, watermelon, corn, potatoes, sweet potatoes, lettuce, chives, green beans, snow peas, plantio, beets, jalapenos, rayenne, halibut, Swiss chard, sunflowers, tomatoes, eggplants and gourds to be distributed to recipient artists.

Bill Lucado presented a gallon of Georgia's finest to Levi Whitted the 86-year-old proprietor of the All Peoples Grill in Durham, NC, at the pre-party for the Roots on Ninth Festival. Levi plans to make a medicine for his rheumatism by adding rock candy and fruit.

National Guitars recently repaired Guitar Gabriel's old guitar.

Music Maker needs assistance to purchase flight cases for traveling musicians because many airlines no longer allow guitars as carry-on luggage.

Our good friend Siewfoot has been doing important fieldwork in the blues community of New Orleans. We thank him for his outreach efforts on behalf of MMRF. Also thanks to Earl King, Laurence Taylor, Lani Ramos and Jive Jam Band, T Bone Stone & the Lazy Boys, The Basin St. Sheiks, Catahoula, Smoky Greenwell, Kenny Holladay, Irene Sage, First Evangelist Baptist Church (Men of High, Michael Anderson, Tiki Augustine, Sky Covington and the New Orleans Home for appearing at our July 3 benefit at the Blue Nile in New Orleans.

Check out the August issue of the Utne Reader for an article about the upcoming book “Music Makers: Portraits and Songs from the Roots of America.”

Our thanks to Jack Ily of Cedar Grove, NC, who volunteers five hours a week at our headquarters.

Simon Beins, a Yale undergraduatly, received a Richter Fellowship to work with MMRF this summer.

Thanks to Sam & Karen Duffy for hosting our party in New York City. Their space in Chelsea is terrific and available for events & parties! Contact them at (973) 449 8093.

Call William Lewis at (919) 451 4062 to book MMRF artists.

Many thanks to the Ninth Street Merchants Association and all the volunteers that made the Roots on Ninth Festival a terrific success.

Music Artist News

Tim recently visited Taylor Moore of Shuqualak, MS. Taylor performs hard Mississippi blues. Work has begun on his first album — stay tuned for more information.

Floods hit Carl Rutherford's community in West Virginia hard this spring. Several lives were lost and property was damaged. Thanks to Gary Kelly for coming down from Canada to help Carl repair his home. There is still much work to be done. If you are interested in helping, just give us a call.

New Orleans blues and R&B legend Earl King is recovering from a stroke. We welcome him as a MMRF artist.

Madison County, North Carolina ballad singer Lani Ray was a visiting artist this spring.

Bonnie Raitt hosted Precious Bryant and Beverly “Guitar” Watkins at her performance at Atlanta's Midtown Music Festival. We appreciate Dennis Baird for his help with transportation.

Cool John Ferguson will appear on a new album produced by Jamie Oldaker, best known for his drumming with Eric Clapton. The album includes musicians influenced by Oklahoman culture such as Clapton, Vince Gill, Taj Mahal and Willis Alan Ramsey. Taj, who reunited after 30 years with his original bandmates Chuck Blackwell (drums) and Gary Gilmore (bass), invited Cool John to play guitar on two tracks. The album will be issued next year.

Alabama blues musician Big Bo McGhee died on March 3rd. Bo was found dead at his home in Eutaw, Alabama. Johnny Pabell, 22, has been charged for this murder. Bo was born in 1928 and began playing the harp at the age of ten. He remained a vital and active performing artist his entire life.

John Price picked up a beautiful peach colored suit for Cootie Stark down at Sammy's while we were in Memphis.

Robert "Wolfman" Belfour, Mudcat, Willie King, Cool John Ferguson, Beverly "Guitar" Watkins, Jerry "Boogie" McCain, Cootie Stark and Eddie Tigner presented a powerful blues revival at the New Daisy Theatre on Beale Street in Memphis, TN this May.
MMRF sponsored Willie King's Freedom Creek Festival again this June. Willie wants to build a juke joint. Interested in donating to this cause? Please call Willie at (205) 373-2521.

Big Boy Henry is living in a new home on his property on Cedar Street, in Beaufort, NC.

Davidson Pauli donated a beautiful Washburn guitar to MMRF. Axel Küstner delivered the instrument to J.W. Walker in Alabama.

Andy Cohen of Memphis, TN sent a gorgeous vintage Mosman guitar to George Higgins.

Captain Luke and Cool John performed at a benefit for the Water Keeper's Alliance at Man Ray in New York.

Each Friday in July, the Fern Bank Museum of Natural History in Atlanta will be presenting a Music Maker Series concert. Cootie Stark, Essie Mae Brooks and Eddie Tigner are scheduled presently. 767 Clifton Rd. (404) 920-6400. For more info, visit: http://www.fernbank.edu/museum.

Saturday nights this summer Cool John Ferguson will be performing at the All Peoples Grill on Guess Road, Durham, NC. (919) 620-9091.

February 17-22: Taj Mahal Fishin' Blues Tourney. Zancudo, Costa Rica. $5000 includes flights from Miami or Atlanta, all food, drinks and hotel. Three days Fishin' Banquet and a beach party. Contact MMRF.

August 17: Taj Mahal, Maria Muldaur, Beverly "Guitar" Watkins, Cool John Ferguson, Neal Pathman, Mudcat, Cootie Stark and Captain Luke will be performing at the Portsmouth Blues Festival in New Hampshire. For tickets, visit http://www.bluesbankcollective.org.

October 6th: Don't miss the show that made Music Maker famous.
Music Maker Benefit: The State Theatre, Falls Church, VA. Tickets available from MMRF only. See form in the back, at www.musicmaker.org, or call 919-643-2456.

Silent Strings continued from page 3
"We used to call him Mr. Cleanhead," Bryant says fondly, referring to Edwards' lack of hair. "We loved Mr. Frank's music."
"When not performing, Edwards was a regular at local clubs, appearing virtually every night at Blind Willie's, the Northside Tavern, or other venues."
Vocalist Francine Reed remembers: "He was a good friend. I love him and I'm going to miss him. [But] his spirit will always be with us, of that there is no doubt."
For blues bandleader Beverly Watkins, Edwards was "beyond an artist. I'd say he was a musician in music."
Watkins also says that Edwards was "like a father to me. My dad died about four years ago, and I could go up to [Mr. Frank] and tell him a little something that wasn't going right in my life, and he'd listen and give me some ideas. That made me feel real good."

Such was typical of Edwards. His approach to life was to "do right by people," Dudeck says. "Any time anybody asked him about his success or his longevity, he said, 'You've just got to treat people right.'"

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 meeting 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 that 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 IRS code 501(c)(3).

Music Maker Programs
- Life Maintenance - Grants for necessities such as food, medical needs, housing, etc.
- Instrument Acquisition - Provides quality instruments and maintenance funds to recipient musicians.
- Tour Support - Provides funding and services to musicians wishing to tour and record.
- Emergency Relief - Substantial one-time grants to recipients in crisis (medical, fire, theft, etc.)
- Visiting Artist Program - Brings artists to our headquarters for professional development and assessment of needs.

Tickets MMRF Benefit 10/5 State Theatre, Falls Church, VA
- $25 each, General Admission
- $40 each, MMRF Friend
- $500 MMRF Member (2 VIP seats & more)
- $1,000 MMRF Patron (2 VIP seats & more)
- $2,500 MMRF Benefactor
(4 VIP seats & more)
Contact us for more information on ticket premiums

Various Artists:
- Edie Brickell, Carrying the Fire
- Taj Mahal, Keep It True
- Peter Rowan, The Bluegrass Album Band
- Sarah White, Soulful Soul
- Various Artists, Delta Blues
- Various Artists, Delta Blues

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Written by Timothy & Denise Duffy
Design & Layout by Timothy Duffy, Keith Ford, Mark Beeson
The Music Maker Rag is published by Music Maker Relief Foundation, Inc.
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Music Maker T-Shirt: $25 each (+S&H)
Circle T-Shirt sizes: S, M, L, XL, XXL
Music Maker Poster: 16" x 20" reproduction of photograph of David Johnson's hands by Axel Kummer (quality suitable for framing) $24.00 (incl. S & H)
Postcard Book - A collection of 10 4¼" x 6¼" photographs by Axel Kummer $20.00 (incl. S & H)
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