

# MUSIC & MAKER RAG

The Official Newsletter of the Music Maker Relief Foundation

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Esie Mae Brooks of Perry, Georgia

©Tim Duffy

Music Maker Relief Foundation, Inc.  
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Dear Friends,

Essie Mae Brooks was born in Houston County, Georgia in 1930. She began singing and writing gospel songs as a girl and has never stopped. Essie is the most requested singer at social functions in her home of Perry, Georgia. We thank the Savannah Music Festival for featuring Essie and other MM artists at their festival finale "Soul of the South" on March 1.

When Denise and I first met Essie Mae we were instantly struck by the beautiful songs she writes. She sang:

*This old life of mine, I sure had my ups and downs. I've been up and I've been down, I've been pushed and shoved around, I've been picked at and picked on but that's alright. You got to have rain in your life.*

*When I lost my mother, you know it was sure enough rain  
When I lost my father, you know it was sure enough rain  
When I lost my sister it you know that was more rain  
You got to have rain in your life, to appreciate the sunshine*

*Lord when trouble, get all around  
That ain't nothing but rain  
When trouble get all in the way, that is nothing but rain  
When trouble get all in the home, that is nothing but more rain  
You got to have rain in your life*

*If you never had no rain in your life, then you don't know what I'm singing about  
You got to have rain in your life to appreciate the sunshine*

Essie wants nothing more than to perform around the country. Through our tour support program we strive to accomplish this. We welcome any information or inquiries from folks that can help get work for MM artists.

With warm regards,

Timothy & Denise Duffy



Taj Mahal and Denise Duffy  
Zanaco, Costa Rica

© Duffy

It's easy to believe that America's rural blues tradition died along with such artists as Mississippi John Hurt, Son House, and Reverend Gary Davis who were "rediscovered" in the 1960s folk revival and found short-lived fame as senior citizens. Dispelling that misconception is one of the many accomplishments of *Music Makers: Portraits and Songs from the Roots of America*. This outstanding book (with 22-song companion CD) makes it clear that traditional blues is alive and well in places like Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and Macon County, Alabama. Sadly so is the debilitating poverty that beset the originators of the blues 100 years ago. All of which makes *Music Makers* a poignant contemporary record, equal parts musical celebration and cultural lament.

The book tells the story of the nonprofit Music Maker Relief Foundation and its efforts to help dozens of musicians live with dignity while pursuing their art. The book's editor, Tim Duffy is a guitarist, folklorist, and president of the MMRF. Duffy and the book's contributing writers and photographers illuminate a world of drink houses, juke joints, shantytown shacks, medicine shows, and fish fries. They introduce us to artists like Joe Leo Cole, an 81-year-old Mississippi tenant farmer, singer, and guitarist, who lives in a wooden shack next to a cotton field. "While some of us are out buying our Robert Johnson CDs, people like Joe are living without electricity, with little food and little warmth, and often, perhaps most strikingly, without even the instruments which link them to the traditions they helped to create," writes contributor Tobias Murtha.

dedicated myself to finding a way to help these artists and the many others I was beginning to meet."

The foundation came into being in 1994, and with the help of some anonymous donors as well as luminaries like B.B.

King, Eric Clapton, and Taj Mahal it has been aiding musicians in the Carolinas, Georgia, Virginia, West Virginia, Alabama, and Mississippi. The MMRF pays for food, medicine, rent, and new instruments, supports touring, and helps artists record. The foundation has produced over 25 CDs of Music Maker artists, giving some of them exposure for the first time.

The book profiles more than 60 musicians, offering a glimpse into their lives and raising the question of whether performers like Jerry "Boogie" McCain, John Dee Holman, and Precious Bryant would be famous if not for the vagaries of life and the music business. Photographs, like that of Alabama singer David Johnson's towering cinder-block home or

the private drink houses of Winston-Salem, reveal a rarely examined subculture. The CD rounds out the picture with some excellent performances. Guitar Gabriel, called a "walking encyclopedia of blues" by Duffy, sings a touching gospel number with his blind sister (Duffy reunited the pair). Cootie Stark, a poor, blind septuagenarian from South Carolina, performs a toe-tapping Piedmont blues, sounding like a long-lost master. He once played with Pink Anderson but was discovered by Duffy singing Fats Domino songs in a club.

Evelry "Guitar" Watkins of Georgia appeared on some influential blues recordings in the early 1960s but faded into obscurity. On the CD, the 63-year-old, who amazes audiences by playing guitar behind her back, is revealed to have a voice like Koko Taylor's and the guitar chops to back it up. "People are surprised when a black woman can play guitar like a man," she says. "They say, 'Damn, I ain't never seen nothing like you.'" Thanks to Duffy and his foundation, and to the added exposure this book should bring, others may soon have the same double-edged razor. ■



## Portrait of the Blues

*Music Makers illuminates a vibrant yet impoverished rural blues scene*

By Ian Zack

Reprinted with permission from  
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The MMRF had its beginnings in 1989 when Duffy was studying in North Carolina and an elderly musician urged him to seek out a blues guitarist called Guitar Gabriel. Gabriel, whose father had played with Blind Boy Fuller, was master of a guitar style that mixed elements of Piedmont, Texas, and

Chicago blues. Before his death, he introduced Duffy to other rural North Carolina blues musicians who, like Gabriel, were struggling to make ends meet. "I became deeply disturbed by the difficult choices they had to make each month: food or medicine, rent or the car, heat or the telephone," Duffy writes. "I

## Artist Notes

Check out the Winter Record Club selection, "Songs from the Roots of America II" This terrific CD introduces many MM artists whose music has never previously been released.

We were very humbled that Ruth Brown offered to help us in our mission. She and Beverly "Guitar" Watkins have become friends. Beverly plans to visit Ruth this winter.

Many of the artists wish to thank Paul Harvey for talking about their book on his program on New Years Eve.

Jerry "Boogie" McCain has completed a new album and Beverly "Guitar" Watkins is almost finished with hers. We will keep you posted on the release dates.



Music Maker Guest House, Hillsborough, NC. ©Austin

Henry Spencer is an awesome harp player and blues singer. He lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts having moved up from West Virginia years ago, and he did a terrific show with John Dee Holman in Portsmouth, New Hampshire last November.

Richard Thomas, known to the music world as Mr. Bones passed away this December at the age of 80 years old. He was an expert bones player and we were thrilled to have him join our show in Falls

Church, Virginia this past October.

Whistlin' Britches has been signing books as Whisper Pants. He has been stealing Music Maker Revue shows with 15 minute long clikin' master performances complete with audience participation.

Willie King was happy to receive a Gibson Les Paul and other instruments to use in his Rural Members Association. We are seeking \$10,000 to sponsor their annual Freedom Creek Festival. Please help us support the most real and rooted blues festival in the world.

## Music Maker News

It is wintertime and we will be issuing grants for artists to purchase heating oil. Contributions to help keep folks warm are welcomed.

If you make a donation to MMRF, please check to see if your employer has a matching gift program.

We thank Ardie Dean for producing Jerry McCain's and Beverly "Guitar" Watkins new CDs. Many thanks as well to Greg Rowell of Vinemont, AL, who engineered and donated the use of his recording studio.



Music Maker Board Members John Price, ©Duffy Bill Lucado and Taj Mahal, Kinsey, ME



Texas Bluesman Clyde Langford

Voice of America did a piece on Music Maker that went out around the world in over 70 languages; we received inquiries from artists from as far away as Uganda. We have been contacted by some great blues artists throughout the U.S. due to the January issue of Readers Digest article on MMRF.

We thank everyone at Hill Street Press for publishing our book!

We are looking for volunteers and sponsors for the "Roots on 9th Festival" which is coming up Sunday May 4th. Give us a call or email your contact info to info@musicmaker.org.

We thank XM radio for giving Music Maker artists such great airplay.

Many thanks for the recent donations of instruments including a Gibson Les Paul, Peavey Classic Amplifier, Washburn electric guitar, Johnson Dobro, brass top guitar, Regal and a six-string banjo.

We are very happy that WNCW out of Spindale, NC invited us to perform at their Christmas show, and are playing our CDs on their station.

Max Cooperstein has taken on booking Music Maker artists. Check our website for details. ■

# Roadside Attraction

A quick note that Cool John Ferguson is playing All People Grill, on the way from downtown Durham to the Music Maker compound, most every Saturday night. Three sets start at 9 PM and finish around 2 AM. Cover is \$10 and beers are about \$4. Cool John CDs, including the wonderful new Xmas album, are on sale for \$20. Ferguson, All People and the Music Maker Relief Foundation have been running this show since last May Drive I-85 to exit 173, Guess Road, and look for the sign six miles north on the right, before Milton Road. Tel. 919-420-9591.

Cool John, from Beaufort, South Carolina, came to North Carolina several years ago to work with the Music Maker Relief Foundation. He tours with the elderly artists who represent the foundation at festivals and concerts in Europe and the United States.

One year John played beside Taj Mahal when the legendary musician fronted for the Blues Revival. Taj recognized Ferguson as "one of the five best guitar players" he has ever seen.

Musically, I have no idea what that means. I am not a musician. Somebody had to point out to me that Cool John plays guitar left-handed and upside down. I am told that Cool John's fingerings are all unique and that he can back up anyone doing anything. I have often seen him play an entire composition with one hand on the neck in the natural motion of setting his guitar down. He cut all the separate tracks on his recent X-mas album so precisely that my brother mixed them without any further manipulation in sound levels or equalization.

Speaking of what Taj Mahal's praise might mean, I do know that Taj Mahal grew up among the Caribbean and Southern émigrés of Springfield, Massachusetts. He gassed his way through his degree in animal husbandry with University of Massachusetts classmates, the Native American pop star Buffy Sainte-Marie.

He has been a fountain of insight and energy on stage in the folk clubs of the early 60s, the rock halls and stadiums of the 60s and 70s, and world music venues since then. He rang in this New Year on National Public Radio from a famous jazz club in San Francisco.

People around the planet know that Taj Mahal represents virtuosity and musicality itself on every stage he steps on. People who talk to him know that he's a professor of music, a constant researcher and teacher. He puts out great albums from Africa and the Caribbean and Hawaii, and tours 200 nights annually through Europe, Australia, New Zealand and North America.



All People Grill, Durham, NC.

© Zetokai

Taj Mahal has been behaving like that for fifty years now, in company with every great guitar player you have ever heard of and several dozen you haven't, and he says that Cool John is one of the five best. He's not saying who the other four are but the company of Taj Mahal's colleagues includes Jimi, Eric, Mississippi John, the Reverend Gary, whoever. Taj is saying John is that good.

But you don't have to take anyone's word for it. You can go pay your ten dollars and stand three feet away from Cool John and hear his clarity and invention and depth of emotion, the kind of thing you can document when you talk about how someone is the best. You can also experience the soul, the feelings that make comparisons irrelevant.

Don't compete; create, Richard Sewall preached to me when I was young. That is the message of the music too. Part of the genius of the show is that not everyone in the band is as good as their leader and it just doesn't matter because Cool John is standing there with the facility to be himself, to express himself, on stage, giving everyone permission to be human. The side man steps forward as band leader, and what he wants to do is back you up.

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## Big Boy Henry: Beaufort Blues

**R**ichard "Big Boy" Henry was born in Beaufort, North Carolina in 1921 and has been called the patriarch of Carolina Blues. At 81 Henry remains a fine blues singer and wonderful storyteller making "Beaufort Blues" a charming, beautiful set of country blues.

Henry has recorded little through the years making this set all the more valuable. He cut his first sides with Sonny Terry & Brownie McGhee in 1951 but these sides sat in the can only to be released decades later. Henry spent time away from music working on fishing and oystering creels, running a grocery store and doing a bit of preaching. He continued to play music and mentor younger bluesmen and in 1995 the protest song "Mr. President," won him a WC Handy Award. In 1996 he released the fine "Poor Man's Blues" on the New Moon label. Although arthritis has hampered his guitar playing he's found sympathetic backing players and his singing remains superb making "Beaufort Blues" a true gem.

The bulk of the songs are credited to Henry but also include a couple of traditional tunes and a cover of a Blind Boy Fuller tune. This is a gentle, relaxed set of down-home blues featuring exceptional guitar from long time partner Lightnin' Wells with additional guitar by label owner Tim Duffy. In addition to being a fine blues singer Henry is from the older generation of bluesman like Lightnin' Hopkins who really know how to tell a story just listen to Henry breathe new life into "John Henry" and "Old Bill" as well as first rate originals like "Mr. Ball's Warehouse" and especially the moving "Alevina" one of the most touching love songs I've heard. Henry also turns in an inspired reading of the gospel song "Beautiful City" which sounds like it owes something to Reverend Gary Davis' rendition. Henry does play guitar on two cuts and when he's not playing he offers up lively encouragement to the band.

Music Maker's ongoing mission is to help down and out musicians with basic necessities as well as encouraging them to play and record. The recordings have been uniformly excellent and



"Beaufort Blues" is a fine addition to an impressive catalog. Find out how you can help by visiting the Music Maker website. ■

(Jeff Harris Bad Dog Blues )

## Gigs

**Saturday nights** Cool John Ferguson will be performing at the All Peoples Grill on Guess Road, Durham, NC. (919) 620-9591. January 25, February 1, 15, and 22, and March 8, 15, 22, and 29.

**February 4-8:** Legendary Rhythm and Blues Cruise. Dance your way through the Caribbean with award winning Rhythm and Blues music including Taj Mahal, Beverly "Guitar" Watkins, Cool John Ferguson, Cootie Stark and Mudcat. Check out [www.bluesin.tv](http://www.bluesin.tv)

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

**March 1-8:** Savannah Music Festival. Join Cootie Stark, Cool John Ferguson, Drink Small, Essie Mae Brooks, Artie Dean and Sol for a Blues extravaganza! ([www.savannahmusicfestival.org](http://www.savannahmusicfestival.org))

**June 14:** Willie King's Annual Freedom Creek Festival. For more information, call Willie at (205) 373-2521.

## Cool John (Con't.)

Here it becomes relevant to mention that the show takes place at the All People Soul Food restaurant, where you dance on black and white tiles laid down on the floor inside cinderblock walls which the founders painted black and white on the outside when they built it. You are in Durham, North Carolina, which never had one of the Jim Crow race riots, which tapped the black middle class in other American cities.

You are the guest of the Whitzel family, which has operated a mixed-race country store, grill, and juke joint as their home place in the coun-



The Saturday crowd at All People Grill, Durham, NC. ©Duffy

tryside since the 1950s, independent of either the top-down national desegregation campaign or the Southern mass movement for civil rights. I have written before of the mixed class and ethnic nature of John's shows. The nature of it is that I can't describe it, I don't really know what is going on.

I just learned that the largest bunch of black men and women regulars are in fact Seminoles. In North Carolina? Are the professional women who embrace and dance together gay? Are those guys who sit by the juke Hispanic from the redneck pool hall up the street? How white are bikers, anyways? Why haven't I bumbled around and made friends and asked people who they are?

For me, I think, and for a lot of people there, a night with Cool John is a night out, a utopia where we share

the egalitarian and individualist promises of whiteness, the calm and joy and strength of blackness, however you want to slice up the human potential and dish it out to everyone. We're in a space capsule shooting out a colony of Americans back to Planet 7, where Sun Ra came down from.

I say that we are a capsule heading into the unknown because this is all happening at the edge of the Research Triangle, where a whole lot of people from all over the world come to Duke

and IBM and UNC who will never understand or even notice what the black and white thing is all about.

Most of the world thinks we're crazy on the topic and they're right.

Even some of my Carolina students asked, after a research presentation on the restaurant and the show, the music is wonderful but what does race have to do with it? Everything and nothing. I bring Asian journalists to the All People one by one as guests and they ask on the way home, "Are there lots of places like that?" One answer is yes, there are, all over.

That is the message of the music. But the messenger is one of only five best in Taj Mahal's lifetime and the other four likely aren't playing a pool hall in your neighborhood. Taj doesn't say, but I bet the other four aren't playing on earth any more. Come to the All People and get it while you can. ■

Don Duffy

## CD Order Form

Qty.	Description	Price
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Given' it Back Record Club 1 yr. Membership</b> You receive a brand new release PLM CD every 3 months: Dec, Mar, June and Sept for a year (4 CDs) \$100 (incl. S & H)	_____

### Music Maker CDs (titles below)

\$19 each (includes shipping and handling)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Big Boy Harry, Beaufort Blues	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Etta Baker, Railroad Bill	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ezra Mae Brooks, Rain in Your Life	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Corra Mae Bryant, Born with the Blues	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cool John Ferguson	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Preston Tulp, Sawmill Worker	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Guitar Gabriel, Deep in the South	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Guitar Gabriel, Volume One	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	George Higgs, Tobacco Blues	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Alga Mae Hinton, Honey Babe	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	John Dew Holman, Bull Durham Blues	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Capt. Luke & Cool John, Outsider Lounge Music	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Jerry "Boogie" McCain, The Stuff Just Kills Me	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Jerry "Boogie" McCain, Unplugged	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Neal Patman, Prison Blues	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Carl Rutherford, Turn Off the Fear	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cootie Stark, Sugar Man	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Eddie Tigner, Route 66	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Beverly "Guitar" Watson, Back in Business	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Little Pink Anderson, Carolina Bluesman	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	vol. volume blue	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lightnin' Webb, Ragged but Right	_____

### Compilations

<input type="checkbox"/>	A Living Past	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Blues Came to Georgia	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Came So Far	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Exposure! the Blues	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Songs from the Roots of America II	_____

Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Order form cont. on back

# Donations

## Billing Information

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Company \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL** Please place total from other side including S&H \_\_\_\_\_

## Payment to:

### Music Maker Relief Foundation

Check enclosed

Charge Card

MC/MISA # \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

Ship to above address

## Ship to:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Gift Message \_\_\_\_\_

## Mail Order Form and Payment To:

**Music Maker Relief Foundation**  
4052 Summer Lane  
Hillsborough, NC 27278

Note: Due to IRS regulations the deductible portion of a donation is reduced by the retail value of premiums received by donors.

Music Maker Relief Foundation is a 501(c)(3) tax exempt organization. All donations are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law.

## 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.

## Board of Directors

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