

MAYOR BRANDON JOHNSON --- CITY OF CHICAGO

2026 OFFICIAL PROGRAM BOOK
4 DAYS 4 STAGES

FOOD SOUL VIBES **FREE ADMISSION**

RAMOVA THEATRE & MILLENNIUM PARK

CHICAGO BLUES FESTIVAL

----- HEADLINING -----

**TAJ
MAHAL**

**ELVIN BISHOP
& CHARLIE
MUSSELWHITE DUO
WILLIE CLAYTON**

----- CELEBRATING -----

ALLIGATOR RECORDS - BILLY BRANCH - JOHN PRIMER

THURS TO SUN JUNE 4-7
LIVE MUSIC ALL DAY LONG

----- EST. 1984 -----

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CHICAGOBLUESFESTIVAL.US

DISCOVER the Places
that Made
the King Sing, Wolf Howl, and McKinley Muddy.



Celebrating
20 YEARS
— OF THE —
MISSISSIPPI
BLUES
— TRAIL —



*From B.B. King to Howlin' Wolf
and Muddy Waters, discover
200+ Mississippi Blues
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Mississippi getaway today.*

VISIT
MISSISSIPPI

BIRTHPLACE of AMERICA'S MUSIC

CHICAGO BLUES FESTIVAL GUIDE

By Aaron Cohen and David Whiteis

The Chicago Blues Festival is an essential annual celebration of tradition and regeneration. This year's lineup brings together the music's venerated heroes and exciting young performers. Historical connections between Chicago and Mississippi are reinforced, but the weekend will also highlight regional sounds from across the country. Everything from acoustic finger picking to full-on electric attacks to zydeco and funk will be heard throughout these four days.



June 4, 2026

Dear Friends:

As Mayor, and on behalf of the City of Chicago, I am honored to welcome you to the 42nd Annual Chicago Blues Festival.

Since its earliest days, Chicago has been home to a rich musical tradition spanning folk, classical, house, gospel, the Blues, and more. Our world-renowned Blues sound has inspired and united people across the globe for generations.

Deeply rooted in our city's history, the Blues continues to shape culture worldwide and influence music today.

This year's festival boasts four days of dynamic performances across various venues. From Millennium Park to FREE festival shows at Chicago Independent Venue League (CIVL) clubs, Ramova Theatre, Reggies, and Rosa's Lounge, the Chicago Blues Festival features an expansion of programming, including student performers at the Next Generation of Blues stage in Wrigley Square representing numerous arts and/or music groups and 14 Chicago Public Schools. We are also proud to celebrate the contributions of Bruce Iglauer, Billy Branch, and Tom Marker to the Chicago Blues community.

While enjoying the performances and festivities, I encourage you to take in all that Chicago has to offer and to explore our downtown and lakefront, experience our vibrant neighborhoods, sample our diverse cuisine, and visit our world-class museums and distinguished universities.

I hope you have a truly enjoyable and memorable experience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'BJ', written over a light blue line.

Mayor Brandon Johnson



**CHICAGO
BLUES
FESTIVAL**
JUNE 4-7, 2026
**RAMOVA THEATRE &
MILLENNIUM PARK**
FREE ADMISSION



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THE 19TH ANNUAL



BLUESFEST AFTERPARTIES

BLUES FEST PREPARTY | ALL STAR HARMONICA BLAST

THU JUNE 4TH

DOORS 7PM • SHOW 8PM
----- MUSIC JOINT • 21+



MATTHEW SKOLLER • ROB STONE • MARTIN LANG
TOM HOLLAND • HARRELL YOUNG REAL DAVENPORT
KENNY SMITH • LEE KANEHIRA • ANDREW DIEHL
MIKE SCHARF • PLUS SURPRISE SPECIAL GUESTS!



FRI JUNE 5TH

DOORS 9PM • SHOW 10PM
----- MUSIC JOINT • 21+

BOB STROGER • BILLY FLYNN • OSCAR WILSON
MELVIN "POOKIE" CARLISLE • DAVE KATZMAN
BROTHER JOHN KATTKE • MELVIN SMITH • AMY LOWE

STEPHEN HULL EXPERIENCE

SAT JUNE 6TH

DOORS 9:30PM • SHOW 10:30PM
----- MUSIC JOINT • 21+



FREE BLUES BRUNCH | DAVE HERRERO

(FT. EMILIANO JUAREZ & DAI GALLO)

SUN JUNE 7TH

DOORS 10:30AM • SHOW 11AM
----- MUSIC JOINT • 21+

DAVE WELD
(AND THE IMPERIAL FLAMES)

END OF BLUESFEST SUPER PROJAM



BOB STROGER • OSCAR WILSON • MELVIN "POOKIE" CARLISLE
BILLY FLYNN • DAVE KATZMAN • LEE KANEHIRA
JIMMY BURNS • VINCE SALERNO • MELVIN SMITH &
VERY SPECIAL SUPRISE GUESTS

SUN JUNE 7TH

DOORS 9PM • SHOW 9:30PM
----- MUSIC JOINT • 21+

FREE BLUES ON THE SIDEWALK

FRI JUN 5.

**SMILEY
TILLMON**

5PM 21+

2:30PM

SAT JUN 6.

**BROTHER JOHN KATTKE
DEREK CARUSO & JOHN CHORNEY**

5:30PM

21+

SUN JUN 7.

**SMILEY
TILLMON**

5PM 21+



FREE BLUESFEST BUS SHUTTLE FROM THE FEST - GO TO REGGIESLIVE.COM FOR BUS SCHEDULE

2026 CHICAGO BLUES FESTIVAL

THURSDAY, JUNE 4 RAMOVA THEATRE



20 YEARS OF THE MISSISSIPPI BLUES TRAIL – FIRESIDE CHAT WITH MAYOR JOHN HORHN, SCOTT BARRETTA, BILL MCPHERSON, DR. EDGAR SMITH, AND JIM O'NEAL MODERATED BY YOLONDA CLAY-MOORE, VISIT JACKSON

6-7 p.m. The [Mississippi Blues Trail](#) has been an invaluable guide to finding the people and places that shaped the music in this state and which, in turn, influenced the world. This panel will discuss its origins and impact. The experts include Jackson, Miss., Mayor John Horhn; sociology / anthropology professor and blues journalist Scott Barretta; B.B. King Museum and Delta Interpretive Center chair Bill McPherson; Mississippi Blues Commission's Blues Musicians Benevolent Fund chair Dr. Edgar Smith; and Living Blues Magazine co-founder Jim O'Neal. [Aaron Cohen]

DOUBLE BILL

8:45-10:15 p.m. Willie Clayton
When [Willie Clayton](#) wraps his honey-and-molasses croon around a ballad like “Don’t Make Me Beg” or his beloved 2005 classic “I

Love Me Some You,” he can melt hearts with seductive ease. Then, when he ramps up the energy with a good-time throwdown like his 2023 trail-ride anthem “Boot Scoot Dance,” he can make us feel as if the party will never end. Clayton’s first recordings, in the mid-1970s, were on Willie Mitchell’s Pawn label; his discography since then has grown to include over 85 releases – both singles and albums



– and although he has come to largely embrace the high-tech studio slickness that characterizes modern-day soul and R&B, his rich baritone vocals convey a blend of sensitivity and sexiness that makes it clear that the soul singer who calls himself the “Last Man Standing” continues to stand as an exemplar of the music he has embraced as his own, and which he carries into the future. [David Whiteis]

7:15-8:30 p.m. John Primer – Tribute to Theresa’s Lounge [John Primer](#), internationally feted as one of the leading carriers of the Chicago blues torch, has worked with such greats as Muddy Waters, Willie Dixon, and Magic Slim. Primer cut his teeth at Theresa’s Lounge on S. Indiana Ave., where he was a house guitarist alongside



Muddy Waters’ former fretman Sammy Lawhorn, backing stars like Junior Wells, James Cotton, and Buddy Guy. The eclectic sets at Theresa’s honed his quick-minded improvisational flair and helped him cultivate a seemingly bottomless repertoire, and today, his performances are among the tightest and most musically exciting in blues. With more than 20 albums to his credit, Primer continues to exult in his undiminished passion for the music he loves. Here he’ll be accompanied by some of his old-time Theresa’s Lounge compatriots to recreate the raucous good-time atmosphere that made T’s a mecca for blues lovers for decades. [DW]

FRIDAY, JUNE 5 JAY PRITZKER PAVILION

7:30-9 p.m. 55 Years of Alligator Records featuring [Lil’ Ed & The Blues Imperials](#), [Ronnie Baker Brooks](#), [Toronzo Cannon](#), [Nick Moss](#), and [Tinsley Ellis](#) In 1971, when Bruce Iglauer founded the Alligator label to record guitarist Hound Dog Taylor, his intention was to document the music of a gifted Chicago bluesman deserving of wider recognition. That he did – Taylor’s Alligator releases are universally

CHICAGO BLUES FESTIVAL



SUNDAY, JUNE 7
TAKE THE FREE TROLLEY BETWEEN
MILLENNIUM PARK AND MAXWELL
STREET, AVAILABLE FROM
10:30 A.M. TO 2:30 P.M.

AT

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LIL' ED & THE IMPERIALS

praised as classics -- but in the process Iglauer also launched what has evolved into the world's largest independent blues label. Here the festival pays tribute by showcasing five of Alligator's top current artists: Lil' Ed Williams, who learned slide guitar from his uncle, J.B. Hutto, and carries on the legacy of Hutto and other slidemasters like Elmore James; Ronnie Baker Brooks, a progressive-minded guitarist whose father, Lonnie Brooks, was one of the artists who helped put Alligator on the map; guitarist and master lyric storyteller Toronzo Cannon; and high-intensity fretboard prestidigitators Nick Moss and Tinsley Ellis. [DW]

6:15-7:15 p.m. Elvin Bishop



TORONZO CANNON

PHOTO CREDIT: CHRIS MONAGHAN

& Charlie Musselwhite Duo
Guitarist [Elvin Bishop](#) and harmonica player [Charlie Musselwhite](#) are two heroes of American roots music and both have deep ties to Chicago. But, while they have regularly cross paths since the 1960s and toured together in 2002, it was not until 2020 that they released an album together, *100 Years Of Blues* (Alligator). The title track is a slow burning autobiographical look back to their encounters

with such legends as Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf. That was when Bishop came to the South Side from Oklahoma and Mississippi native Musselwhite arrived from Memphis. They were warmly embraced and from that experience helped introduce the blues to rock audiences around the world. Bishop was a key player in The Paul Butterfield Blues Band before leading his own Elvin Bishop Group. Musselwhite has led his own popular groups, collaborated with artists ranging from John Lee Hooker to Tom Waits, and won a



ELVIN BISHOP & CHARLIE MUSSELWHITE

PHOTO CREDIT: STEVE JENNINGS

Grammy for the 2013 album, *Get Up!*, which he co-led with Ben Harper. As Musselwhite has said of the ease he has with Bishop, "This is us sitting down to play the music that we love and resonating together effortlessly because we're 'coming from the same place'... on many levels." [AC]

5-6 p.m. C.J. Chenier & The Red Hot Louisiana Band

Accordianist/singer/saxophonist [C.J. Chenier](#) was born into zydeco royalty as the son of the music's king, Clifton Chenier. The younger Chenier brings his own ideas to this classic Louisiana tradition but he always adheres to its crucial obligation to get big and small audiences up and dancing. C.J. Chenier joined his father's band (as a saxophonist) in 1978 and inherited the group—and his father's instrument—when the elder Chenier died nine years later. Musicians who have sought his sound include Paul Simon and Joe Sample. He began releasing

albums under his own name on different labels, signing with Chicago-based Alligator in 1994. These aptly titled albums—*Too Much Joy*, *The Big Squeeze* and *Step It Up!*—highlight his energetic blending of the venerated Black Creole sound with rock, funk and swing. Among Chenier's numerous accolades, he has been inducted into the Museum of the Gulf Coast Hall of Fame in Port Arthur, Texas, where he is honored alongside his legendary father. [AC]

3:45-4:45 p.m. Marquise Knox

Recent decades have seen a burgeoning youth movement in the blues, and guitarist/harmonica player [Marquise Knox](#) has been one of its leading lights. Born in St. Louis in 1991, Knox was mentored early on by such greats as guitarist/pianist Henry Townsend and harpist Big George Brock. His own style is rooted in the postwar sound – deep-pocket shuffles, guitar and harmonica leads that seethe with emotion while exploring rich tonal and melodic territory, overlaid with his resonant baritone vocals – while his gifts as a lyric storyteller make his music come alive with fresh ideas and inspiration. He also ranks among our most socially conscious blues artists; he has spoken out forcefully in support of the blues as living Black cultural history, and he has publicly expressed his alliance with progressive causes such as activist minister Rev. William Barber's Moral Mondays initiative. Still in his mid-30s, Knox represents the voice of both contemporary blues and the music's future. [DW]

VISIT MISSISSIPPI CROSSROADS STAGE

4:30-5:45 p.m. Ra'shad The Blues Kid [Ra'Shad the Blues Kid](#), born Larry Ra'Shad Lavar McGill in Laurel, Miss., in 1987, spent his youth dividing his time between music and athletics. When he wasn't playing guitar in church or

listening to soul and blues artists like Johnnie Taylor, O.V. Wright, and Marvin Sease, he was making a name for himself on the gridiron. An all-state offensive lineman, he earned a football scholarship to attend Jackson State University, but after an injury curtailed his athletic career he began to focus more fully on music, honing a personalized style that dug deep into his Mississippi blues roots but also incorporated modernist flavorings borrowed from newer soul-blues and southern soul. His discography, including albums and singles available in both physical form and on streaming platforms, has earned critical praise and widespread admiration. On stage, his rich baritone delivery and supple musicianship make him among the most entertaining and emotionally satisfying performers in the music today. [DW]

3-4:15 p.m. Eden Brent Pianist/vocalist [Eden Brent](#), known for her two-fisted keyboard attack and eloquent musical stylings, learned from the best. Born and raised in Greenville, Miss, she was tutored by the legendary Abie “Boogaloo” Ames, earning the nickname “Little Boogaloo” before breaking into the national scene in the mid-2000s. Since then she has garnered international recognition for her no-nonsense, deeply passionate commitment to the blues heritage and the finesse and integrity with which she carries it on. Brent’s discography, beginning with 2003’s *Something Cool* (originally issued on her own Little Boogaloo



imprint), highlights her deftness as a pianist, her vocal prowess (she’s been compared to the likes of Memphis Minnie, Bessie Smith, and even Aretha Franklin), and the melodic and tonal sophistication she

absorbed studying classical and jazz piano, along with blues and boogie-woogie, during her formative years. Imbued with both the spirit of a backstreet Greenville barrelhouse and the elegance of an uptown show lounge, the blues Eden Brent conveys are both roots-rich and forward-looking. [DW]

1:30-2:45 p.m. The Big Time Rhythm & Blues Band The Big Time Rhythm & Blues Band’s wide-ranging repertoire is based solidly in the blues but also encompasses soul, pop, rock, and R&B. Lead guitarist and co-founder Michael “Cadillac” Dennis got his start in gospel, and a spiritual fervor continues to inform both his music and his onstage presence; horn man/harmonica ace Dr. Alphonso Sanders has worked alongside figures as diverse as blues legend Honeyboy Edwards and premier jazz pianist Mulgrew

CHICAGO JAZZ PUBLISHING AND ENTERTAINMENT

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Miller; keyboardist Dharamdas Harris has toured with soul and blues legends such as Little Milton, the Chi-Lites, and Artie “Blues Boy” White; bassist John Turner, III counts jazzmen such as Marcus Miller and Paul Chambers, as well as former Family Stone bassman Rustee Allen, as among his musical role models; drummer/vocalist Ja’Mikal Reed is “Cadillac” Dennis’s son and, like his father, is deeply rooted in gospel as well as blues and R&B. Together they create a full-bodied, richly textured sound that resonates with soul and passion. [DW]

Noon-1:15 p.m. Mississippi Marshall Few artists are as attuned to their home state’s entirety of musical traditions as [Mississippi Marshall](#) (a.k.a. Marshall Hooper). Growing up in the Delta, he picked up the guitar as a child but started playing drums in his father Ellis Hopper’s family band by the time of his eleventh birthday. While serving in South Korea as part of a U.S. Army band, he switched to guitar and dug deep into the sounds he grew up hearing. Winning over audiences as his songs, voice and guitar technique fired up country, rock ’n’ roll and blues, he went on to share stages with artists ranging from B.B. King to Charlie Daniels. But it’s on the blues where his instrumental tone sings the loudest whether it’s fiery or a laid-back groove. A two-time International Blues Challenge

Semi-Finalist and Mississippi Music Foundation Award winner, he has released four acclaimed albums including the aptly named *Believe I'll Go Back Home*. [AC]

ROSA'S LOUNGE (NORTH PROMENADE)

6:30-7:45 p.m. The Freddie Dixon Blues Band When the [Freddie Dixon Blues Band](#) launches into “You Shook Me,” “I Just Want To Make Love To You” and “Seventh Son,” the singer/bassist/bandleader has his own claim to these anthems. Freddie Dixon’s father, bassist Willie Dixon, wrote these songs along with 500 more. The younger Dixon came up through the ranks of Chicago’s South Side veterans and in 2021 released the *3by3* album with John Watkins and Maurice John Vaughn. But his band puts a singular stamp on this tradition with violinist Judy Lei’s solos reflecting her conservatory training in European classical music. Guitarist Robert Lassandrello and drummer Grant Neibergall bring their backgrounds in blues, jazz and rock to help create a musical universe that embraces a world



of genres while staying true to the legacy. [AC]

5-6:15 p.m. Tom Holland & The Shuffle Kings For almost 30 years, guitarist [Tom Holland](#) has been a key player in many of Chicago’s top blues groups. A South Side native, he spent his early 20s working with L.V. Banks before joining John Primer’s Real

Deal Blues Band. In the ensuing years he worked behind such stars as James Cotton, Carey Bell and Eddy “The Chief” Clearwater. But he showed off his skills as a strong leader with his group, The Shuffle Kings, on such albums as *No Fluff*, *Just The Stuff* (2013) and *The Lost Sessions* (2019). As he performs such inviting tunes as the laid back “Easiest Thing I’ll Ever Do”, Holland makes sure that his fluid technique always serves the soul of the song. [AC]

3:30-4:45 p.m. The Mike Wheeler Band with Demetria Taylor Guitarist [Mike Wheeler](#), one of Chicago’s hardest-working and most gifted guitar masters, returns with his skin-tight Chicago aggregation, this time featuring the vocals of [Demetria Taylor](#), whose father, the late Eddie Taylor, was one of the primary architects of the postwar Chicago sound. Born in 1973, Taylor remembers that even as a little girl, she felt destined to become a blueswoman. After insinuating herself into Chicago’s club circuit in the early 2000s, she released her debut as a headliner, *Bad Girl*, on Delmark. She followed it up in 2022 with *Doin’ What I’m Supposed to Do*, also on Delmark, and today, she proudly carries on her role as one of the leading carriers of the living Chicago blues tradition. With Wheeler and his men stoking the fire, she promises to take us on a musical journey that honors the living history of Chicago blues while laying forth a path to the future. [DW]

2-3:15 p.m. Funky MojoDaddy Since the 1980s, bassist/vocalist Kenny Kinsey has performed around the world as part of his family band, The Kinsey Report, but for the past 20 years, he’s stepped to the front for his other gig, [Funky MojoDaddy](#). Based in northwest Indiana, the group also includes drummer CJ Tucker, guitarist Ryan Frahm and keyboardist TJ Jenkins. Blending together an electrified combination of blues, funk and soul for the album *Live At: Blue Stage Jams*,

they became a supergroup with guest guitarists Nick Byrd, Corey Dennison and Jeff Massey. Funky MojoDaddy’s set at the festival will undoubtedly capture the electricity they bring regularly to such Chicago venues as Kingston Mines and Rosa’s. [AC]

12:30-1:45 p.m. Nick Alexander Blues Band When guitarist [Nick Alexander](#) started showing up at Kingston Mines for its Sunday jams, he had no problem getting in despite being 11 years old. The sessions’ host was also his father, the late blues hero Linsey Alexander, who passed away last year at the age of 82. Shortly afterward, Nick Alexander released his debut album, *Lil Hoochie*, which includes songs that his father performed alongside some other influences: James Brown’s funk and Ray Charles’ classic R&B. His concerts at such venues as the Kingston Mines also highlight his affinity for acoustic blues. Going forward, Nick Alexander intends to delve deeply into the blues canon—including his father’s works. [AC]



WRIGLEY SQUARE NEXT GENERATION OF BLUES

6:45-7:45 p.m. VanderCook College of Music
5:15-6:15 p.m. Meaza Joy
4-4:45 p.m. Kenwood Academy High School
3-3:45 p.m. The People’s Music School
2-2:45 p.m. Curie Metro High School
1-1:45 p.m. Chicago West Community Music Center
Noon-12:45 p.m. Walter H. Dyett High School for the Arts

SATURDAY, JUNE 6 JAY PRITZKER PAVILION

7:45-9 p.m. 75 Years of Billy Branch - Billy Branch and the Sons of Blues with Kenny Neal and Ronnie Baker Brooks As a harmonica player, singer and bandleader, [Billy Branch](#) has been an essential part of the Chicago blues community for decades. And as a devoted educator, he has been a crucial messenger of the music to audiences and students around the world. He picked up a harmonica at the age of 10 and immersed himself in the city's blues scene during the early 1970s. His reputation exploded after joining Willie Dixon's band in 1975. A few years later he formed the Sons of Blues and the group has recorded such celebrated albums as *Where's My Money?* (1984), *Roots And Branches – The Songs Of Little Walter* (2019) and *The Blues Is My Biography* (2025). Along with serving as a direct link to key players in blues history, he continues to pass that knowledge along through his involvement with the Blues In The Schools Program. Guitarist [Kenny Neal](#) has been a longtime colleague of Branch and they collaborated on the 2003 album *Easy Meeting*. Born in New Orleans, Neal has become a global ambassador of the Louisiana swamp blues sound. Longtime friend, [Ronnie Baker Brooks](#), has carried on the legacy of such icons as his father Lonnie Brooks and blended it with soul and rock on such albums as *Blues In My DNA* from 2024. Both of them share Branch's attitude, which he expressed in a recent interview with Blues Blast Magazine: "I keep a foot in the past, with an eye to the future. That kind of sums up my approach." [AC]



6:30-7:30 p.m. Ruthie Foster Born in Gause, Texas, vocalist/guitarist [Ruthie Foster](#) was raised in gospel. She expanded her performing ambitions to include blues and other secular forms while attending college in Waco. After a stint in the U.S. Navy, she moved to New York and hit the folk circuit. Such was her commitment that she actually turned down an offer to record for a major label that wanted to steer her in a more pop-oriented direction. She



released her first album, *Full Circle*, in 1997; since then she's dropped numerous albums, all on independent labels and featuring her sure-fingered fretboard work, emotionally rich vocals, and a dedication to lyrical storytelling that delivers dispatches from the front lines of the human condition. Foster's 2024 release, *Mileage*, on the fabled Sun label, garnered a Grammy for Best Contemporary Blues Album. She always creates music that lives, breathes, and soars in the realm where blues, gospel, folk music, and the dream of freedom intersect. [DW]

5:15-6:15 p.m. Shakura S'Aida Born in Brooklyn, raised in Switzerland, and a long-time resident of Canada, vocalist [Shakura S'Aida](#) is a citizen of the world, and that's reflected in her music. Her vocal delivery, supple and swinging yet imbued with



earthy immediacy, is further enhanced by her gift for understatement and subtlety. The stories she conveys limn both the depths and the unlimited potential of the human heart. In 2008, S'Aida released her debut solo album *Blueprint*; she's continued to record and perform internationally since then, and she also wrote, directed, and co-starred in *The Nina Project*, a four-woman tribute to Nina Simone. As exemplified by the title of her 2022 release *Hold On to Love*, Shakura S'Aida is on a mission of healing, as well as empowering, through music. [DW]

4-5 p.m. Dylan Triplett St. Louis native [Dylan Triplett](#) is another in the emerging coterie of young blues artists who are infusing new life and new spirit into this venerable art form. Born in 2000, Triplett was recognized early as a prodigy and began performing professionally when he was in his mid-teens. His reputation spread, largely by word of mouth, and



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SEPTEMBER 3

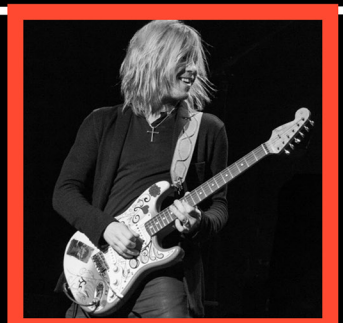
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in 2022, after an involuntary hiatus brought about by the COVID pandemic, he released his first recording, *Who Is He?*, which showcased his wide-ranging vocal chops in a set that included blues, soul, and even a funk-powered restyling of the Miles Davis classic “All Blues.” In the wake of that success, he won the 2023 Blues Foundation Award for Best Emerging Artist, and his trajectory has gone steadily upward ever since. More recently, he signed with Christone “Kingfish” Ingram’s Red Zero label – a tantalizing collaboration between two of the blues’ young leading lights. His vocal style is both emotive and intimate; he avoids histrionics in favor of an unforced intimacy that draws his listeners in and keeps them enthralled. [DW]

VISIT MISSISSIPPI CROSSROADS STAGE

4:30-5:45 p.m. Dexter

Allen [Dexter Allen](#) is a roots man – but to him, roots represent something alive and growing, taking nourishment from rich soil to create new beauty and bring forth new life. Born into a religious family in Crystal Springs, Miss., in 1970, Allen got his start playing bass in his father’s gospel group. He also had ears for secular music, and in the early 2000s, the great Bobby Rush hired him to be his lead guitarist, a job that found him entraining blues audiences around the world. Allen has been recording under his own name since 2008; both his recordings and his live performances showcase the depth and breadth of his artistry, ranging from traditionally styled deep blues through propulsive R&B and funk to smooth-jazz elegance. In his versatility, his refusal to be pigeonholed, and his commitment to both the music and its message, Allen captures the essence of the living blues heritage. [DW]

3-4:15 p.m. CUZ Band About 14 years ago, Chris Parks decided to start a group that would be versatile enough to delve into many different genres while staying rooted to their origins in the Mississippi Delta. So he founded [CUZ Band](#), which has become an essential party starter across his state and has enlivened festivals far away from the South. Expect to hear the band’s own lively take on classic old school, horn-driven R&B “I Got That Feeling” but the band can also take it slow on such smooth ballads as “Mood Is Right” and “Thang Called Love.” CUZ Band also sounds assured in taking on venerable blues standards, including a killer version of “Smokestack Lightning.” They’ll bring a little bit of everything for this



blues festival set. [AC]

1:30-2:45 p.m. Anissa Hampton
[Anissa “Big Sexy” Hampton](#)’s voice resonates with a power reminiscent of musical foremothers like Whitney Houston, Anita Baker, and Denise LaSalle; as a lyricist, she can be naughty, seductive, and soul-baring in turn. Born in Chicago but raised mostly in Jackson, Miss., Hampton grew up in a musical household. A graduate of Jackson State, she began her professional career as a backup singer; since going out on her own she’s already dropped a series of singles that have won praise and admiration throughout the South and elsewhere. A highlight of Hampton’s music is her preference for using a live

band; even in today’s age of techno-enhanced production and track shows, she knows that the sensual, emotionally rich sound of live musicians is an indispensable component of both blues and true soul music. As she expands her territory, thrilling audiences in a widening variety of venues and settings, her future looks bright with promise. [DW]

Noon-1:15 p.m. John Clayton White Singer/guitarist [John Clayton White](#) emerged recently in the Mississippi blues scene and he’s already become an award-winning presence. In 2024, his band snagged first place in the Mississippi Delta Blues Society’s regional International Blues Challenge. Watching the clips he has posted online attest to his gentle command of Bill Withers’ “Ain’t No Sunshine” (on acoustic guitar) while also letting loose on Jimi Hendrix’s “Voodoo Child” (on electric). What makes this versatility also striking is that, at 15 years old, he is just getting started. Clayton White has packed a lot into a short amount of time. Playing guitar since childhood, he attended



Mississippi School of Music in Tremont, Miss., and started his first band in 2021. Appearing at Club Ebony in Indianola, Miss., he worked onstage with Susan Tedeschi, Derek Trucks and members of B.B. King’s band. Along with working in venues across the state, he is also becoming one of Mississippi’s big advocates in festivals throughout the country. [AC]

ROSA'S LOUNGE (NORTH PROMENADE)

6:30-7:45 p.m. Oscar Wilson Blues Band Known as “Mr. 43rd Street,” South Side native [Oscar Wilson](#) grew up with music in the air. Singing since childhood, his path was sealed in the '80s when he sat in with J.W. Williams. He started singing professionally 20 years later after moving to Wisconsin. In 2007, he became the singer for Chicago's Cash Box Kings who have been thrilling audiences with their raucous interpretations of the city's 1950s and '60s blues classics. Wilson stepped out under his own name to showcase his compositions along with interpreting different classic styles for his 2017 album *One Room Blues*. Now fronting his band, Wilson finds new ways to bring the sounds of the South Side to the world. [AC]

5- 6:15 p.m. The Gerry Hundt Trio For Chicagoan [Gerry Hundt](#), playing the blues means not just investigating deep historical corners but also infusing that investigation with ideas from around the world. Originally a harmonica player in college, he moved to bass, guitar, drums and mandolin while leaning into his combination of ragtime, gospel and acoustic finger picking. He became a valuable sideman for Nick Moss and recorded his debut, *Since Way Back*, on Moss's Blue Bella label in 2007. Hundt's trio, who appeared on the 2024 album *Get Hip!*, includes drummer Tom Lehnert and bassist Renaud Lesire. Their expertise in electric blues lends them a foundation to include touches of surf guitar, country and Caribbean sounds. The group's new album, *One More For Me*, will be released later this year. Along with his trio set, Hundt will perform solo as Gerry Hundt's One-Man Band from Friday through Sunday, 1-3 p.m. in Millennium Park. Playing guitar, percussion, harmonica (and

maybe kazoo), his repertoire of folk and blues connects directly to the golden era of Maxwell Street. [AC]

3:30-4:45 p.m. The Nick Moss Band Featuring Dennis Gruenling Chicago guitarist [Nick Moss](#)' technique reflects his lifelong love of the blues, but the six string was not his first instrument. Originally a bassist for such bandleaders as Jimmy Dawkins, he switched to the guitar at the urging of Willie “Big Eyes” Smith. After working with such legends as Jimmy Rogers, Moss started his own band in 1997 and released his debut, *Got A New Plan*, on his Blue Bella label in 2001. In 2018, Alligator Records released Moss' *The High Cost Of Low Living* and *Lucky Guy!* the following year. Moss' band released *Get Your Back Into It!* (also on Alligator), which included a guest spot from ace harmonica player [Dennis Gruenling](#). That album features Moss' compositions that continue echoing the classic blues style from the mid 20th century and, as the bandleader once put it, “We are a rare breed as how authentic we like to keep the music.” [AC]



2-3:15 p.m. Melody Angel “I'm a rebel with a cause, and it feels so good!” sings [Melody Angel](#) in “Rebel,” a song she released as a single last year but which she first recorded in 2016 and has been

featuring in her sets ever since. That lyric exemplifies the attitude, the music, and the message of this Chicago-based guitarist and singer. With her searing fretboard stylings, clarion-toned vocals, and uncompromisingly honest lyrics – drawing equally from today's headlines, the hardcore reality of Chicago's streets, the sweet/sour ecstasies of love and romance, and the resolve of a young African-American woman determined to prevail against mistreatment and despair -- Angel makes music that smashes barriers. Her music welcomes into its embrace all who have the vision and courage to savor the company of an artist, storyteller, and teacher whose commitment to musical excellence is matched only by her determination to live, love, and fight for justice with the same unquenchable spirit. [DW]

12:30-1:45 p.m. Theo Huff & The Legacy Band [Theo Huff](#) burst onto the scene in 2008 at age 20 with a vocal technique that was already reminiscent of Johnnie Taylor in his prime, and since then he's honed both that voice and his showmanship to become one of our premier exponents of old-school soul. Huff's debut CD, *Now Is The Time*, garnered him the 2014 Blues Critic Award for Best New Artist. He's continued to record since then, primarily showcasing original material; in performance, though, he digs more deeply into his roots, interspersing his own creations with loving renditions of classics from the 1960s/'70s golden era of soul music. His stagecraft also pays homage to the values of that era: Nattily dressed, elegant yet playful in his demeanor, he lives his persona as a young man with an old soul, honoring Chicago's musical legacy even as he helps to maintain and expand that legacy's place in the forefront of the music today. [DW]

**WRIGLEY SQUARE
NEXT GENERATION OF BLUES**

6:45-7:45 p.m. Midwest Young Artist Conservatory
5:15-6:15 p.m. Chicago Blues Revival
4-4:45 p.m. Whitney M. Young Magnet High School
3-3:45 p.m. Fernando Jones Presents the Blues
Kids of America Jam Session
2-2:45 p.m. BandWith Chicago
1-1:45 p.m. Nicholas Senn High School
Noon-12:45 p.m. WDCB Presents

**SUNDAY, JUNE 7
JAY PRITZKER PAVILION**

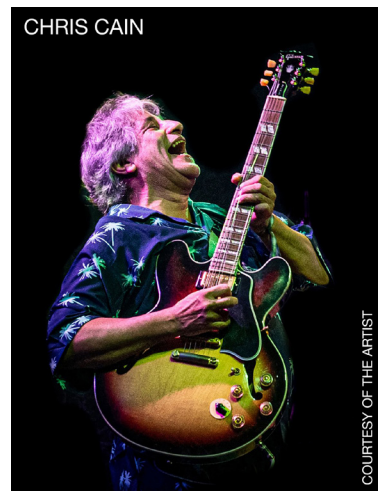
7:45-9 p.m. Taj Mahal and the Phantom Blues Band
The expression “legend in his own time” may be overused, but in the case of [Taj Mahal](#), it’s appropriate. Born Henry Saint Claire Fredericks Jr. in New York in 1942, he grew up immersed in music; among his early influences was his godfather, the famed pianist Buddy Johnson. Mahal is an internationally acclaimed roots-music polymath who has performed, educated, and inspired fellow musicians and listeners



for over six decades. His discography includes over 60 albums and at least 40 singles and EPs; along the way he’s earned five Grammy Awards and multiple other accolades. His Phantom Blues band, like other ensembles he’s put together over the years, are an eclectic group equally proficient in the Africanist tradition, blues, folk, and gospel, as well as contemporary-styled gems like the pop-folk ballad *Time*, written by the late Bill Withers, which Mahal recently released and is on its way to becoming yet another modern-day Taj Mahal classic. An evening with Taj Mahal is an evening spent in the presence of wisdom, artistic genius, and living history. [DW]

6:30-7:30 p.m. Chris Cain About five years ago, [Chris Cain](#) detailed his origins in the autobiographical song, “Born To Play,” on the *Raisin’ Cain* album (Alligator). Sung with undeniable conviction, his experiences back up his words. Originally from California, his father gave him a guitar when he turned 8 and also took him to see such performers as Ray Charles, B.B. King

and his hero, Albert King. Cain went on to study jazz at San Jose City College and then went on to teach the subject at that institution, while also picking up the piano, bass and woodwinds. After starting his own band in 1986, he released his debut album, *Late Night City Blues*, the following year. He would go on to release more than 13 albums and built up a big following in Europe through his regular tours of the continent. Cain’s numerous accolades include his 2021 nomination for best contemporary blues artist and best blues guitarist for the Memphis Blues Awards. [AC]



5:15-6:15 p.m. Sue Foley [Sue Foley](#)’s journey as a stunning singer, songwriter and guitarist have taken her from Ottawa, Canada, where she fell in love with the blues, to Austin, Texas, where she started drawing attention with her 1992 debut album *Young Girl Blues*. Throughout the years, her insightful original songs and interpretations highlight her range in solo acoustic settings or leading an electric band. In 2021, she would release *Pinky’s Blues*, naming the album after her beloved Telecaster. She has also brought different musical traditions into the blues, particularly Mexican folk music. Recently, Foley received considerable acclaim, and a 2025 Grammy



nomination, for her traditional blues album, *One Guitar Woman*, a tribute to such pioneers as Sister Rosetta Tharpe. This year she has been touring with Rory Block and Cindy Cashdollar as Guitar Women. Away from performing, Foley has a PhD in musicology and later this year will release her book, *Guitar Women: Conversations with the Heroines of Guitar*. [AC]

3:45-5 p.m. Women in Blues Tribute to Mama Yancey and Big Mama Thornton with Mary Lane, Deitra Farr, Katherine Davis, Nora Jean Wallace, Melody Angel, Lee Kanehira, and Lynne Jordan & the Shivers [Estelle “Mama” Yancey](#), who passed away in 1986 at the age of 90, performed and recorded alongside her husband, boogie-woogie/stride piano master Jimmy Yancey, in the 1930s and ‘40s. Later, after re-emerging as a solo artist, she endeared herself to a new audience, as well as young admirers such as pianist Erwin Helfer and vocalist Deitra Farr. [Willie Mae “Big Mama” Thornton](#), although known for her 1953 release, “Hound Dog,” which Elvis turned into a rock & roll classic, and “Ball and Chain,” which Janis Joplin rode to fame in the 1960s, also deserves to be



LYNNE JORDAN

honored on her own terms. She was an accomplished harmonica player and drummer as well as a singer, her discography is substantial, and her performing career extended from the early 1940s until shortly before her death in 1984. Paying tribute to these venerated foremothers will be some of Chicago’s premier blueswomen, including Mary Lane, [Deitra Farr](#), [Katherine Davis](#), [Nora Jean Wallace](#), [Melody Angel](#), [Lee Kanehira](#), and [Lynne Jordan with her band, the Shivers](#). [DW]

VISIT MISSISSIPPI CROSSROADS STAGE

4:30-5:45 p.m. Jaye Hammer [Jaye Hammer](#), born Jeremy George in Friars Point, Miss., in 1981, sings

in a stentorian, church-honed baritone that can thrill listeners in a nightclub, in an auditorium, or at an outdoor festival stage. His emotional range is as wide as his vocal palette – on a good-time anthem to lovemaking, such as his trademark “Lay the Hammer Down,” he’s both playfully aggressive and invitingly sexy; then, on an inspirational classic like Sam Cooke’s “A Change Is Gonna Come,” his voice, careworn yet resonant with hope, is both soothing and inspiring. Hammer has been recording since 2005; in 2011 he signed with Ecko, and he has since established himself as a major force in southern soul-blues. As anyone who remembers his crowd-galvanizing performance at the 2024 Chicago Blues Festival can attest, Hammer can be expected to fill Millennium Park with the gospel-infused power of his voice. [DW]



MZZ REESE

3-4:15 p.m. Mzz Reese & Reese’s Pieces Vocalist [Mzz Reese](#), born Priscilla Thomas in Jackson, Miss., has been a Chicagoan since the mid-1970s. Her father, the late Herbert Thomas, was an esteemed gospel singer with the Canton Spirituals and Chicago’s Kindly Shepherds, among others. Under his tutelage she learned the fine points of intonation and harmony, and how to command a stage with confidence. She also idolized vocalists ranging from gospel superstar Shirley Caesar to soul-blues legend Denise LaSalle.

Those teachings and role models, along with her rich alto voice, have propelled her into the top ranks of Chicago’s blues and soul vocalists. More recently, her housewrecking performance at the 2025 Eastside Kings Festival in Austin brought her national and international recognition. A European tour and a long-awaited follow-up to *Cookies*, her 2015 debut CD, are in the works; meanwhile, she returns to the Chicago Blues Festival with her trademark fusion of entertainment, inspiration, and uplift. [DW]

1:30-2:45 p.m. Fred T and The Band Mississippian [Fred T.](#) (a.k.a. Fred Robinson) built his band 10 years ago and this group exemplifies his lifetime in the blues. Seeped in the traditions of Delta blues, this band regularly livens up venues throughout the South with its own take on funk and soul. Fred T has worked in Bobby Rush’s band and has performed with such legends as B.B. King, Otis Clay and Eddie Shaw. Along with a new take on blues classics, the band also features such originals as “Stop Trippin’,” which Fred T sings with the finesse of his mentors. The city of Jackson, Miss., recognized Fred T as Musician of the Year in the Jackson Music Awards and he was a semi-finalist in the prestigious 2017 International Blues Competition in Memphis, Tenn. [AC]



FRED T AND THE BAND

PHOTO CREDIT: JAY HIATT

Noon-1:15 p.m. Libby Rae Watson with Bill Steber Back in the mid 1970s, [Libby Rae Watson](#) was in her early 20s and with a sense of local wanderlust found out about the older blues legends in her home state of Mississippi. Early encounters with such legends as Furry Lewis and a friendship with Sam Chatmon led her to become a singer and guitarist with an emphasis on the acoustic tradition of the region's back roads. Through it all, Watson tells musical stories with an affectionate sense of humor, such as "Big Joe," her tribute to Big Joe Williams that appeared on *I Done Told Ya*, a collaboration with Wes Lee. In 2018, Watson was a finalist in Memphis' International Blues Challenge. She also helped organize the first Delta Blues Festival in Greenville, Miss., in 1978. Like Watson, guitarist [Bill Steber](#)'s contribution to the blues is not just as a performer. His stunning black-and-white photographs of musicians have been featured in such publications as Living Blues. [AC]

ROSA'S LOUNGE (NORTH PROMENADE)

6:30-7:45 p.m. Gerald McClendon (The Soulkeeper) With a stunning voice and easy going charm, [Gerald McClendon](#) revives the sound of classic soul every time he steps on stage. A lifelong Chicagoan, he grew up absorbing the music of Sam Cooke, Curtis Mayfield and Smokey Robinson while also delving into blues, country and jazz standards. His 1999 debut album, *Choose Love*, features his mellow contemporary R&B compositions. But he also adds his own twists to the classics, including his "Guitars of Spain" project that brings flamenco inflections to songs by Otis Redding. McClendon's sublime 2021 album *Let's Have A Party* takes a sunny and mellow approach to the blues with gospel vocal refrains and funk beats mixing up the proceedings. [AC]

5-6:15 p.m. Rick King's Royal Hustle For years, blues fans have seen Chicago's own [Rick King](#) playing drums for such legends as Koko Taylor, Buddy Guy and B.B. King. Others may know him from co-founding the funky Lubriphonic. But stepping to the front as vocalist and percussionist of the seven-piece Rick King's Royal Hustle puts those previous years in a whole new light. This group also excels in its interpretations of American soul music in all of its regional and stylistic varieties, and it also adds in some touches of reggae. The septet has the experience to propel its versatility with bassist Pennal "PJ" Johnson touring with numerous blues and gospel artists; guitarist Radka Kasparcova working in the all-women rock band Serendipity; guitarist Pete Galanis' accompanying Lurrie Bell; trumpeter Ron Haynes' tours with Chaka Khan; trombonist Johnny Cotton's time with the Ohio Players and keyboardist Marty Sammon's tenure with Buddy Guy. [AC]



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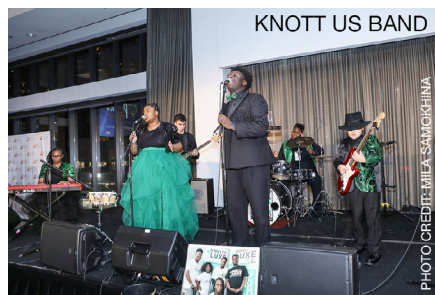
3:30-4:45 p.m. Bob Stroger: Windy City Blues Legend At age 95, bassist [Bob Stroger](#) continues to enrich the blues with his rhythmic, melodic and harmonic acumen as well as his personal charm, whenever he performs. Through the years he has propelled and anchored the bands of such notables as Eddie King and Otis Rush, and he has also been a first-call session man, both in the studio and on gigs, with the likes of Sunnyland Slim, Odie Payne, Bo Diddley, and many others. It was Slim who urged Stroger to step forward and begin to showcase his gifts as a vocalist, and in recent years he's been featuring this aspect of his talents more prominently; his most recent release, 2022's *That's My Name* (Delmark), showcases his mellifluous vocals at their latter-day best, alongside his undiminished chops as a bass player. Stroger remains a true living legend of Chicago blues, a venerated elder who is still in his prime. [DW]

2-3:15 p.m. Dan Souvigny Band with Carlos Johnson Blues fans all over the world would recognize Dan Souvigny as the keyboardist in Buddy Guy's band, a position he's held for four years. He's also collaborated with such stars as Chrstone "Kingfish" Ingram, Derek Trucks and Eric Gales. His extroverted musical personality is the ideal onstage foil for these stars. But Souvigny came to the blues from a very different place. Growing up in Hamshire, Ill., he was a youthful prodigy who excelled at ragtime, swing and stride jazz styles and was a three-time Junior winner of the World Championship Old Time Piano Playing Contest. Souvigny then spent a few years working with guitarist Joanna Connor. As he's shown leading his own band in clubs, he brings all of these idioms to the blues (and his [dan_on_keys](#) Instagram page has choice clips

of his Latin forays). Guitarist and singer [Carlos Johnson](#)'s intense delivery has made him a valuable musician on the Chicago blues scene since he started hitting the stages in the 1970s. [AC]



12:30-1:45 p.m. A Patch of Blues A [Patch of Blues](#) arose out of Chicago bluesman and educator Fernando Jones' Blues Camp at Columbia College in the early 2020s. Originally an all-woman ensemble, they hit the city by storm despite their youth, earning accolades for their performances at festivals, in clubs, and at various special events around town. In 2024, they won a Chicago Music Award for "Most Outstanding Band." Their lineup today includes three original members: vocalist Fatima "Fati" Jones, lead guitarist Rebecca Egwenu, and drummer Stacy Norris – along with bassist/multi-instrumentalist Sam Jones. The sound they deliver, a bracing mix of hard-core blues, funk, soul, and pop, is remarkably full-bodied for an instrumental trio; with its effortless meld of genres and styles, as well as its wide emotional spectrum, it honors their roots while blazing trails toward new spirit and new light, bringing life to their stated determination to summon "the power of music to unite and heal." [DW]



WRIGLEY SQUARE NEXT GENERATION OF BLUES

6:45-7:45 p.m. The Chicago Academy for the Arts
5:15-6:15 p.m. Knott Us Band
4-4:45 p.m. Alex Olson
3-3:45 p.m. Will Carter Music
2-2:45 p.m. Jones College Prep
1-1:45 p.m. King College Prep

Noon-12:45 p.m. Wendy and DB Singer/songwriters [Wendy and DB](#) spread the joy of the blues to children. The group's 2022 Grammy nominated album *Into The Little Blue House* is their collaboration with such Chicago-based blues artists as Kenny "Beedy Eyes" Smith to infuse upbeat messages about community for whole families to enjoy. The duo's *Get Your Sunny Side Up* album includes contributions from such friends as Secret Agent 23 Skidoo and Flor Bromley. Wendy (Wendy Morgan)

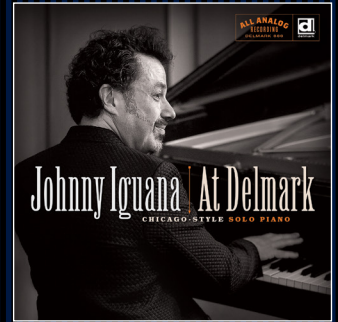


started emphasizing works for children after a career in pop music an acting. Her musical partner, Darryl "DB" Boggs, has been a band teacher and choir director in Chicago schools for more than four decades. [AC]

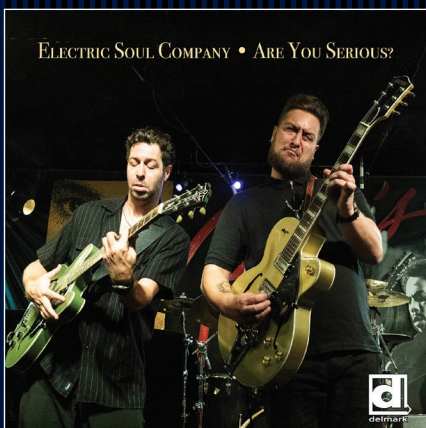
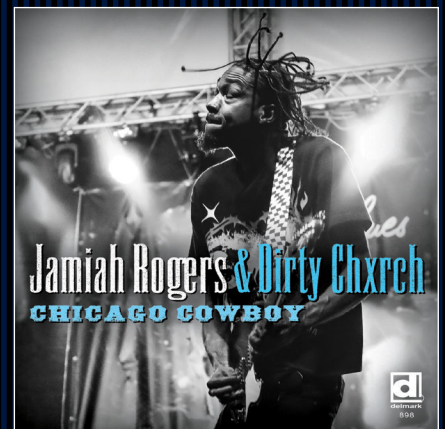
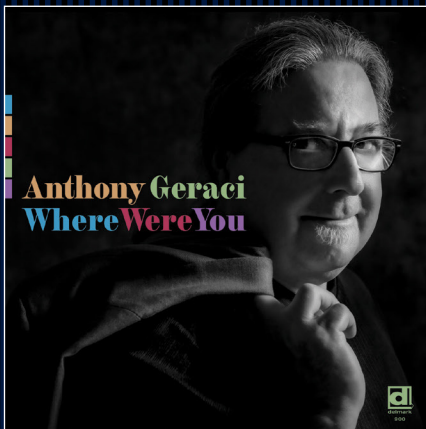
MAXWELL STREET STAGE (between S. Halsted Street and S. Union Avenue)

The original Maxwell Street Market, centered around 13th and Halsted on Chicago's Near West Side, was a bustling open-air bazaar where goods of every description were bought and sold, and where music filled the air. Some of Chicago's most legendary blues artists got their start there; through the years, generations of music lovers

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also made a weekly pilgrimage to the Market to celebrate the living history it represented. For aficionados of the Chicago tradition, this set will truly “bring the blues back home.” [DW]

2-3 p.m. Harmonica Hinds Duo
[Mervyn “Harmonica” Hinds](#) is one of Chicago’s most honored blues traditionalists, proficient in banjo and guitar as well as his namesake instrument. After moving here from his native Trinidad in 1977, he quickly established himself on the South Side circuit; his regular appearances at Theresa’s Lounge, among other venues, kicked off a musical career that he has sustained to this day. He’s now a mainstay at Buddy Guy’s Legends and other popular clubs, and his discography includes multiple releases under his own name as well as guest slots on recordings by such immortals as Koko Taylor and Muddy Waters himself. Playing outdoors on the Maxwell Street Stage will be something of a return to roots for this veteran Chicagoan, whose career dates back to the latter-era glory days of the original market. [DW]

1:30-2 p.m. DJ James Porter
See bio on 10 a.m. performance.

12:30-1:30 p.m. John Primer / Steve Bell *See the listings for the Ramova Theatre on Thursday, June 4, for more on John Primer.* Harmonica ace [Steve Bell](#) has

incorporated the signature moves of his father, the late Chicago harp master Carey Bell, into a distinctive, personalized style. He and Primer blend together with an almost telepathic immediacy. [DW]

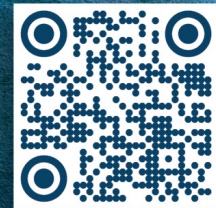
Noon-12:30 p.m. DJ James Porter *See bio on 10 a.m. performance.*

11:00 a.m.-Noon Studebaker John’s Maxwell Street Kings
For guitarist [Studebaker John](#) (a.k.a. John Grimaldi), his set at Maxwell Street should feel like a homecoming. While growing up, he was a regular visitor to this blues incubator where he’d watch such heroes as Hound Dog Taylor. He plugged in his own guitar in the 1970s and has never stopped. His band captures the spirit of the historic street through his original compositions on such lively albums as *Kingsville Jukin’* and *The Way You Do* (both on Delmark). [AC]

10-11 a.m. DJ James Porter
DJ and journalist [James Porter](#) is a premier authority on blues and classic R&B with his articles appearing regularly in such publications as the Chicago Reader. He hosts the monthly “Hoodoo Party” radio show on Loyola University’s WLWU and sings and plays harmonica in the blues-inspired garage rock band The James Dean Joint. [AC]

CHICAGO BLUES FESTIVAL COMMITTEE

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A dark, moody photograph of a saxophone being played, with the player's hands and fingers visible. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the instrument against a dark background.

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