

St. Louis and the Blues

In 1890 St. Louis was the fourth largest city in the country. At the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers and dubbed the “Gateway to the West” for the many thousands of settlers who had passed through on their journey west, St. Louis was a major economic and cultural center. New people constantly came to St. Louis by road, riverboat and railroad, bringing new ideas that would mix with older traditions.

St. Louis has always been a musically vibrant city and played a key role in the development of ragtime, jazz and blues. Rural musicians, including many African-Americans who were former slaves or descended from slaves, and musicians from other town and cities were drawn to St. Louis, where their music mixed with band music, classical music, parlor songs, music from minstrel shows and vaudeville, and dance music of all kinds.

St. Louis was the center for ragtime music, the syncopated music that preceded jazz and blues. Early ragtime was usually played on the piano and took the country by storm in the early part of the 20th century. The “King of Ragtime” Scott Joplin had written his famous “Maple Leaf Rag” in Sedalia, Missouri before moving to St. Louis in 1901 and living here until 1907. His publisher John Stark had also moved to St. Louis and published many Joplin ragtime hits, including “The Cascades” written for the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair. Many other top ragtime pianists made St. Louis their home, including Tom Turpin, Louis Chauvin, James Scott, Scott Hayden, Arthur Marshall and Blind Boone. Because of St. Louis’ great ragtime piano tradition and the wealth of pianos in clubs, piano played a big role in St. Louis blues.

Many blues historians write that the blues were born in the Mississippi Delta and moved up river to Memphis and St. Louis and north to Chicago. In fact, the story is much more complicated, with both rural and city musicians creating the blues and interacting with each other in many different ways. St. Louis, with its musical vitality, played a huge role in the creation and development of the blues. William Howland Kenney in *Jazz on the River* writes: “From 1880 to World War II, St. Louis, more than Memphis, tended to create hybrid musical styles such as ragtime and hot dance music that combined folk music roots with a variety of more formal musical traditions.”

The “Father of the Blues” W.C. Handy said that he first heard the blues in 1892 on the levee in St. Louis: “While sleeping on the cobblestones in St. Louis I heard shabby guitarists picking out a tune called ‘East St. Louis.’ It had numerous one-line verses and they would sing it all night.”

The first published song with the word “blues” was “Baby Seal Blues” written in 1912 by St. Louisan Artie Matthews, although that distinction is still debated today. What is not disputed is that the most famous blues song ever is W.C. Handy’s “St. Louis Blues.”

Blind Boone (1864-1927)

Illustration © 2009 by Kevin Belford

John William “Blind” Boone was born at a Civil War Army camp near Miami, Missouri in 1864. Born to a runaway slave owned by descendants Daniel Boone, he lost his sight as an infant to what was called a “brain fever,” causing his eyes to be removed in what was considered a radical surgery for the time. John William was an extremely intelligent child and prodigy of sorts – he could replicate rhythms by the age of three, and played tin whistle by the age of 5. His mother adored him, and used the resources of the entire town of Warrensburg, where they were then living, to help purchase John a train ticket to St. Louis to attend the Missouri School for the Blind. It was during his time at the School for the Blind that his talent on the piano flourished. He could replicate any tune he heard by ear on the keys. Boone also discovered the emerging ragtime scene in St. Louis, and would sneak away from school to listen to the new sounds being created in the clubs at night.

After being expelled from school, Boone eventually settled in Columbia, where his career took off. Considered a pioneer of early Missouri ragtime, Boone was one of the first musicians to bridge the gap between popular and classical music. Recorded only on piano rolls, his recordings run the gamut from popular 19th-century rags to religious and more serious, classical-style music. One of the eras most successful and popular entertainers, Boone traveled across North America, 10 months a year for a reported 39 years, performing for sold out churches and concert halls through the early 1900s. He was known to be very generous to charities throughout Columbia until his death in 1927, and in turn, the community still embraces Boone and his legacy through the John William Boone Heritage Foundation.

Source: <http://blindboone.missouri.org/history.html>

St. Louis Songs

Three murders in St. Louis during the 1800’s were crafted into ballads in the city and have been performed and recorded by many artists over the years.

“Duncan and Brady” was based on the October 1890 murder of a police officer in a saloon fight in the Deep Morgan section of St. Louis. Police Sergeant James Brady responded to the call and Harry Duncan, a local African-American singer, was arrested. Many believed he was innocent and that bar owner was guilty of the crime. But Harry Duncan was convicted and many versions of “Duncan and Brady” were sung by everybody from Wilbur Watts & The Lonely Eagles in 1929 to Leadbelly, Dave Van Ronk and Bob Dylan.

“Frankie and Johnny” was a murder ballad written by black pianist and songwriter Bill Dooley the night after 22-year old St. Louis dancer Frankie Baker shot or stabbed her 17-year old lover Allen Britt in October 1899 on Targee Street because he was having a

relationship with another woman, Alice Pryor. Frankie claimed self defense and she was acquitted. Dooley used the title “Frankie and Albert,” but the song was published by Tin Pan Alley in 1904 with the title “He Done Me Wrong” and in 1912 with the title “Frankie and Johnny.” Incidentally, Josephine Baker was born on the Targee Street, an area that was torn down to make way for the Kiel Opera House and Auditorium.

“**Staggerlee**,” and many other spellings – “Stagolee, Stack O’Lee, Stacker Lee, etc. – is included in Rolling Stone’s 500 greatest songs of all time. The story is from St. Louis in December 1895 when “Stack” Lee Shelton shot William “Billy” Lyons, after a political quarrel turned into a fight in a saloon at Eleventh and Morgan streets. Shelton was arrested, jailed and later convicted of murder. Countless versions exist, including recordings by Mississippi John Hurt, Sidney Bechet, Fats Domino, James Brown, Duke Ellington and the Grateful Dead.

St. Louis Blues Songs

Streets and Places

A number of St. Louis locations have been included in the titles and lyrics of blues songs. Speckled Red and Mary Johnson both recorded “Delmar Blues,” Henry Spaulding did “Biddle Street Blues,” Peetie Wheatstraw memorialized the rough “Cake Alley,” and in 1929 Henry Brown celebrated an area that stretched along Delmar from the levee all the way past Jefferson in “Deep Morgan Blues.”

Disaster Songs

There were a number of songs about the sinking of the Titanic in 1912, and the event was recalled by Virginia Liston with “Titanic Blues” in 1926 and by Hi Henry Brown in 1932.

After the Mississippi River flood of 1927, Lonnie Johnson immediately wrote “South Bound Water” and later “Backwater Blues” and “Broken Levee Blues.” “High Water Blues” was performed by Bessie Mae Smith that same year.

A cyclone struck St. Louis on September 29, 1927 and killed almost a hundred people. Lonnie Johnson very quickly wrote and recorded “St. Louis Cyclone Blues.”

Classics

“Every Day I Have the Blues,” often credited to Memphis Slim, was actually written and recorded by St. Louisan Aaron “Pinetop” Sparks. B.B. King used it as his theme song and it has been recorded by many artists, including Count Basie with vocalist Big Joe Williams, Eric Clapton, Santana, and Tony Bennett and Stevie Wonder.

Big Joe Williams recorded his blues classic “Baby Please Don’t Go” in 1935. He admitted to getting “some” of the song from Bessie Mae Smith. It has become a blues and rock standard, covered by everyone from John Lee Hooker and Muddy Waters to The Doors, Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers, Van Morrison and Aerosmith.

The 1920’s

Blues became a popular musical genre in the 1920s, with the word “blues” being used on records for wide range of actual music styles. Blues were “in,” much like jazz. Many musicians played both blues and jazz and there was rich cross fertilization between the two genres.

Blues music in St. Louis during the 1920s was more innovative than in other cities, showing rhythmic invention and virtuosic playing. Coming out of the ragtime era and the many excellent ragtime pianists in St. Louis, there were many strong blues pianists such as Speckled Red, Henry Brown, Roosevelt Sykes and Barrelhouse Buck McFarland. There were also many strong guitarists such as Lonnie Johnson, Charley Jordan, J.D. Short and Big Joe Williams. Pianists and guitarists found themselves often playing together, and the strong left-hand work of the pianists left the guitarists free to explore more adventurous melody work. Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of the 1920s blues scene in St. Louis is the number of outstanding female singers, including Mary Johnson, Alice Moore, Irene Scruggs, Eva Taylor and St. Louis Bessie Mae Smith.

Lonnie Johnson

1889, Louisiana – 1970, Canada

From: Kevin Belford, *The Devil at the Confluence: The Pre-war Blues Music of St. Louis Missouri*, 2009.

Lonnie Johnson moved to St. Louis from his native New Orleans in November 1925. He worked with Charlie Creath's Jazz-O-Maniacs Band on the Mississippi riverboat the S.S. St. Paul out of St. Louis from 1920-1922 and recorded with Creath for Okeh in St. Louis in 1925. Johnson also worked with his brother James "Steady Roll" Johnson at Katy Red's Club, East St. Louis in that year.

In a city with many musical influences, few wielded as strong an influence as Lonnie Johnson. If St. Louis could be said to have a dominant figure, it was undoubtedly Lonnie. His impeccable guitar style impressed both Clifford Gibson and Henry Townsend, and he exerted a tremendous stylistic influence on the field as a whole, influencing such figures as Rambling Thomas, Robert Johnson and Josh White. His too-little recorded piano contributed much to the St. Louis style. Early recognition from jazz collectors (for his work with Eddie Lang, Duke Ellington and Charlie Creath, among others) wrongly typed him as a fugitive jazz guitarist. Lonnie may well be the only St. Louis musician of the era to have recorded on mandolin, and he was also proficient on banjo and violin.

(From www.bluesworld.com)

Henry Townsend

1909, Mississippi - 2006, Wisconsin

Patriarch of the St. Louis blues, Grammy Award-winning artist Henry Townsend recorded in every decade for eighty years. Born October 27, 1909 in Shelby, Mississippi, his parents moved him to Cairo, Illinois at an early age. As a teenager, he would go to East St. Louis to hear Lonnie Johnson play with his brother "Steady Roll" on piano and his connection to the St. Louis blues was born. He first recorded in 1929 with Sam Woolf, a local impresario who lived at 15th and Biddle. Henry was 20 years old. Adept on both piano and guitar, Townsend performed often with Roosevelt Sykes, and recorded for Columbia, Paramount and Bluebird records throughout the '20s and '30s. A popular sideman, Townsend was internationally known in the blues world, and performed at festivals and clubs into the 1970s and '80s.

(From www.bluesworld.com)

James "Stump" Johnson (also known as Shorty George, Snitcher Roberts)

1902, Tennessee – 1969, St. Louis, Missouri.

Young James Johnson was nicknamed "Stump" because of his small stature. Around 1909, The Johnson family moved from Tennessee to St. Louis, and here James was influenced by Son Long, a legendary pianist from the red-light district, whom James called the real originator of boogie woogie.

James Johnson told author Paul Oliver in 1960, "I had learned to play the blues by just hangin' roun' the pool room where they have an ole piano, just pickin' it up for myself. Boots on the levee was one of the most popular places in the city of St. Louis because all the riverboats would come in there and dock and all the 'ristocratic people would come down there for slummin' and enjoyment. They were very, very tough places though and they were shootin' dice and drinkin' whiskey and enjoyin'; themselves and it could get kind o'rough."

Arthur E. Satherly, a talent scout for QRS, discovered Stump playing at his brother Jesse's music store on Market Street in 1929. "The Duck's Yas Yas" on QRS became a hit, James recorded three more versions of it, and it was covered in 1929 by Tampa Red, among others. The flip side, "The Snitchers Blues" was also covered by Red as "Friendless Blues." In November 1954, after serving in the war, Stump was rediscovered by Charles "Lindy" O'Brien, a St. Louis police officer who had a love of St. Louis blues. James later worked in the tax collection department at St. Louis City Hall and as a policeman in Wellston. After a long illness, the end came on December 5, 1969 when he died in the VA Hospital from carcinoma of the esophagus.

(From www.bluesworld.com)

What Are the Blues?

The blues are a feeling, not a format. Blues songs usually have a feeling of sadness and melancholy, and often help the singer feel better about their situation. Many early blues came out of the experience of African-Americans who worked in the fields or at other hard labor, and are in part based on work songs and field hollers with their repeated lines and strong rhythms. Early blues were often an entirely individual endeavor – a singer perhaps with a guitar singing about some trouble in their life – such as a lost lover, a mean boss, or an injustice suffered – or telling a story about someone else’s troubles. The tune might be borrowed from another blues, but that didn’t matter because the creativity came in the words invented by the singer.

What Is a Twelve-Bar Blues?

A very common form of the blues is the “twelve-bar blues” that has twelve measures or bars. In its simplest form, the first line is repeated or slightly varied, with a different third line that rhymes with the previous lines and adds something new, often providing humor, a comment, or concluding the thought.

Here’s a sample twelve-bar blues lyric, taken from the beginning of the “St. Louis Blues”:

I hate to see de evenin’ sun go down.
Hate to see de evenin’ sun go down.
‘Cause my baby, he done left dis town.

In the key of C, the chord progression for a twelve-bar blues would be:

C	C or F	C	C
F	F	C	C
G	F	C	C or G

What Are Blue Notes?

One way that a blues singer or instrumentalist makes the music more emotional is by bending the notes below the regular note in the scale. Any note in the scale can be bent, but the notes that are most commonly lowered are the 3rd and the 7th notes of the scale.

Regular C Major Scale:	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
With lowered 3 rd and 7 th :	C	D	E flat	F	G	A	B flat	C

Irene Scruggs (also known as Little Sister, Dixie Nolan and Chocolate Brown)
1903, Mississippi - date unknown, Europe

Irene Scruggs was born in Mississippi and raised in St. Louis. She recorded with Clarence Williams on the Okeh record label in 1924, with the King Oliver band for Vocalion Records in 1926, and with Lonnie Johnson for Okeh Records again in St. Louis in 1927. She worked St. Louis clubs with her own band in the late twenties and used the alias "Chocolate Brown" when recording for Paramount in the early 1930s. She toured and recorded with Little Brother Montgomery, often stealing the shows with her guest spots. Scruggs was part of a process wherein traditional rural musical roots blended into newly evolving urban styles. Raunchy, sexy blues became one of her specialties with hits such as "Good Grindin'" and "Must Get Mine in Front." It was no surprise that her material was included in *The Nasty Blues*, a collection of bawdy blues material and biographies published by Hal Leonard. By the 1940s, Scruggs had joined the population of expatriate black performers living abroad. Later she moved to Germany, where she is thought to have died.

Source: www.bluesworld.com and <http://www.allmusicguide.com>

Alice Moore (also known as Little Alice)
birth and death dates unknown, active late 1920s- 1930s

Alice Moore ranks with Mary Johnson as one of the two best female blues singers in St. Louis during the pre-WWII period. Alice Moore's recording career can be divided into two time periods, 1927-1929 and 1934-1937. The first set of recordings was made for Paramount and the latter ones were made for Decca. Moore's singing technique is typical of the St. Louis style with its nasal quality, but the way that she stretches out the vowels and her spoken comments gives her a unique sound. Little Alice wrote most of her own songs. Many recordings by other artists are attributed to L.A. Moore and A. LaMoore, which would appear to be pseudonyms for Little Alice Moore. Moore's songs are typical of the time period, generally focusing on relationships or trying to make a living in tough economic times. "Blue, Black and Evil" was her biggest hit, and she recorded three different versions.

Source: www.bluesworld.com and <http://www.allmusicguide.com>

Eva Taylor (born Irene Gibbons)
1895, St. Louis County, Missouri - 1977, New York

Born in St. Louis January 22, 1895 Gibbons was an influential African-American singer who performed throughout St. Louis before the turn of the century. Gibbons went on to fame under the stage name Eva Taylor, and married pianist/leader/composer Clarence Williams. Nicknamed "The Dixie Nightingale," Taylor recorded for several labels including Black Swan, Columbia, Okeh and Bluebird. She eventually settled in Harlem and recorded and performed off-and-on into the 1960s.

Source: www.bluesworld.com and <http://www.answers.com/topic/eva-taylor>

Victoria Spivey

1906, Texas – 1976, New York

Victoria Spivey's connection with St. Louis bears mentioning, as she recorded for Okeh records in St. Louis in 1926, and from 1926 to 1929 worked as a staff writer for the St. Louis Publishing Company. She also briefly owned a club in East St. Louis in the mid-forties. Spivey was a well-known club performer in Texas before moving to St. Louis and her songs, which often focused on crime and disease, were popular before and after the Great Depression.

(From www.bluesworld.com)

Luella Miller and Al Miller

Dates Unknown

Ragtime and Early Blues – Publishers, Presenters and Talent Scouts

John Stark was a music publisher in Sedalia, Missouri who came to St. Louis after he had had published Scott Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag." His subsequent publishing of songs by Scott Joplin and other ragtime composers was a key to the ragtime craze that swept the country.

Charles and Tom Turpin both played important roles in the St. Louis music scene – Tom through his ragtime piano playing and compositions and Charles for creating the Booker Washington Theater at Market Street and Jefferson Boulevard, the site of a tent where traveling shows had performed. The Booker Washington Theater, part of the Theater Owners Booking Association (TOBA) circuit, was a musical hotspot for many years, including blues contests that would bring new talent to the public eye.

Jesse Johnson opened his Deluxe Music Shoppe on 2234 Market Street behind the Booker Washington Theater in 1919. Beside selling records and managing jazz bands like Charlie Creath's Jazz-O-Maniacs, he brought national talent to St. Louis, booked local talent in other cities, and was a talent scout for record companies. Jesse's brother James "Stump" Johnson was married to Edith North Johnson who alone recorded 17 sides in 1929.

James Crutchfield

1912, Louisiana – 2001, St. Louis, Missouri

A singer and piano player with recordings on the Dutch Swingmaster label, James Crutchfield was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He came to St. Louis in 1948 and played clubs in Gaslight Square with Elmore James. He remained active in the St. Louis blues scene, performing at Venice Café each Wednesday until his death in 2001.

Crutchfield has an LP on the Munich label in Germany, one on Dutch Swingmaster, and has six cuts on the Delmark Biddle Steet *Barrelhousin'* release, where he is accompanied on some cuts by James "Bat The Hummingbird" Robinson playing drums.

(From www.allmusic.com and www.stlblues.net)

Roosevelt Sykes (also known as Willie Kelly, Dobby Bragg and The Honeydripper)

Birth year unknown – 1983, Louisiana.

Piano

Blues Hall-of-Famer Roosevelt Sykes was one of the most influential bluesman of his time – inspiring blues greats such as Fats Domino, Professor Longhair and Ray Charles. He moved to St. Louis from Arkansas in the early 1920s, and quickly won fans with his intricate chord patterns and amazing piano technique. He recorded for many of the top record labels including Victor, Decca and Bluebird, and was one of the few artists who continued to record during WWII. He influenced many of St. Louis's top blues musicians including Henry Townsend.

(from

http://www.blues.org/halloffame/inductees.php?YearId=6#ref=halloffame_inductees)

Henry Brown

1906, Tennessee – 1981, St. Louis, Missouri

Brown moved to St. Louis around 1918, and apart from army service (as a musician) in World War II, he spent his entire musical life there. His economical but highly inventive piano playing usually featured a bouncy, four-to-the-bar chordal bass, and he was heard on record both solo and behind a number of St. Louis artists in the 1920s and '30s, including Mary Johnson, Alice Moore and the "gutbucket" trombonist Ike Rodgers. He recorded a superb album in 1960 for Paul Oliver. Thereafter, he was recorded sporadically, but less successfully, until 1974. He had been in declining health for some time before his death in June 1981. Drastically under-recorded, Don Kent calls Brown "one of the pinnacles of St. Louis musicianship...Brown is one of the greatest singers of the '20s."

Sources: <http://www.nme.com/artists/henry-brown>, www.bluesworld.com, and Don Kent, notes to Mamlish 3805 "Good Time Blues."

Charley Jordan (also known as Uncle Skipper, one of The Two Charlies)
1890, Tennessee - 1954, St. Louis, Missouri.

Charley Jordan came to St. Louis from Helena, Arkansas and was said to have been a bootlegger in the twenties. He limped as the result of a bullet wound, acted as a talent scout for Decca in the thirties, ran a rehearsal studio for local talents, and recorded extensively with Peetie Wheatstraw. He is reputed to have been shot to death on Ninth Street in 1954, but there is also evidence that he died of pneumonia.
(From www.bluesworld.com)

Barrelhouse Buck (born Thomas McFarland)
1903, Illinois - 1962, St Louis, Missouri

Thomas “Barrelhouse Buck” McFarland was born in Alton Illinois in 1903 and was part of a group of Blues musicians from the ‘20s and ‘30s who were referred to as the “Alton school.” This was in reference to the similarities they all had in their piano playing and the fact they all came from Alton.

In the years between the two World Wars, McFarland and other Alton natives, plus some others, made up the core of a thriving blues scene in St. Louis. The barrelhouse style that gave “Barrelhouse Buck” his name came about due to the types of places they would play. Barrelhouse bars were usually at the low end of the social scale with the bar consisting of some planks laid down over some barrels.

Popular or famous Barrelhouse Buck McFarland songs include “I Got to Go Blues,” “Mean to Mean,” “Mercy Mercy Blues,” “St. Louis Fire Blues,” and “Charlie's Stomp.” McFarland died in 1962 just eight months after he recorded the tracks that Delmark Records has released under the title *Alton Blues*.

St. Louis Jimmy (born Jimmy Oden)
Also known as St. Louis Jimmy and Old Man Oden
1903, Tennessee - 1977, Illinois

Jimmy Oden moved to St. Louis from Mississippi after being orphaned at the age of 8, and was raised by an older sister. He worked as a shoeshine boy in a barbershop from age 9, then as a busboy and waiter for the Fred Harvey chain. Oden recorded with Roosevelt Sykes, Henry Brown, Charlie Jordan as well as with Chicago artists, and was known as "Old Man Oden" until moving to Chicago in 1933 where they called him “St. Louis Jimmy.” (From www.bluesworld.com)

Robert Nighthawk (Born Robert Lee McCoy or McCullum)
1905, Arkansas - 1967, Arkansas

Known for his mournful vocals and skillful slide guitar, Nighthawk was born in Arkansas and spent much of his early life in the Deep South, performing with his cousin and local

bluesmen throughout the Delta. He moved to St. Louis in the 1930s after accusations of murder, and quickly began playing with Henry Townsend, Speckled Red, Peetie Wheatstraw and other notable St. Louis blues figures. Nighthawk was best known in St. Louis for playing at Ned Love's in the 1930s and again in the 1950s. He lived in Chicago and Cairo, Illinois often and on during this period, eventually returning to Arkansas before his death in 1967.

(From www.bluesworld.com and www.allaboutjazz.com)

J. D. Short (also known as Jelly Jaw)

1902, Mississippi - 1962, St. Louis, Missouri

A native of the Mississippi Delta, J.D. Short, also known as “Jelly Jaw,” was a versatile musician who could play guitar, harmonica, saxophone, drums and clarinet. He moved to St. Louis in the 1920s, and played with musicians such as Henry Spaulding, Honeyboy Edwards, Douglas Williams and Big Joe Williams, and recorded for Vocalion, Delmark, Folkways, and Sonet.

(From www.bluesworld.com)

The 1930's and 1940's

The blues flourished in St. Louis during the 1930s. St. Louis drew top talent from the South and the Midwest and St. Louis blues musicians were active in other cities, as well. The constantly changing mix of people, the continuing interaction between blues and jazz and other genres, and recording opportunities for many blues musicians all ensured a vibrant blues scene in St. Louis.

The blues were not always sad. Adding a stronger beat and a faster tempo, the blues could swing, much like jazz which was moving towards its swing era and popular big bands. In the 1940s, up-tempo blues would evolve into barrelhouse, boogie-woogie, and jump blues, all part of the public's demand for dance music. Though kept alive by some blues musicians, more traditional rural blues was largely being replaced by a new more urban blues sound.

In the 1930s and 40s, juke boxes were replacing live music, and all recordings were stopped by the American Federation of Musicians for two years, 1942-1944, when union president James Petrillo sought to obtain more royalties for recording musicians. At the same time, the United States was at war and began rationing the shellac used for making 78's. The combination of the rationing and the Petrillo Ban brought an end to a rich era of blues recordings.

Peetie Wheatstraw (born William Bunch)

Also known as The Devil's Son-in-Law and The High Sheriff from Hell.

1902, Arkansas - 1941, East St. Louis, Illinois

Born William Bunch and known as "the Devil's Son-In-Law," and "the High Sheriff from Hell," Peetie Wheatstraw was proficient on piano and guitar, and had many recordings for Vocalion and Decca, often accompanied by guitarist Charley Jordan. He operated The St. Louis Club with Big Joe Williams. Paul Garon's "The Devil's Son-In-Law" (Studio Vista Ltd, 1971) covers Wheatstraw in depth. "While Peetie's later records became highly stylized, his earlier records incorporated more elements in both vocal and piano. His piano is considerably more forceful...and his vocal utilizes growls, falsetto, erratic phrasing and a harder edge without especial consistency." (From www.bluesworld.com)

Big Joe Williams (Also known as Poor Joe)

1903, Mississippi - 1982, Georgia

Born October 16, 1903, in Crawford, Mississippi, Joe played his distinctive 9-string guitar as well as accordion, harmonica and kazoo. His father was John "Red Bone" Williams, a Cherokee Indian and his mother was Cora Lee. He was born on a farm on the edge of Knoxford Swamp outside of Crawford, one of sixteen children. Williams was interested in music at an early age and learned on a homemade guitar and flute at about five years of age. He rambled up and down the Mississippi throughout the teens and '20s, working as a singer, dancer and guitarist at picnics, roadhouses, dances, fish fries, and levee and railroad camps. He recorded for Vocalion in Memphis in 1929, frequently worked with St. Louis Jimmy at local house rent parties in St. Louis that same year, worked with the Birmingham Jug Band at jukes and on the streets of Bessemer, Birmingham and Tuscaloosa.

Together with Peetie Wheatstraw, he operated the St. Louis Club from 1939 into the forties. He frequently worked with Bill Lucas, performing on local streets in St. Louis in 1941, and formed his own group, which included Muddy Waters, working local clubs and jukes in the Clarksdale, Mississippi area around the same time. He frequently worked with Charley Jordan and Bullet in St. Louis in 1949, recorded for the Oldie Blues label in St. Louis around 1951-1952, and for Bob Koester's "Delmar" in St. Louis in 1957-1958. (From www.bluesworld.com)

Speckled Red b. (Rufus Perryman)

Born: Oct. 23, 1892, LA. In 1941, moved to St. Louis and died there on January 2, 1973. Pianist Speckled Red (born Rufus Perryman) was born in Louisiana, but he was raised in Hampton, Georgia, where he learned how to play his church's organ. He made his reputation as part of the St. Louis and Memphis blues scenes of the '20s and '30s. Red was equally proficient in early jazz and boogie-woogie with a style similar to Roosevelt Sykes and Little Brother Montgomery.

Throughout his childhood and adolescence, he played piano and organ and by the time he was a teenager, he was playing house parties and juke joints. Red moved to Detroit in the mid-1920s and while he was there, he played various night clubs and parties. After a few years in Detroit, he moved back south to Memphis and in 1929, he cut his first recording sessions. One song from these sessions, "The Dirty Dozens," was released on *Brunswick*

and became a hit in late 1929. In the early '40s, Speckled Red moved to St. Louis, where he played local clubs and bars for the next decade and a half. In 1954, he was rediscovered by a number of blues aficionados and record label owners. By 1956, he had recorded several songs for the Tone record label and began a tour of America and Europe.

Sources: Cohassey, Detroit Blues, Vol. 3, No 1, p.12. Wolfgang Spider, Detroit Blues Society, www.allmusicguide.com, and Wolfgang Spider, Detroit Blues Society, www.bluesworld.com

Blues Legacy – Record Producers and Detectives

Bob Koester was from Wichita, Kansas and grew up loving blues and jazz, attending live shows, and collecting records and trading them while still in high school. He came to St. Louis to attend St. Louis University and sold records my mail order from his dorm room. He joined the St. Louis Jazz Club and met Ron Fister, a fellow record collector, and together they opened a small store K &F Sales which then became the Blue Note Record Shop. After parting ways, Koester started Delmar Records in 1953 on Delmar Boulevard. That same year he released a record by the Windy City Six, a traditional jazz group. He obtained the help of St. Louis City policeman Charlie O'Brien, a fellow member of the St. Louis Jazz Club, in locating veteran bluesmen still living in the city.

Koester moved to Chicago in 1958 and purchased Seymour's Jazz Mart in 1959, with the store later becoming the Jazz Record Mart. He changed the name of his record label to Delmark and in the mid 1960s began focusing on Chicago blues artists such as Junior Wells, Robert Lockwood and Otis Rush. Delmark Records celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2003.

Charlie O'Brien was known as the "Blues Detective." Charlie was a record collector, a member of the St. Louis Jazz Club and a St. Louis City policeman beginning in 1949 who used his police detective skills to track down forgotten blues artists. When he found them, the artists were often relieved to learn that they were not in trouble with the law.

Working together with Bob Koester, the careers of many older blues musicians were revived. Among those "rediscovered" who found concert or recording opportunities were Henry Brown, Edith Johnson, Mary Johnson, Stump Johnson, Speckled Red, Walter Davis and Barrelhouse Buck McFarland.

Gabriel

Gabriel, now a DJ at KDHX, has for more than 50 years been an influential advocate for blues music in St. Louis. From 1959 to 1970, he worked at KATZ radio (1600 AM) and at several other radio stations in the years that followed. Born in Louisiana, Gabriel moved to the St. Louis area and attended Lincoln High School in East St. Louis. He

played trumpet and pedal steel guitar in high school, had his own band in the 1950s that included Bennie Smith, and in the 1960s he knew Howlin' Wolf, Chuck Berry and Ike and Tina Turner, among many other musicians. Bennie Smith recalls a memorable trip for a concert at Fort Leonard Wood in Gabriel's battered 1950 Chevy Carryall that needed oil every ten miles. Gabriel also had his own record label, recorded and sold music, owned a record store called House of Blues, part of the old Majestic Theater in East St. Louis. Anna Mae Bullock, later known as Tina Turner, made her first ever recording on Gabriel's Tune Town label, as the vocalist billed as "Little Ann" on the song "Boxtop" cut at Ike Turner's house on Virginia Place.

Post-War and the Legacy of the Blues

The history of jazz and blues has been intertwined since the earliest days of both genres. Jazz musicians have often taken a blues number and given it a jazz interpretation. "St. Louis Blues" has probably been performed by more jazz singers than any other song. St. Louis' own Miles Davis used the blues as the basis for his landmark 1959 album entitled "Kind of Blue."

While some blues players continued to perform acoustic blues, many musicians went electric in the 1950s, changing from acoustic guitar to electric guitar and gradually from acoustic bass to electric bass. These electric blues groups moved towards Rhythm and Blues, and many on to Rock and Roll. Blues is certainly one of the key ingredients in both of these musical genres, and many R&B and rock musicians have blues numbers in their set lists. Ike Turner, who played backup guitar for blues players and helped many blues musicians get recording deals, was a band leader who during his St. Louis years led the way to R&B and Rock and Roll. His recording of "Rocket 88" in 1951 is thought by many to be the first Rock and Roll song. Tina Turner who joined Ike's band in St. Louis became a major figure in R&B and rock music. Guitarist Bennie Smith, who played on Tina's first recording, was the dean of St. Louis blues guitarists. Pianist Johnny Johnson was another innovator who hired the guitarist Chuck Berry in 1952 for his band and together they helped to create the early Rock and Roll sound. Oliver Sain was a giant in St. Louis, known mostly for his fine saxophone playing, but he was also a drummer, band leader and recording studio producer.

St. Louis has played a key role in blues and the creation of Rhythm and Blues and Rock and Roll.

Tina Turner (born Annie Mae Bullock)
b. 1939, Tennessee

Tina Turner grew up in Nutbush, Tennessee and moved to St. Louis when she was 16. In St. Louis, she attended Sumner High School. It was while she was in High School that she met Ike Turner while visiting Club Imperial with her sister. She persuaded Turner to sing for him and after his initial reservation, she performed in his band, the Ike Turner Kings of Rhythm, using the name "Little Ann." She soon was a key ingredient in the band, which became the Ike and Tina Turner Revue. Despite a tumultuous relationship, they were stars in the 1960's and 70's, with many hits including "A Fool in Love," "River Deep, Mountain High" and "Proud Mary."

Tina left Ike in 1976 and their divorce was finalized in 1978. Tina became a successful solo singer and made a major comeback beginning in 1984 with a number one hit "What's Love Got to Do With It." Her powerful stage presence made her one of the world's most popular entertainers and she was named "one of the greatest singers of all time" by *Rolling Stone* magazine. Her recordings have sold more than 200 million copies and she has sold more concert tickets than any other performer worldwide. She has performed as an actress in numerous films, among them *Tommy*, *Mad Max - Beyond the Thunderdome*, and *The Last Action Hero*.

Fontella Bass

Born 1940, St. Louis, Missouri

Vocalist

Born in St. Louis on July 3, 1940, Fontella Bass is perhaps one of the best known performers to emerge from the St. Louis music scene. Though she is best known for her soul classic "Rescue Me," she was a favorite of the St. Louis blues and R&B scene beginning in the 1950s, first gaining recognition as a singer with Little Milton's band. She married then-unknown jazz trumpeter Lester Bowie, who went on to become one of the most acclaimed musicians in the avant garde jazz world. When St. Louis blues great Oliver Sain parted ways with Little Milton, Bass left with him and they began a long and successful partnership, performing at concert and clubs throughout the St. Louis into the 1970s. Though she never found the same commercial success that she did with "Rescue Me," Bass continued to record and tour throughout the 1990s, focusing her strong gospel roots. (*From www.allmusic.com*)