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The BLUES
You Would
Just Hate to
LOSE, Vol. II

Rock & Roll and Jazz
It all comes from the same place
Blues is the mother and father
It provides the bass
So if you feel yourself drifting
And getting out of touch
Go back to your roots
They'll come through in the clutch — W.K.
The Washington, D.C. area has long been home to a diverse and talented core of musicians. From the early days of Prohibition, the talent found playing in local clubs has been stellar — it remains true today. Whether jazz, blues, R&B, rock 'n' roll or country, the depth and coherence of the musicians and the music deserves broad recognition. This disc, the second part of a series I started in 1996, highlights the blues you can find in the DC area.

The mid to late '50s saw guitar giants like Link Wray and Roy Clark holding down regular club gigs. Do Diddley lived and played in the area between 1958 and 1964. Bobby Parker arrived in the area in the late '50s. In 1961, Roy Buchanan and sax man Joe Stanley left the Dale Hawkins band, and Joe recruited Roy to join his band The Saxtons for a short stint. Roy ended up settling here, working in a number of bands, and by the late sixties was a regular at the Crossroads Bar in Bladensburg, MD where his legend grew. Directly across the street in the Tip Top Inn was Bobby Parker, and Roy would often unplug his guitar and come across the street to jam with him. Around the late '50s and early '60s, a precocious teenage saxophonist named Danny Gatton began playing publicly as well.

In the '60s, DC was also home to blues masters, John Hurt, Bullmoose Jackson, Skip James and Archie Edwards, and in 1970 JB Hutto moved to DC. In 1967, Bret Littlehales and Bobby Radcliff, at the age of 16, formed the Northside Blues Band and many of the DC area's blues players can trace a lineage back to offshoots from that band. Bret began playing harp about six months before his cousin, Pierre Beauregard and helped Pierre get started. Toward the end of the decade, a major influence on music took shape in Jake Einstein's, free-form radio station, WHFS, then in Bethesda. WHFS was the original Radio Free DC (no credit given by G. Gordon Liddy). The importance of this station to the musical education of this band can't be overstated. The station gave many, including me, their first major exposure to the blues and gave voice to many local musicians. Jake eventually sold the station, and WHFS went on to create the Modern Rock radio format. Jake reappeared in Annapolis with WRNR, and though he has since sold that station as well, it continues the free-form radio tradition. I am not alone in the wish that WRNR would find some way to turn their broadcast signal towards the DC area for a better pickup. In the early '70s, Georgetown U.'s WHFS also provided an outlet for local talent.

While WHFS and the Einstein family gave exposure and focus to the local music scene, one member of the family, Damian Einstein, has stood out in his efforts on behalf of local music. A musician himself, Damian replaced Pierre Beauregard as harmonica player for JB Hutto. In 1975, Damien was in a near fatal auto accident that put him in a coma for four months. Steve Jacobs says that it was Carey Bell, leaning over his hospital bed, playing harmonica, that helped Damien regain consciousness. After two years of rehabilitation, he was able to resume his radio show and continue his efforts for local music. Damian is now music director of WRNR and can still be heard as a regular DJ.

The years between 1968 and 1974 have been described as "the golden age of the clubs" — clubs with names like the Crazy Horse, Emergency. The Far Inn, Childie Harold, Club Soda, Bayou, Cousins Nickels, My Mothers Place. Desperado's, Top O' the Hill, and Bottom Blues Psychedly, which could have been described as ground zero, as it was right downstairs from WHFS. Also at its peak was the Cellar Door, which showcased the likes of Muddy Waters, James Cotton and other giants of the blues. From this fertile ground, a group of players emerged that you can still find working today. Catfish Hodge, Nils Fogline, Tom Principato, Bobby Radcliff. Big Joe Maher, Charlie Hubel, Steve Jacobs, Rusty Bogart, Doug Jay, Linwood Taylor, Bobby Manriquez, Cathy Ponton King. The founders of The Nighthawks — Mark Wenner, Jimmy Thackery, Pete Ragusa and Jan Zukowski and many many more.

Over the years musicians' pay has required them to be "on the grind" as much as they could about Delta Blues in person. This cut dates from my earliest attempts to absorb live recording when I didn't even have a decent pair of headphones. Danny Morris (who was the guitarist for the Nighthawks) and Kevin McKendree (part of the Dynaflows/Big Blues lineup) had started up the Fats Blues Band for Sunday nights at Fat Tuesdays in Fairfax. For a couple of weeks, Danny was in Japan with the Nighthawks and Robert filled in. I had just moved to DC from Chicago, and the clubs for live local blues seem to have dwindled. Yet, perennial musicians continue to play and their ranks continue to expand with the likes of Robert Lighthouse, Benjie Poreckie, Chris Watling and Sam Gunderson. The small clubs that always seemed to be on the verge of closing still are the best venue to experience the blues. "The Blues You Would Just Hate To Lose, Vol. II" is the next installment in my effort to document a small piece of this amazing scene.

The Music:

Robert Lighthouse, a native of Sweden, settled in DC at the end of the '80s after working his way around the country trying to absorb as much as he could about Delta Blues in places like Chicago's Maxwell Street and New Orleans. In DC, he established a cult following as a street musician before landing a steady gig at the City Blues Cafe. He first showed up on WHFS, which has stood out in his efforts on behalf of local music. A musician himself, Damian replaced Pierre Beauregard as harmonica player for JB Hutto. In 1975, Damien was in a near fatal auto accident that put him in a coma for four months. Steve Jacobs says that it was Carey Bell, leaning over his hospital bed, playing harmonica, that helped Damien regain consciousness. After two years of rehabilitation, he was able to resume his radio show and continue his efforts for local music. Damian is now music director of WRNR and can still be heard as a regular DJ.

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with Leroy Parnell and is now with the great Delbert McClinton. John Perry who is on bass, now works with Tom Principato.

On drums is George Johnson who worked with Big Jesse Yawn and Danny Morris for a couple of years. Danny and John are still keeping the Sunday night thing going in Fairfax.

Cathy Ponton King went to the University of Maryland and worked in campus radio, which opened the door to her love of blues in the late ‘70s. Later on, she had the opportunity to jam and learn from the scene at the Wax Museum and Psychedly, she became friends with Jimmy Thackery and the Nighthawks. It was on a hollow body Rickenbacker guitar loaned to her by Thackery that her initial blues licks were worked out. Then in the early ‘80s she had the opportunity to meet Muddy Waters backstage at the Celadon Door Night Club in Georgetown. Soon after, her first band, The Rhythm Masters, toured the East Coast for six years and opened shows for Albert King, Johnny Copeland, Willie Dixon, Koko Taylor and Albert Collins. During those years she had the chance to jam and learn from the likes of Paul Barrere, Bob Margolin and Jimmy Thackery, which gave her a strong foundation. When she left the Rhythm Masters, Cathy recorded and released her critically acclaimed first CD, “Lovin’ you Right,” with Thackery on guitar and Jerry Portnoy on harp. Thackery co-produced the project along with Cathy’s husband, Jeff King, and studio owner Ray Tilken. She also shows up on Marc Fischer’s 1998 dance collection out of Florida, “Swing Time Boogie” with an original song, “Soul Touch.” The Duke Robillard song “Tore Up” comes from the first night I tried taping her at City Blues Cafe and is her recording debut on lead guitar. I knew that night, when the cut happened, that this was something special and reconfirmed it by listening to the tape as soon as I got home. On bass is Jim Robeson, who has contributed to many local country, rock and blues bands and has a Grammy nomination from his production work at Blues Cafe. The late Tom Principato is a bassist who can lay down a mean boogie woogie, slide guitar is Mike Lessin and on drums is Joey Romero. A $5 cover at the door on a weekend gig for this fine night of music.

John Cocuzzi is mostly found around town as the keyboard player with Big Joe and the Dynaflops and the Big Four Combo which includes Big Joe, John Previti and Joe Stanley. John has contributed as one of the East Coast’s finest vibes players and has recorded and worked with the likes of John and Bucky Pizzarelli, Doc Cheatham, Alan Vache and Benny Goodman alumni-Helen Ward and Steve Jordan. There are a couple of great examples of his vibes work on the new Big Joe & the Dynaflops disc, “I’m Still Swingin’.” When he performs one of his solo piano gigs, he dips heavily into the Nat Cole songbook. In addition to vibes with Alan Vache and Alan Dale he has released his own John Cocuzzi and the Swing Professors, “Fools Paradise,” and he also appeared on the Blues/Lose I CD, “Wabash Blues” has been waiting for a home ever since Blues/Lose I was issued, and it contains one of the sweetest moments I ever had the good fortune to catch on tape. After John finishes his first vocal parts, Joe Stanley lays down an incredible solo and as he finishes. Chris Watling walks up playing his baritone to begin a night of sitting in. There wasn’t a face without a smile in the entire club. Rounding out the lineup was Big Joe on drums and Jeff Sarli on bass. It is one of the best examples of the spontaneity that can occur in a small room gig and is just one of many great City Blues nights I have had a chance to enjoy. A weeknight gig with no cover and a two drink minimum for something this good.

Bruce Ewan has been lauded as one of the finest chromatic players in the Mid-Atlantic and is sadly someone who rarely plays in local clubs. Low pay and sparse crowds have led him overseas, where his shows are SRO. The only chance we get to see him play is when his brother Bobby Radcliff comes to town. Bruce’s first exposure to harmonica was when Mark Wenner and Bobby Radcliff played one day for his 8th grade class. He credits Mark Wenner as being his mentor as Mark took him under his wing and helped him get started on harp. Bruce started sitting in with his brother’s band in 1976 at places like the Top O’ the Foolery and Mr. Henry’s. His first band was called Little Bruce and the Blues Rockers. In the early ‘80s he was in a band named Rock House that included Steve Wolf and guitarist Marty Baumann. In 1988 he and Marty formed the Solid Senders that worked the area into the ‘90s. This cut, “Blues In The Dark,” comes from a demo recorded at Peter Bonta’s, Wally Cleaver Studios about five years ago. In addition to Marty, Big Joe Mahler is on drums and Bryant McGregor is on bass.

Dig around the club scene and you may be lucky enough to come across performers like Honey Joe Brown. Not known widely, Joe has been holding down the Friday night spot at LaPorta’s Restaurant in Alexandria for a few years now. Although I have recorded Joe live, I knew this studio demo of “You Don’t Know What Love Is” deserved to be heard. Joe is an understated performer with a voice as smooth as honey. This cut may be the sleeper of the entire disc. On guitar for this is Rusty Bogart, bass is Adam Friedman, drums is Bubbles Dean and piano is Tim Ford.

Mark Wenner grew up in the Bethesda, MD area as good friends of Bobby Radcliff and went to college at Columbia University in NYC. His college band was called B-Town Slim and his Rhythm Review (8 standing for Bethesda). When Radcliff came to NYC, he would often crash at Mark’s — a role that would be reversed when Bobby relocated to New York and Mark returned to DC. Mark with Larry Bolet from Radcliff’s band began looking for other musicians in the DC area to form an as yet unnamed band. One night in the early ‘70s, Charlie Hubel, who had replaced Damian

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Einstein as harp player with J.B. Hutto, (he is now primarily known as a great tenor/baritone player and one of the founders of the J Street Jumpers) was hitchhiking down Wisconsin Ave. from Bethesda trying to get into DC to the club Top O’ the Foolery, where Bobby Radcliff had a regular gig. A car stopped and picked him up, and the journey continued. As the driver and Charlie talked, the driver told Charlie he was a harp player trying to get downtown to sit in with his friend, Bobby Radcliff. You can substitute your own explicative as Charlie said, “damn so am I!!” The driver was Mark Wenner. Charlie and Mark became friends. A little after this event, Tom Principato returned to the area for a visit. He had been working in Boston with the James Montgomery Band. He ended up hanging around with the Crawlin’ King Snake band which included his friend, Beanyregard. Jimmy Thackery and Jimmy Cole. Tom and Pierre hit it off and that band moved to Boston without Jimmy Thackery. The Boston unit became a mid-Atlantic favorite, as harp player with Charlie he was a harp player trying to get downtown to sit in with his friend, Bobby Radcliff. The initial lineup also included Don Monihan, Larry Bolet and Bill Holland, who’s later band, Rent’s Due, became a fixture on the DC scene for years.

The Nighthawks debuted at the Far Inn in 1972 on Mondays and moved into Radcliff’s Tuesday and Wednesday slot when Radcliff split for New York. In ’73, the Hawks lineup consisted of Mark and Jimmy along with Peter Bonta, Lee Smith and Anton Hansmann. In ’74, Bonta left to join the Rosslyn Mountain Boys and eventually opened Wally Cleaver Studios in Fredericksburg where many of the locals like Steve Wolf, Hansmann and Smith also went off into other projects. That’s when the last two pieces of the puzzle fell into place. Pete Ragusa came over from Razz, and Jan Zukowski came over from the nationally charted band, the Cherry People.

For a while the Hawks ran a series of Blue Monday shows at the Bayou where they brought in people like Otis Rush, John Lee Hooker, Jimmy Rogers and backed them up. They also brought in other starting out bands like George Thorogood, The Thunderbirds, Stevie Ray Vaughn and Robert Cray, effectively helping break them in this area. More than a couple of people I’ve talked to credit Mark Wenner as the single most important person in the development of the blues scene in Washington. Twenty-five years later, The Nighthawks motor on. After years of playing and approximately two dozen releases, DC’s Nighthawks are a monument to longevity and as current guitarist Pete Kanaras calls them, “the Viola of blues bands.” It would be easier to try to list blues performers The Nighthawks have not had the chance to share a stage or concert bill with, than the other way around.

The Sunset Grille in Annandale where this recording of “Shake Your Hips” occurred, is probably the closest thing to a road house in the DC area. It’s a small room that feels like your living room. Bill Kirchen usually rules the roost there on Thursdays, and if you’ve got the chance, you should catch him there.

Linwood Taylor began playing professionally around 1972 in the hayday of DC’s club scene. Long a highly respected guitarist, he has sat in with Luther Allison, Johnny Copeland and Tinsley Ellis. He also played frequently with Albert Collins on his East Coast tours and is a perennial winner of the Washington Area Music Association awards. Along with his own CDs, Linwood is featured on the “Live at the Acme Bar & Grill” release—a great collection of area musicians. This cut, “The Sky is Crying,” showcases Linwood on slide. Steve Taylor on bass and Darren Pressman on drums round out the band.

With five CDs to his credit, Big Joe Maher is a talent to be reckoned with. He came of age during the golden age of the clubs and over the years has played with Willie Dixon, Otis Rush, Jimmy Witherspoon, Duke Robillard, Anson Funderburg, Roomful of Blues and many others. It was watching the Big Joe and the Dynaflaws’ lineup of Joe, Rusty Bogart, Kevin McKenzie and Jeff Sarli in ’94 that inspired me to tape bands in the clubs around DC. Big Joe is one of the most versatile blues musicians you will find anywhere. He is equally at home doing Chicago, Texas or New Orleans styles, but his true love is swing and jump, as his new disc, “I’m Still Swingin’” on David Earl’s, Severn Records shows. He also is featured on three songs on the Marc Fischer, “Swing Time Boogie” collection on Beach Bag Music. He is a favorite of the Mid-Atlantic swing/lindy dance crowd. By the end of ’96, the current lineup of the Dynaflaws began to gel with Ivan Appelrouth on guitar, returning to the Powerhouse, that has served as a home for his scene. Long a highly respected guitarist, he took shape with Tom Principato is yet another of the great musicians who began playing in the early ‘70s. After getting out of high school, he divided his time between DC and NY. It was during a trip back to DC that the band Powerhouse took shape with Pierre Beauregard. After Powerhouse disbanded, Tom moved back to DC, sharing a house with Steve Jacobs and later Bob Margolin who had moved into the area after leaving the Muddy Waters band. In the early ‘80s, Tom held the guitar chair for such acts as Billy Price, Big Mama Thornton and Sunnyland Slim. In the mid ’80s, he joined with Jimmy Thackery to record two LPs as the Assassins, which also included bass player Steve Wolf. Tom started up his own label, Powerhouse, that has served as a home for his eight solo releases, two of which have gar-
nered Grammy nominations. I first saw Tom in 1993, and his band at that time included Kevin McKendree on keys, Steve Riggs on bass and Conrad Drennen on drums. In 1994, Tom moved to Austin, Texas for a couple of years, and this show at Fat Tuesdays in Fairfax was the night he announced he was moving back to the area. In this song, "Last Night," there is a moment that sounds like the mike is turned off, but Tom has stepped to the side of the microphone after a solo and is singing directly to the audience. This night also marked a reunion of an earlier version of the Tom Principato Band with Clark Matthews on drums and Steve Wolf on bass. This line-up had not performed together with the remaining members of Little Feat after Lowell George's heart attack. In 1983, Steve joined with Lips Lackowitz to form Tough Luck. In 1988 Tough Luck became Chicago great Carey Bell's band, starting Steve's long association with Carey that continues today. Steve was a prominently featured artist on Blues/Lose I, playing on four of the songs from that collection. When Steve isn't on the road with Carey, he has been found working with the likes of Big Joe, Jesse Yawn, Cathy Ponton King and the Mississippi Bullfrogs.

Artie Sherman is another great talent you can find working in clubs around town. He spent a dozen years as part of the Midnight Movers backing Wilson Pickett and is an absolute monster on the keys. He has done a fair amount of session work for Pierre Sprey's Mapleshade Records and over the years has worked or recorded with Percy Sledge, Lonnie Youngblood, Bootsy Collins, Bobby Bland, Jerry Butler, James Cotton, and many others. He also possesses a powerful voice and a decent tape of him singing is one of my un-attained goals. Willie Hicks (Jesse Yawn's regular bass player) on bass and Big Joe on drums round out the band. Steve loves a flat tire shuffle, and Big Joe Maher can play one with the best of them.

What can you say about a band like the J Street Jumpers that would do justice to their efforts? The Jumpers were formed from the remnants of the Uptown Rhythm Kings at the end of 1994. As a nine piece band, it's been a tough journey but a love for the music has helped the Jumpers persevere. The recent swing revival has finally brought them wider recognition and rewards for their labor of love. They just issued their first CD on Mapleshade Records, "Is You Is Or Is You Ain't My Baby?" The band is full of the music history of the area. Sax player Charlie Hubble and guitarist, Rusty Bogart have been playing together on and off since the early '70s. Their first gig together occurred when Bobby Radcliff called Charlie because he needed a band to fill in a club date he could not make. In the mid '70s, Rusty was in a band called the Incredible Snakes that included Bruce Ewan, Eric Sheridan (who went on to lead the Uptown Rhythm Kings and John Linnell, who now is part of the Roomful of Blues lineup. I first met Rusty when he was part of the Dynaflows/Big Blues lineup with Big Joe, Kevin McKendree, and Jeff Sarli. Trombonist Steve Shaw started as a bass player with Bobby Radcliff. Jeff Lodsun/drums, Vinnie McCool/trumpet, Don Lerman/alto, Arthur Gerstein/tenor along with Charlie and Rusty, all came over from the Rhythm Kings. Lodsun and McCool have worked with a number of local outfits covering a wide spectrum of music. Jeff was part of the Tennessee Rockets that included Tex Rubinowitz and Billy Hancock. Rusty, Charlie, Arthur and Jeff comprise most of the
band that backs Nap Turner on his "Live at City Blues" CD (ROR005). This night John Previti was filling in on bass. John is in great demand around town and where you find John, you find great musicians. Currently he is part of the Rick Whitehead Trio along with Barry Hart and the Big Four Combo with Big Joe, John Cocuzzi and Joe Stanley. He also has a Mingus/Monk Tribute Band and had a long association with Danny Gatton. You also can find John Previti gigging all over the area with the likes of Tim Eyermann, Tim Biery, Jimmy and the Blue Dogs and any number of others. "Blow Top Blues" shines a spotlight on singer Mariana Previti. Mariana can also be found fronting a small combo that includes Tim Ford, Al Seiber, Barry Hart and her husband John. This is another recording that dates from my early attempts. The Wharf is a tiny room and I was parked directly in front of this nine piece outfit that would cross the color line to play with the black musicians uptown. He was an original member of the Rainbows with Marvin Gaye, Don Covay and Billy Stewart. He was with Billy Stewart at a birthday party the night before Billy was killed in an auto accident. Joe toured regularly with the Clovers as well as Link Wray. He had his own band, The Saxtons that backed Big Joe Turner, Suga Cooke, Little Anthony, The Ames Brothers, Lloyd Price, The Drifters, Bobby Darin and many many others. The Saxtons would alternate sets on a double bill with Jimmy Dean, his band providing the rock & roll as a counter to Jimmy's country. He joined Roy Clark's band for a couple tours and played the Arthur Godfrey show with him. He was in Dale Hawkins' band with Big Joe and Barry Hart. He and Roy left Dale at the same time and Roy became a member of The Saxtons. In the early '60s Joe became a member of the Bill Black Combo and ended up leading the band when Bill Black died. Joe joined with Charlie Daniels (yes the "Devil Went Down to Georgia" guy) when Charlie would be dressed in black tux, bow tie and black patent leather shoes with his hair slicked back (can you paint this picture!) for his weekend gigs around DC. Joe Stanley helped Danny Gatton get his first gigs and was part of the Danny and the Fat Boys band and the two of them were in Robert Gordon's band. He was also part of the Hot Red Swinging Johnsons with Derek Huston and Jeff Lodsun. Joe has one CD, King of the Honky Tonk Sax on Mapleshade. On Blues/Lose I, I called him a Lieber & Stoller kind of guy, and "Flip Flop & Fly" is the kind of music I most enjoy trying to tape him performing.

Benjie Poreckie is great on the Hammond B3, and he also has a new disc on Severn, "Servin' It Up." I first saw him when he was part of Big Jesse Yawn's band and he also joined Mary Ann Redmond's band for a bit. Benjie is also part of the great (Gary) Grainger, Poreckie, (Blues) Webb Trio. Bryant McGregory started out playing with the Uptown Rhythm Kings and can be found working with a number of the musicians featured on this disc. His regular gig at this time is with Johnny and the Headhunters. Rick Oliveras is on guitar. Chris Watling's main gig is his longtime band The Grandsons who play all over town. He has been jokingly referred to by Big Joe as Joe Stanley, Jr.

It would probably take more than twenty CDs to do proper justice to the musicians and scene you can find in the DC area. There are so many more musicians that deserve mention and coverage. To borrow an expression from Nap "Don't Forget the Blues" Turner, "God willin' and the creek don't rise," the resources of time and money may be found to continue this project. — Wayne Kahn

Remember: whether you are dancing, playing or listening it just doesn't matter what you do as long as you're RIGHT ON RHYTHM!

Support live local music 'Cause these truly are the BLUES YOU WOULD JUST HATE TO LOSE!!!