

In Profile: B.B. King

Back in 1965 my college roommate, who was a straight A student, dropped out of school after hearing the first album by the Paul Butterfield Blues Band. As an aspiring guitarist, my roommate was galvanized by Mike Bloomfield's guitar playing with the Butterfield group. And when Dylan's *Highway 61 Revisited* album, embellished by Bloomfield's remarkable playing, was released later in the year, it only served to reaffirm my friend's resolve. While I went off to classes, he would hang around the apartment in his bathrobe, determined to learn every Bloomfield riff.

One night, while listening to a black radio station, we heard a searing instrumental blues number. My friend was certain it was Bloomfield and cited the occasion as evidence that the white guitarist's appeal was crossing over to black audiences. We called the station to confirm the hypothesis and the deejay exploded with laughter at our ignorance. It was then that we learned of B.B. King.

Because of the folk blues revival that was occurring at the time, we were familiar with Mississippi John Hurt, Sleepy John Estes, Son House, and others. But we were largely unaware of the urban bluesmen like King who were struggling for recognition. They were recording on small labels, playing the chittlin circuit, and continuing to wear their hair processed while country bluesmen like Reverend Gary Davis and Lightnin' Hopkins were entertaining college audiences across the land.

Of course, Mike Bloomfield helped to raise our consciousness and before long my roommate was collecting obscure albums by a host of urban blues performers—Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker, Buddy Guy and Junior Wells, and above all, B.B. King. When my friend left New York in the spring to seek his musical fortune, he urged me to keep the faith and (temporarily) his record collection.

Now, some twenty years later, Mike Bloomfield is gone for good, my friend holds a Ph.D. in psychology, and B.B. King is deservedly an American institution. If there is a lesson in all of this, it is perhaps that it's hard to keep a good man down. There will always be a Mike Bloomfield to point the way, often in a brief burst of glory which ends in self-destruction. But if there is any justice in this world, then the dues-payers, the hard workers, the self-



improvers like B.B. King will gain the stature they deserve.

That B.B. works hard is evident in his performances. The man's face glistens when he begins and by the end of an opening number, he's drenched in sweat. Whether he's appearing on *The Tonight Show* or headlining in Vegas or on tour in the USSR, B.B. King delivers the blues without reservation.

He's been doing it since the late 1940s when he hosted a radio show in Memphis and was known as the Beale St. Blues Boy which he eventually shortened to the telegraphic B.B.

His first hit record—a treatment of Lowell Fulson's "3 O'Clock Blues"—occurred in 1951 and topped the rhythm and blues charts. Throughout the 1950s B.B. King had a string of R&B chartmakers—usually versions of other performers' tunes like Joe Williams' "Everyday I Have the Blues" and Big Joe Turner's "Sweet Sixteen" and Tampa Red's "Sweet Little Angel."

Invariably, B.B.'s interpretations were his own, branded with the lightning fast single note runs on his Gibson guitar he affectionately named Lucille and a

vocal style that combined a shouting delivery with gospel elements.

B.B.'s popularity with black listeners slackened somewhat in the 1960s, although he continued his extensive tours of one-night performances in true journeyman fashion. The payoff finally came in the latter part of the decade, thanks to the likes of Mike Bloomfield, Eric Clapton, and John Mayall. By 1969 B.B. King was playing to rock audiences at the Fillmore, East and West, and enjoying the success of a pop chart hit, "The Thrill Is Gone."

In spite of that title, I suspect that the thrill lingers on into the 1980s for B.B., for he continues to perform frequently. Like Ray Charles and James Brown, the man endures, true to his music and himself.

Eugeneans will be able to witness his art at the Hult Center on Monday, September 24. As B.B. has often said at the break in the tune, "Sing, Lucille."

—Tim Volem

Eugenian Joins Mary O'Hara in Concert

Margaret Vitus, third generation Oregonian and second generation Eugenic, has been honored throughout the U.S. for her flute playing. She has toured with Mary O'Hara and will perform with her in the Soreng Theatre, Tuesday, Sept. 18. If you want to hear two incredibly talented women, join them for a night of soaring vocals and instrumentals from modern popular songs to traditional folk, even ancient gaelic melodies.

Margaret began playing flute while attending Churchill High School. She studied at the Manhattan School of Music in New York and with a private teacher. She worked so hard she injured her jaw and was told she would never play again. She returned to Oregon to get her degree in psychology. She began practicing for five minutes a day and eventually was able to obtain a Masters Degree in Music from the U of O. She played in faculty recitals there.

She has played in international competitions and the Aspen Festival Orchestra, studied with members of the NY Philharmonic as well as other very well known flute teachers. She's studied jazz with Eugene's own Carl Woideck. She was the only American chosen to participate in an Artists' Performance Program at Northwestern University and will head for there this year after touring with Mary O'Hara some more.

Mary will be at the Marketplace Bookstore signing her books on Monday, Sept. 17 at noon. Her autobiography will be made into a film in England this year. Margaret asked if I would like to interview her about Mary too, but there wasn't time or space. Let's just say we're glad she's coming to Eugene.

Oregon Mozart Players Open Season

The Oregon Mozart Players will present the first concert of their 1984/85 season on Saturday, Sept. 15 at 8:30 pm in Soreng Theatre, Hult Center for the Performing Arts.

Under the direction of Robert Hurwitz, the orchestra will open the program with Mozart's *Symphony No. 31 in D, K. 297*, written during the composer's visit to Paris in 1778.

Michael Anderson, Principal Clarinetist with the Oregon Mozart Players, will be the soloist in Aaron Copland's *Concerto for Clarinet and String Orchestra*, conducted by Richard Long. The concerto was commissioned by Benny Goodman and is dedicated to him. This will be Anderson's farewell appearance with the orchestra before taking a one-year leave of absence to continue his clarinet studies with David Shifrin at USC.

Robert Hurwitz will return to the podium for the final work in the program: Haydn's *Symphony No. 97 in C*, one of the finest of the twelve symphonies which Haydn wrote in the latter years of his life for the renowned impresario Johann Peter Salomon.

This concert is made possible in part by a grant from the Oregon Arts Commission, the National Endowment for the Arts, and by the Eugene Parks and Recreation's Cultural Division, Room Tax Funds.

Tickets for the concert, at \$8.50, \$6.50 and \$6.00, are available at the Hult Center Box Office (687-5000).

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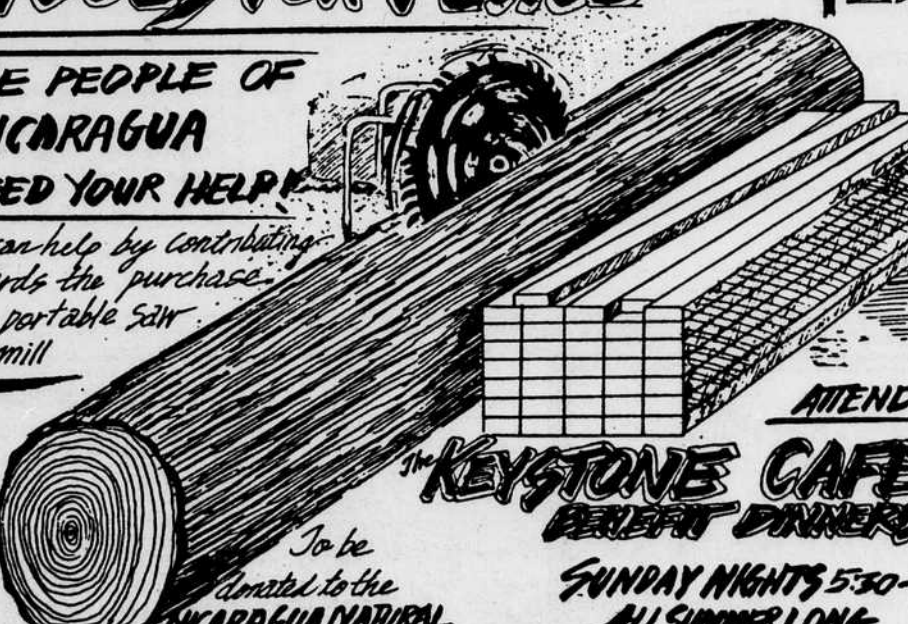
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