

2008 Blues Hall of Fame Inductees

By The Blues Foundation



The following esteemed individuals and recordings have been selected for induction into the Blues Hall of Fame by The Blues Foundation. The Hall of Fame committee is chaired by Jim O'Neal, founding editor of *Living Blues*, and David Sanjek, recently of the BMI Archives. The induction ceremony will be held at The Blues Foundation's Charter Member Dinner on Wednesday, May 7, at the Tunica RiverPark in Tunica, Mississippi, the night before the 2008 Blues Music Awards.

The 2008 inductees include living performers **Jimmy McCracklin** and **Hubert Sumlin**, as well as late artists **Johnny "Guitar" Watson**, **Peetie Wheatstraw**, **Jimmy Witherspoon**, and the **Mississippi Sheiks**. **John Hammond** and **Paul Oliver** are the non-performers inducted this year. The play *7 Guitars*, by **August Wilson**, and the book, *Moanin' at Midnight: The Life and Times of Howlin' Wolf* by **James Segrest & Mark Hoffman**, were also selected.

The following singles or album tracks will be inducted during the ceremony: "**Back-Water Blues**" by **Bessie Smith**; "**Double Trouble**" by **Otis Rush**; and "**My Babe**" by **Little Walter**. These albums were also chosen for induction: *Piney Woods Blues* by **Big Joe Williams**; *Members Only* by **Bobby Bland**; *Rocks the House* by **Etta James**; *Freddy King Sings* by **Freddy King**; and *I'm Jimmy Reed* by **Jimmy Reed**

On May 8, the night after the Blues Hall of Fame inductions, The Blues Foundation will present the Blues Music Awards for the first time in their 29-year history in the Mississippi Delta, the birthplace of the Blues. Performers, industry representatives, and fans from around the globe will celebrate the best in Blues recording and performance from the previous year at the Grand Casino Event Center in Tunica Resorts, Mississippi, just down the road from Memphis, the Awards' home since their 1980 inception.

The presenting sponsor will once again be The Gibson Foundation. In 2008, the State of Mississippi, the Tunica Convention and Visitors Bureau, and the Grand Casino and Resort are sponsoring the Blues Music Awards. BMI, Casey Family Programs, Eagle Rock Entertainment, FedEx, Sierra Nevada Brewing Company and XM Satellite Radio also sponsor the Blues Music Awards.

The Blues Hall of Fame is a program of The Blues Foundation, a non-profit organization established to preserve Blues history, celebrate Blues excellence, support Blues education and ensure the future of this uniquely American art form. The Foundation consists of a worldwide network of 165 affiliated Blues societies and has individual

memberships spanning the globe. In addition to the Blues Hall of Fame, the Foundation also produces the Blues Music Awards, the International Blues Challenge and the Keeping the Blues Alive Awards. For more information or to join The Blues Foundation, log onto www.blues.org.



Performers

Jimmy McCracklin

One of the pioneers of West Coast blues, Jimmy McCracklin has been recording since 1945 – longer than any other living blues piano player. Born Aug. 13, 1921, in Helena, Arkansas, McCracklin was influenced in St. Louis by singer-pianist Walter Davis, one of the most popular bluesmen of the 1930s. But McCracklin always kept up with the times, and his records accordingly progressed from basic blues piano outings to West Coast jump into boogie, R&B, soul, and funk-tinged blues. His hits include *The Walk, I Got to Know, Every Night, Every Day,* and *Think*; in addition, he composed (but did not credit for) *Just a Little Bit* by Rosco Gordon, co-wrote *Tramp* with Lowell Fulson, and played piano on B.B. King's *Rock Me Baby*. McCracklin is still active as a songwriter and performer in California.

Hubert Sumlin

Hubert Sumlin made his mark with his sharp, innovative and unpredictable guitar work on Howlin' Wolf's classics such as *Killing Floor, Shake for Me,* and *Hidden Charms*, but he has since gone on to acclaim for his own solo career in the 32 years since Wolf's death. Born on a plantation outside of Greenwood, Mississippi, on Nov. 16, 1931, Sumlin was an adolescent blues partner of James Cotton in Arkansas, where he started following Howlin' Wolf. After Wolf moved to Chicago, he summoned Hubert to join him, and together they weathered turbulent times as Wolf fired his protégé time after time, only to hire him back. Sumlin even went over to play for Wolf's main rival, Muddy Waters, at times, but Wolf was like a father to him and he was never out of the fold for too long. His guitar work with Wolf was so legendary among other musicians that even Jimi Hendrix reportedly said: "My favorite guitar player is Hubert Sumlin." Accolades from the rock world have continued to accrue to Sumlin in recent years as he has shared stages with the Rolling Stones, Eric Clapton, Aerosmith, Santana, and many others.

Johnny "Guitar" Watson

Johnny "Guitar" Watson reinvented himself as a flamboyant funkster and ultra-hip player extraordinaire in the 1970s, when his career reached new heights with hits such as *A Real Mother For Ya, Superman Lover,* and *Lover Jones*. Few of his new fans realized that he was already a veteran blues guitarist, a product of Houston's Third Ward where he came up alongside guitar slingers such as Joe Hughes, Johnny Copeland, and Albert Collins in

the shadow of Gatemouth Brown. Born in Houston on February 3, 1935, Watson cut his first records at the age of 17 under the name Young John Watson after moving to Los Angeles. Many of his early recordings demonstrated his hard-hitting guitar style; in the 1960s he recorded as a soul singer and pianist as well, before reemerging with his blues integrated into a contemporary groove of stylized funk that would help shape the rap and hip-hop that followed. One of his '70s hits, *Gangster of Love*, was a remake of a blues he had originally cut in 1957. Watson suffered a fatal heart attack while performing onstage in Yokohama, Japan, on May 17, 1996.

Peetie Wheatstraw

The colorful persona of Peetie Wheatstraw – The Devil’s Son-in-Law (The High Sheriff From Hell) belonged to William Bunch, a singer, pianist and guitarist from Ripley, Tennessee. Born on December 21, 1902, Bunch was using the Wheatstraw name by the time he made his first recordings in 1930. He went on to become one of the most popular and influential blues artists of his era, whose songs and signature “Ooh, well, well” vocal lines were adopted by many others. Among his followers was Robert Johnson, who not only sang of the devil and hell, but also borrowed lyrics and music from various Wheatstraw tunes such as Police Station Blues. If Wheatstraw has not risen to the iconic, near-mythological status of Johnson, perhaps it’s because Johnson’s songs seem so serious, whereas Wheatstraw was obviously having fun with his character. Comedian Rudy Ray Moore, author Ralph Ellison, and others have invoked the folk legend of Peetie Wheatstraw, the Devil’s Son-in-Law, in their works. The “real” Peetie Wheatstraw died in a car crash in East St. Louis, Illinois, on December 21, 1941. His stature was such that even *Variety* magazine ran an obituary, an honor afforded very few blues musicians of the time.

Jimmy Witherspoon

Jimmy Witherspoon was one of the most prominent of the blues shouters who emerged in the 1940s and '50s, a smooth vocalist whose style made him a favorite among jazz audiences as well as blues and R&B listeners. Witherspoon was born in Gurdon, Arkansas, probably on August 18, 1922 (some sources say a year earlier or later), and moved to Los Angeles in the late 1930s. His first recordings were done with Jay McShann, the Kansas City bandleader who had moved to California; although Witherspoon’s music has been strongly associated with Kansas City jazz, blues and swing, he never lived in K.C. In 1949 “Spoon” entered the record books when his hit *Ain’t Nobody’s Business* for the Supreme label stayed on the *Billboard* rhythm & blues charts for an incredible 34 weeks. In later years he recorded in a variety of musical settings, backed by jazz, soul, and rock musicians on various sessions, but Spoon always delivered the blues. He died on Sept, 18, 1997, in Los Angeles.

Mississippi Sheiks

The Mississippi Sheiks were the premier African-American string band of the pre-World War II era, responsible not only for creating new hits for the blues audiences but for keeping alive a tradition that predated the blues. Fiddlers once ruled the roost in rural black music, before the guitar came to prominence, and the music intertwined with white old-time and country traditions. The Mississippi Sheiks' fiddler was Lonnie Chatmon, a member of a prolific musical family from Bolton, Mississippi, all of whom performed as members of the Sheiks at times. His brothers Bo Chatmon, better known as Bo Carter, and Sam Chatmon both had significant careers in the blues as solo acts. While apparently the Sheiks might include any number of Chatmons at their dances, on record the unit usually consisted of just Lonnie Chatmon and guitarist Walter Vinson. Their major contribution to the blues came at their first session in 1930 when they recorded *Sitting on Top of the World* and *Stop and Listen Blues*. Muddy Waters once said that when he lived in Mississippi, he walked ten miles to see them play.

Non-performers

John Hammond

John Henry Hammond Jr. qualifies for any number of Halls of Fame in the music business for his many accomplishments as an A&R man, producer, critic, and promoter. In his role at Columbia Records in New York, he helped introduce such talents as Bob Dylan, Aretha Franklin, Count Basie, and Bruce Springsteen. His blues credentials go deep as well, dating back to 1930s productions with Bessie Smith and Ida Cox, and the promotion of the legendary Spirituals to Swing concerts at Carnegie Hall. Hammond knew enough about blues in 1938 to try to put Robert Johnson on the Carnegie Hall bill – but when he learned that Johnson had just died, he gave Big Bill Broonzy the slot. Decades later, when the folk music boom presented a new opportunity to promote country blues, Hammond saw to it that Columbia released an album of Robert Johnson's songs in 1961, and Johnson's influence has been enormous ever since. In the 1980s Hammond found another guitarist who would also impact the trajectory of blues and rock, Stevie Ray Vaughan. Hammond was born on Dec. 15, 1910, in New York City, and died on July 10, 1987. His son, John Paul Hammond, has carved out his own career as a performer on the folk and blues circuits.

Paul Oliver

Forty-nine years after the publication of his first book on the blues, Paul Oliver remains the blues world's foremost author, still writing and lecturing on the blues at the age of 80. Oliver's works have been based not only on his incisive analyses of records but on extensive field work in the United States and Africa and interviews with blues artists both famous and obscure. Three of his books, *The Story of the Blues*, *Conversation With the Blues*, and *The Blues Fell This Morning (The Meaning of the Blues)*, are already in the Blues Hall of Fame as Classics of Blues Literature. Although books, records, and

magazines from England have been inducted, Oliver, who was born in Nottingham, England, on May 25, 1927, becomes the first individual from Britain elected to the Hall of Fame. Oliver first heard the blues at a U.S. air base during in England during World War II, and began writing articles in 1952. Oliver is also a professor of architecture and is a distinguished author in that field as well.

Classics of Blues Literature

7 *Guitars* – August Wilson

Seven Guitars was one of ten plays by playwright August Wilson that chronicled 100 years of African-American history, one play per decade. Blues was a central theme in much of Wilson's work, and the main character in *Seven Guitars* (set in 1948) is a fictitious bluesman, Floyd "Schoolboy" Barton, who has returned home from Chicago to Pittsburgh's Hill District (where Wilson was raised), with a hit record to his credit: *That's All Right* (actually recorded by Jimmy Rogers in Chicago in 1950). Wilson (April 27, 1945 - October 2, 2005) won numerous awards for his work in the 1980s and 1990s, including two Pulitzer Prizes. *Seven Guitars* opened on Broadway in 1996 and was published in paperback by Plume in 1997 and in hardcover by Theatre Communications Group in 2007.

***Moanin' at Midnight: The Life and Times of Howlin' Wolf* -- James Segrest & Mark Hoffman**

The larger-than-life legend of Chester Arthur Burnett, better known as Howlin' Wolf, is chronicled with care and respect by co-authors James Segrest and Mark Hoffman in their detailed biography *Moanin' at Midnight: The Life and Times of Howlin' Wolf*. Among the many revealing accounts in the book are the tribulations and rejections of Burnett's childhood, his discharge from the army on psychiatric grounds, and recollections of the Wolf in action by a host of musicians from both the blues and rock 'n' roll worlds. *Moanin' at Midnight: The Life and Times of Howlin' Wolf* was published by Pantheon Books in 2004.

Classics of Blues Recording: Singles and Album Tracks

"Back-Water Blues" Bessie Smith (Columbia, 1927)

Back-Water Blues was one of the best known works of the Empress of the Blues, Bessie Smith, recorded for Columbia Records in 1927 with James P. Johnson on piano. Bemoaning the fate of losing a home to flood waters after five days and nights of rain, Smith laments: "Thousands of people ain't got no place to go." While many latter-day listeners have equated this song with the disastrous 1927 flood of the Mississippi River,

Smith actually recorded this before that particular flood had occurred. As musicologist Dr. David Evans has noted, “*Back-Water Blues* was recorded in February 1927, before the great disaster of April. Perhaps the build-up of rain made her anticipate the flood; it was released just as the flood came, and as a result, it became a big hit.”

**“Double Trouble”
Otis Rush (Cobra, 1958)**

At the age of 23, Otis Rush was able to mine the essence of deep blues with his classic single *Double Trouble* for the Cobra label of Chicago in 1958. The minor-key masterpiece depicted a sleepless soul not only plagued with “false love,” but with trouble keeping in a job in “this generation of millionaires.” Rush has been justly hailed for his guitar work when he has done this song in live performances, but the signature licks on the Cobra session were actually played by Ike Turner. This record influenced Eric Clapton and inspired Stevie Ray Vaughan’s band to name themselves after it.

**“My Babe”
Little Walter (Checker, 1955)**

My Babe was a No. 1 rhythm & blues hit for Chicago blues singer-harmonica player Little Walter in 1955 on the Checker record label. With Robert Jr. Lockwood’s memorable guitar riffs propelling the arrangement, songwriter-producer Willie Dixon took an old spiritual with the line “This train is bound for glory, this train” and reworked it as “My babe don’t stand no cheatin’, my babe.” During the same period, Ray Charles had also brought gospel into the blues with *I Got a Woman*, as part of the process that eventually led to what we know as “soul music.” Walter had recorded an early attempt at *My Babe* in 1954, but the song only came to fruition when Walter went back into the studio with Dixon, Lockwood and drummer Fred Below on January 25, 1955.

Classics of Blues Recording: Albums

***Piney Woods Blues* (Delmark LP, 1958)
Big Joe Williams**

Big Joe Williams, whose 1935 classic *Baby Please Don’t Go* is already in the Blues Hall of Fame in the singles category, had been recording singles, first on 78 rpm and then 45 rpm, for over two decades when a new label called Delmar released his first 33-1/3 rpm album in 1958. The label was launched by a young Bob Koester in St. Louis, and later changed its name to Delmark in Chicago, where Koester continues to record blues and jazz today. The Big Joe sessions are from St. Louis, featuring Williams on his nine-string guitar accompanied by J.D. Short on harmonica and guitar. Williams was a spontaneous spirit both in the studio and on the streets. A notorious rambler, he had vanished by the time the album came out and Koester’s liner notes stated “his exact whereabouts is

unknown.” It seems he was actually in California, where he cut an LP for another then-new and now-venerable label, Arhoolie, but he became a regular in the Delmark stable and at one point lived in the basement of Koester’s Jazz Record Mart in Chicago.

***Members Only* (Malaco LP, 1985)
Bobby Bland**

Bobby Bland’s first LP with Malaco Records provided him with his biggest hit of recent decades, the title track *Members Only*, written by Larry Addison. Bland, a model for company loyalty in the record business, has been with the Mississippi-based Malaco label ever since; before that, he stayed with Duke Records from 1953 until 1973, when Duke was sold to ABC (subsequently MCA) – and Bland recorded for ABC and MCA for another 11 years. The Malaco debut marked a return to a Southern soul-blues setting for Bland, who had been recording primarily in California during the ABC/MCA era. The *Members Only* LP, produced by Malaco partners Tommy Couch and Wolf Stephenson, included songs from the Malaco stable of songwriters as well as covers of *In the Ghetto*, Geater Davis’ *Sweet Woman’s Love*, and Little Willie John’s *I Need Your Love So Bad*.

***Rocks the House* (Argo LP, 1964; Chess CD with bonus tracks, 1994)
Etta James**

Etta James Rocks the House, recorded live at the New Era Club in Nashville on September 27 and 28, 1963, is only the fifth live album elected to the Blues Hall of Fame. It joins *B.B. King Live at the Regal*, *B.B. King Live in Cook County Jail*, Albert King’s *Live Wire – Blues Power*, and *Robert Nighthawk Live on Maxwell Street*. This is Etta James at her raunchy best as a blueswoman – bumping, grinding, growling, and wailing songs like *Baby*, *What You Want Me to Do*, *What’d I Say*, *Money*, and *Woke Up This Morning* at one of the top clubs on the black Southern chittlin circuit of the 1960s. (Nashville has long had a vibrant rhythm & blues scene despite its one-dimensional reputation as the capital of country music.) Janis Joplin must have heard this – or if she didn’t, she should have. CD bonus tracks added in 1994 to the original 1964 LP include *Ain’t That Lovin’ You Baby* and *I Just Want to Make Love to You*.

***Freddy King Sings* (King LP, 1961)
Freddy King**

Texas-born Freddy (or Freddie) King came up on Chicago’s West Side blues scene alongside Otis Rush, Magic Sam and Buddy Guy and burst on the national R&B scene with a string of hit singles in 1961. In an era when many of the popular dance tunes were instrumentals, King never seemed to run short of ideas for catchy guitar tunes such as his hit *Hideaway*. But when it came time to sing *Have You Ever Loved a Woman*, *I’m Tore Down*, and *See See Baby*, he also provided himself to be one of the most expressive blues vocalists. King Records of Cincinnati compiled two albums of his work in 1961, one all-

instrumental, and this classic collection spotlighting the best of his early blues vocals: *Freddy King Sings*.

I'm Jimmy Reed (Vee-Jay LP, 1958)
Jimmy Reed

Jimmy Reed was already making history in 1958 when Vee-Jay Records of Chicago released his first album, *I'm Jimmy Reed*. Not only had Reed already had ten singles on the national rhythm & blues charts (six of which are included on this LP), but he had also cracked the Top 40 pop charts with *Honest I Do*. No Chicago bluesman had ever broken through to the pop and rock 'n' roll audience the way Jimmy Reed did, and the tracks on this album exemplify his appeal, from the sweet sentiments of *Honest I Do* to the basic 12-bar blues of *You Don't Have to Go*. Reed's music was singable, playable, and danceable for the multitudes; untold numbers of youngsters, black and white, took up the harmonica or guitar after getting hooked on "the Jimmy Reed beat" developed by Reed and his partner Eddie Taylor, who present on most of the songs here. Albert King is the drummer on some of the earliest sessions, and Reed even plays slide guitar on *Boogie in the Dark*.