

Durham festival explores rich blues tradition

All who love the blues, take note: the Durham Bulls and St. Joseph's Historical Foundation have brought back the annual Durham Blues Festival! The exciting musical showcase will feature two nights of spellbinding and diversified performances from some of the great mod-

ern blues musicians from across the country. An innovative and highly involving workshop, "Bringing Home The Blues," will explore the rich blues tradition of the North Carolina Pied-

Feature

mont. The festival, which is scheduled for Friday and Saturday, Sept. 27-28, will take place in Durham Athletic Park, home of the Durham Bulls baseball team. Included are some of the more prominent names in blues today, such as Koko Taylor, Bobby "Blue" Bland, Clarence Carter, Kenny Neal, Lynn White, and Rockin' Dopsie and the Zydeco Twisters.

Koko Taylor is known simply as the magnificent "Queen of the Blues." Taylor earned the title by a long and painful ascension from tiny Chicago clubs to gigantic festivals and media appearances. She has been called the "hardest working woman in show business" by the Chicago Tribune as a result of her efforts. Career highlights include a Grammy award for Best Blues Performance in 1984, a performance on "Late Night with David Letterman" and performing two songs in David Lynch's film *Wild At Heart*. This performance by Taylor, one of the world's most acclaimed blues singers, is one to be savored.

Bobby "Blue" Bland is best known as the originator of the blues ballad. By his own definition, Bland specializes in "beautiful love songs," and has "been blessed with the ability to deliver this music better than almost anyone else." He has vaulted into the National R & B charts over 40 times, a feat bested only by James Brown, Fats Domino and Ray Charles. The famed creator of such blues classics as

"Turn On Your Love Light" and "Further On Up The Road," Bland is considered by many fans to be one of the preeminent vocalists of any style of music.

Serious fans of rhythm and blues have been familiar with the sexy, uptempo sound of Clarence Carter since the release of his first Top Ten single, "Tell Daddy," in 1967. Even after losing his sight at an early age, "Dr. C.C." has overcome all of the obstacles in his path to develop a rich, distinctive yet sassy sound, as exemplified in his hits "Let's Funk" and "Strokin'."

Younger stars Kenny Neal and Lynn White should do much in the way of adding a driven, vibrant feel to this weekend's events. Neal's unique approach to the blues has been described by the Washington Post as "dixie-fried, rhythm and blues that modernizes the music without betraying its essence." White, whose sultry stylings have recently been featured on tour with B.B. King, is an artist cast firmly in the finest Southern deep-soul tradition. Finally, the thrilling zydeco button accordionist Rockin' Dopsie ("the Crown Prince of Zydeco") will round out a diverse blues experience that should appeal to any serious listener.

For those whose thirstings for blues aren't quenched by this weekend's live performances, the Festival is presenting a September-long series of workshops designed to bring the pub-

lic in touch with the local blues scene.

Durham is the ideal site for North Carolina's largest celebration of the blues. In the 1920s, the bustling tobacco town attracted many struggling bluesmen who came to perform at local markets, and that tradition continues today. The "Bring Home The Blues" exploration features constructive, one-on-one sessions with such artists as Etta Baker, a fine guitarist in the finger-picked Piedmont blues tradition, and Guitar Gabriel, a favorite of musicians such as B.B. King and Muddy Waters, who only recently picked up the guitar again after a fifteen-year sabbatical. The workshops will also include local notables Uncle Luke, Tim Duffy, John Jackson and Algia Mae Hinton.

The desire to increase appreciation for local blues heritage, as is exemplified by these workshops, is not motivated purely by love of the music, but by serious social concerns as well — as is demonstrated by the Festival's organizers in St. Joseph's Historical Foundation.

The congregation, which was founded in 1891, has expanded steadily over the years from a simple place of worship to an institutional representative of concerns in Durham's African-American community. After serving as an educational center in the 1950s, St. Joseph's became the community's focal point during the civil rights movement of the sixties and seventies. These efforts clearly reflect the Foundation's creed: "To bring to the community programs that will enlighten and enrich all involved, by presenting and exploring the African-American experience and its contributions to world culture." Today, St. Joseph's sponsors events such as the Blues Festival in order to live up to this philosophy.

Whether one is searching for a cultural celebration, a serious exploration of North Carolina's blues roots, or a simple weekend of exhilarating, live performances, the Bull Durham Blues Festival is a musical extravaganza which should not be passed up.

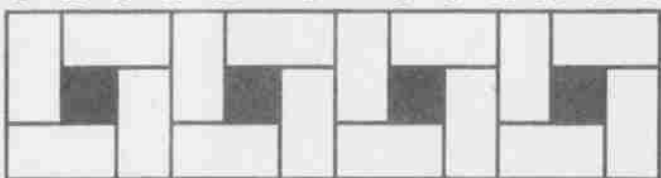
For general information on St. Joseph's and the Festival, call Rich Lee at 683-1709. Tickets for the Festival shows are \$15 for one night or \$25 for both, and can be purchased at Schoolkids. For workshop information, contact Lesley Williams at 833-8057.

— Ned Dirlik

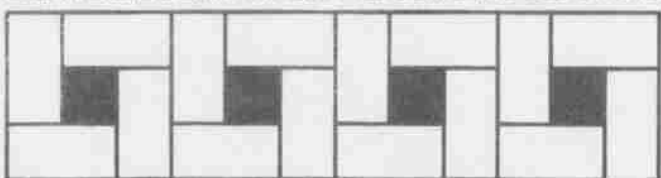


Koko Taylor, 'Queen of the Blues,' will perform at the Blues Festival

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