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Bobby Rush, Mathias Lattin & Dom Flemons**



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6 p.m. Mathias Lattin  
7:30 p.m. Robert Jon & The Wreck

**SUN., MARCH 1**

2 p.m. Ben Prestage  
3:15 p.m. Parker Barrow  
4:30 p.m. Piper & The Hard Times  
6 p.m. Gypsy Blue Revue  
7:30 p.m. North Mississippi Allstars

Times and artists are subject to change



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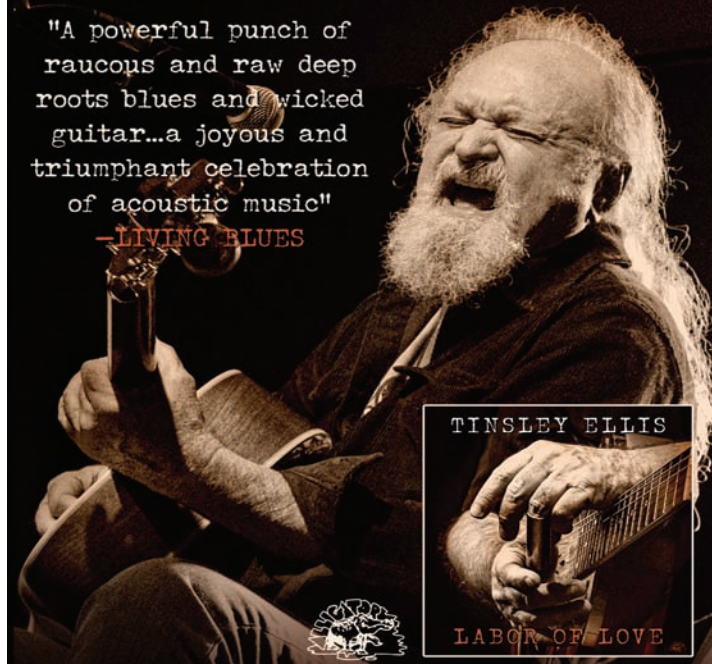


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# BIG CITY *BLUES* VIEWS

## Hand Me Down Blues!

*"The Blues ain't nothin' but a good woman on your mind."*—C.C. Rider, Mississippi John Hurt

**"G**enerational Blues" is about how music has been passed down by ancestors, mentors and sometimes by happenstance, and that's the focus of this issue. It was actually created as I traveled OTR (on the road) from snowy, cold Michigan to Memphis, Clarksdale, Pensacola Beach, Ponte Vedra, Fort Lauderdale and while sailing on the #44 Legendary Rhythm & Blues Cruise. But I had a full stop east of Greenwood, MS up in the Delta hills at **Mississippi John Hurt's** home/museum that was burned down on February 21, 2024, by the KKK who also tore down and stole two historical signs plus unbelievably desecrated his grave. Mississippi John Hurt's granddaughter, **Mary Hurt**, has rebuilt "Daddy John's" - her grandfather's Museum and invites you to the **2026 Mississippi John Hurt Homecoming - October 3-4, 2026, Avalon, MS** (Hurt family property). On March 24, 2026, Mississippi John Hurt will be inducted into the **Folk Americana Roots Hall of Fame** in Boston, MA. information:

**Mississippi John Hurt's old home, where he lived most of his life. Originally located in the all-black town of Avalon, MS that became a museum when his granddaughter, Mary Hurt, moved it to his land. Tragically, it was burned down only a few hours after it was placed on the National Historic Register on February 21, 2024, Carroll County, MS**

Photo Courtesy of [www.msjohnhurtfoundation.org](http://www.msjohnhurtfoundation.org)



Mississippi John Hurt portrait by Robert Jr. Whittall

[MSJohnHurtFoundation.org](http://MSJohnHurtFoundation.org)  
"World-renowned master of acoustic guitar John Hurt, an impor-

tant figure in the 1960's folk blues revival, spent much of his life doing farm work around Avalon in Carroll County and performing for parties and local gatherings. Hurt (1893-1966) only began to earn a living from music after he left Mississippi in 1963 to play at folk festivals, colleges, and coffeehouses. His first recordings, 78 rpm discs recorded in 1928-29, are regarded as classics of the blues genre." - John Hurt's **Mississippi Blues Trail** marker that was stolen but was returned and resurrected in front of the Mississippi John Hurt Museum.

Mississippi John Hurt was born on July 3, 1892, 1893 or possibly 1900 in Teoc, MS and died on November 2, 1966, in Grenada, MS, a few miles from Avalon. Hurt handed down his blues and influenced so many musicians like **Taj Mahal, Bob Dylan, Jerry Garcia, John Sebastian (Lovin' Spoonful), Dave Van Ronk, Guy Davis, Stephen Grossman, Doc & Merle Watson.**

Doyle M. Pace wrote about John Hurt in the **Kansas City Blues Society's Blues News**, originally published in January, 1996: "A tiny gnome of a man with the countenance of an angel took the stage at the 1963 Newport Folk Festival and

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**On the cover:**

Photo by Shirley Mae Owens

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freaked out the rowdy audience (of mostly young white people) with his rendition of old-timey songster ballads and Mississippi folk blues to the accompaniment of an incredible syncopated three-finger guitar-picking style that he had taught himself a half century before on a "dollar-and-half" guitar that his mother had bought for him. After his triumph at Newport, Mississippi John Hurt went on back home to Avalon, Mississippi to pick his cotton crop.

John Smith Hurt was born in 1893 in the Mississippi hill country of Carroll County, on the fringe of the Delta, in the tiny community of Teoc. While he was still a baby, his farming family moved to nearby Avalon, where he would spend most of the rest of his life. When he was nine or ten years old, Hurt decided he wanted to play the guitar and, having no one to teach him, he proceeded to develop his own unorthodox finger-picking style. 'I grab it and go my way with it. Use my melody with it. I always tried to make my strings say just what I say,' was Hurt's own explanation of his guitar style. He learned to play popular songs of the day, rags, gospel songs, and early blues tunes.

John Hurt never thought of music as anything more than an enjoyable way to relax from the arduous work of the cotton fields that was his lifelong occupation, except for a few months as a section hand on the Illinois Central Railroad and working for the Works Progress Administration during the Depression building roads and cutting timber. In 1928, a record producer named **Tommy Rockwell** came to Avalon to find **Willie T. Naramour**, a white fiddler who had won a chance to record for **OKeh Records** by taking first place in a fiddle contest. Naramour and his companion guitar player, **Shell Smith**, were popular Carroll County performers who would eventually record more than 30 sides for OKeh. One of their most popular numbers, **Carroll County Blues**, had been adapted from a tune Naramour heard a black field hand humming while he worked. The tune is still a standard at old-time fiddle contests and bluegrass festivals. John Hurt frequently played with Naramour and Smith when they were in the Avalon area, so when Rockwell asked them if they knew any more good musicians that he might record, they naturally gave him Hurt's name.

Valentine's Day of 1928 found Hurt at the OKeh mobile unit in Memphis, sitting in a straight-backed chair with a microphone close to his lips. He put several cuts on wax, but only two—**Nobody's Dirty Business** and **Frankie**—were ever released on a single 78 record. Subsequently, however, OKeh called him to New York City in December of that same year for two more sessions. He recorded several ballads, blues and gospel numbers, including his own composition, **Avalon Blues**, which would in time become his signature song.

*"Avalon, my home town, always on my mind."*



**Mary Frances Hurt, Founder, CEO & President of the Mississippi John Hurt Foundation, accepting the 2024 Best Tennessee Feature "A Man Called Hurt: The Life and Music of Mississippi John Hurt."**

*Avalon, my hometown, always on my mind.*

*Pretty mama's in Avalon, want me there all the time."*

As a marketing gimmick, the word Mississippi was prefixed to his name, and he was paid twenty dollars for each song and sent back home to spend the next 35 years with the anonymity of a sharecropper on a cotton plantation. In 1927 Hurt had married **Jessie Lee**, who was to remain his wife for the rest of his life, and they eventually became the parents of 14 children.

John Hurt might have passed the rest of his life in obscurity if **Folkway Records** had not reissued two of the old OKeh sides as part of a series on **American Folk** music. A younger generation of folk and blues fans, hearing Hurt for the first time, became enthusiastic about his old style of blues. Even though Hurt was generally considered to be deceased, a blues researcher named **Tom Hoskins**, acting on a hunch and a clue from Avalon Blues (the line, Avalon, my hometown), traveled to that town, where he had no trouble locating the object of his search, the meek little old man who, at the age of 70, was still eking out a living in the cotton fields. When Hoskins showed up at his door, Hurt, who at that time was unaware of the Folkway releases, was completely baffled and suspicious of someone professing an interest in, or even knowledge of, those old recordings that he had made so long ago. Hurt even thought Hoskins must be from the FBI and said to him, "You've got the wrong man! I ain't done nothing mean." Still fearing that the young man was somehow connected with the law, Hurt agreed to go north with him because he thought that if he refused, Hoskins would arrest him anyway.

Musicologists and blues aficionados were ecstatic to find a blues musician

who was still playing and singing in an authentic style, untainted by commercialism or modern trends. Music historian and critic **Nat Hentoff** called the finding of Hurt the "most singular rediscovery" of the 1960's blues renaissance. In July of 1963 Hurt recorded 39 songs for the Library of Congress and shortly afterward appeared before thousands at the Newport festival. He returned to Avalon to finish his crop and then Hurt and his wife Jessie moved to an apartment in Washington, D.C. where he became the resident artist at the **Ontario Place Coffeehouse**.

There was great demand for him to make appearances all over the U.S. and Canada. In addition to Newport, he appeared at most of the major folk festivals including the Philadelphia, Mariposa, and New York festivals. He kept a busy club schedule, appearing at the **Showboat** and the **Brickseller** in D.C., the **Gaslight** and **Café A Go-Go** in New York, the **Second Fret** in Philadelphia, and the **Ash Grove** in Los Angeles. He gave concerts at numerous colleges and universities, as well as appearing on several television shows, including the **Tonight Show**.

Hurt's income went from sharecropper's wages of a few hundred dollars a year to thousands as an entertainer. Such a whirl of activity was overwhelming to this unassuming and gentle man. He never quite grasped what was happening. He made three albums for **Vanguard**, as well as recording for other labels, but he was uncomfortable with the business side of recording and could not understand people squabbling over the rights to his music. As soon as he saved enough money, Hurt moved back to Mississippi and bought a house in Grenada, a few miles from Avalon, but he did not have long to enjoy his new home and wealth because he died quietly in his sleep on November 2, 1966.

For a professional career that had such a short span, John Hurt has had a wide influence on a great variety of people, from hard-core ethno music purists to pseudo-folk flower persons to serious students of the guitar. Virginia blues man **John Jackson**, Minnesota folk singer **Robert Zimmerman** and New York guitar wizard **Stephan Grossman** were all influenced by Hurt. The great North Carolina guitar virtuoso **Doc Watson** and his late son **Merle** almost always included a Mississippi John Hurt song or two in their concerts. They never failed to express their gratitude for his gifts. Upon his death, the New York Times eulogized, "Of all the fine old singers uncovered in the folk-music revival of the nineteen-sixties, few had as much influence on young audiences as Mississippi John Hurt."

Take the high road, when you get to a crossroads take it, may the river be with you, may the wind be at your back, surf's up, mahola, aloha, don't forget to boogie & big love!

Hope, peace & happiness,  
Best,

**Shirley Mae Owens aka Sugar**

## BIG CITY Rhythm & Blues

Founding Editor

**Robert Jr Whittall**

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Publisher & Editor

Marketing Captain & Photographer

**Shirley Mae Owens**

Graphic Design & Production

**Charlie Auringer**

Copy Editor

**Guy Powell**

Assistant to the Publisher

And distribution specialist

**Bob Monteleone**

Contributing Writers

**Bob Baugh, Peggy Brown, Laura Carbone, Ro Daley, Steve Daniels, David Glynn, Mike Griffin, Robin Hathaway, Eric Harabadian, Deak Harp, Kevin Johnson, Bob Krause, Jen Littleton, Carol Marble, Karen McFarland, Bob Monteleone, Shirley Mae Owens, Guy Powell, Julia Magness, Richard Radbil, Michael Richardson, Dick Shurman, John Sinclair, Carlin C-Note Smith, Albert Varosi, Erin Vickers, Bob-O Walesa, Carolyn Walkup, Kim Welsh, Dirk Wissbaum**

Contributing Artists

**Scott Dedenbach, Bette Evans, Jan Kaulins, Plastic Crimewave, Rick Ruby, Robert Jr Whittall,**

Contributing Photographers

**Charles Auringer, Laura Carbone, Peter Hurley, Bob Krause, Aigars Lapsa, Jim Mills, Shirley Mae Owens, John Rockwood, Lindsay Shannon, Roman Sobus, Dick Waterman, Kim Welsh, Robert Jr Whittall, Dirk Wissbaum,**

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**blues@bigcitybluesmag.com**

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