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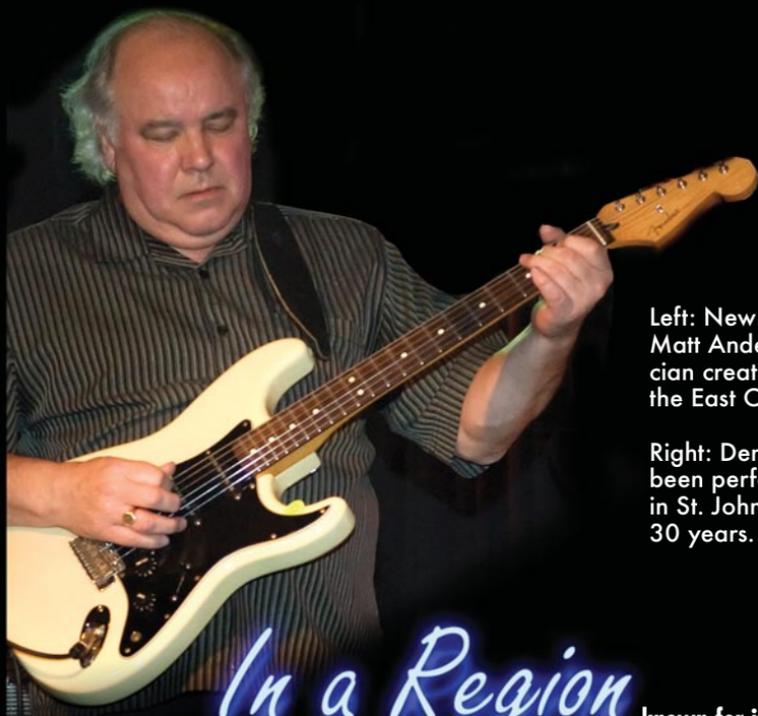
Got the

Summertime

Blues?

>> Listen for the sounds of a musical genre gaining momentum in Atlantic Canada.

By Angela Blenkhome



Left: New Brunswick-born Matt Andersen is one musician creating a buzz on the East Coast blues scene.

Right: Denis Parker has been performing the blues in St. John's for more than 30 years. (Bud Gaulton photo.)

In a Region

known for its spirited Celtic traditions and salty sea shanties, no one can fault visitors to (or residents of) Atlantic Canada for thinking it's our birthright to play a fiddle or the bagpipes. Sure, we love a good kitchen party, but some of us have broken with expected traditions and picked up a guitar or harmonica – and marched straight into a scorching blues scene.

Just what makes our blues scene so hot? It's a deceptively simple combination of talented local artists, dedicated fans and a deep-rooted culture of musical creativity. The blues in Canada can be traced back to the slaves' escape to freedom from the southern United States via the Underground Railroad. As unconscionable as slavery was, it gave birth to the blues, and this music has endured ever since. During the past 25 years, Atlantic Canadian blues in particular has grown from a grassroots movement to gain mainstream international attention while maintaining elements of its origins.



An enthusiastic crowd of blues fans at the Wreckhouse Jazz and Blues Festival. *Signal Blog photo.*

Blaine Morrison hosts “The Blues-Own,” Atlantic Canada’s longest running blues radio show. Morrison credits the blues’ growing popularity to its regional “pioneers” – Dutch Mason, Matt Minglewood, Joe Murphy and Roger Howse to name just a few. Their dedication to performing and promoting the blues meant a lot of time spent on the road playing in clubs and bars from the late 1960s to present day. It was their country-wide criss-crossing that helped pave the way for today’s up-and-coming artists and spawned an ever-widening blues fan base.

Morrison says he once asked Nova Scotia blues artist Matt Minglewood what makes Atlantic Canadians unique as fans. Minglewood, a talented storyteller at heart, replied, “...we grew up rooted in the soil, whether as fishermen or farmers. Blues is another form of folk music of the working person. We in this region are generally of modest means, so we play modest instruments like guitar and harmonica grounded in roots music, so we embrace the blues.”

Festival Season is Upon Us

I’ve been attending blues festivals since I was a young child in Nova Scotia. I remember how easy it was to get lost in the music – in the sense of communal experience told straight from the gut with grit and soul, stories of life’s hardships or pining an unrequited love. There’s a certain magic to hearing live blues with several thousand of your closest friends. And in such a laid-back setting, you never know who you’ll run into on a trip to the port-a-potty.

Rain or shine, summer 2011 is shaping up to be a hot one on the Atlantic Canadian blues festival circuit. Check out these upcoming events, starting in Newfoundland.

Wreckhouse International Jazz and Blues Festival

This year marks the 10th Wreckhouse International Jazz and Blues Festival (WIJBF) held in St. John’s, Newfoundland. Liz Dunbar, executive director of the WIJBF, sums up the festival’s appeal: “St. John’s and the entirety of Newfoundland has a



Keith Hallett of Fredericton, New Brunswick played at last year's Wreckhouse Jazz and Blues Festival. *Bud Gaulton photo.*

reputation for being a music centre. When you walk into an East Coast bar, you expect to hear and experience live music. It's what we do."

The Wreckhouse name reflects the raw and unpredictable power of Newfoundland's weather – and is an apt description of the blues itself. Transforming from the humble roots of the first St. John's Jazz Festival in 2002, Wreckhouse Jazz and Blues has emerged as a non-profit foundation committed to encouraging an appreciation of this music throughout the year with concerts, educational activities and fundraisers, culminating with the festival as its centrepiece.

The 2011 festival lineup is currently being finalized, but past performers have included local talents Lori Cooper, Keith Hallett, and Chris Kirby & the Marquee; rising Cana-

dian star Treasa Levasseur and five-time Grammy-nominated Robben Ford – known as one of the best electric guitarists to date.

"International artists who have performed in St. John's at this festival comment that they can feel the sense of community, are continually impressed by our local musicians, and some return year after year for the opportunity to play with them," says Dunbar.

Don't miss the festival's popular workshops – a surefire way to get up close and personal and learn from many of the musicians in a more intimate setting.

TD PEI Jazz and Blues Festival

The TD PEI Jazz and Blues Festival takes place in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. It began in 2005, when

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Husband and wife duo Derek Trucks and Susan Tedeschi take to the stage. *Barry Calhoun photo.*

local high school students performed a series of outdoor jazz concerts on Richmond Street. They convinced local merchants to contribute some funds to cover their costs and the students added a lively musical element to the street scene. Eventually a committee was formed to establish the annual music festival that now also embraces the blues.

Festival chair Doug Millington says that this “cool community identity” helps attract performers like Harry Manx, Downchild – one of Canada’s best known blues bands, and Jack de Keyzer, whom the legendary Jeff Healey called the finest blues guitarist in Canada.

P.E.I. may be our smallest province, but its support of the blues is mighty. And new for 2011, you can leave your umbrella and rubber boots at home. The main stage outdoor tent events are moving indoors to Murphy’s Community Centre. You can enjoy soulful blues where the only thing that might get wet is your whistle.

Harvest Jazz and Blues Festival

Fredericton, New Brunswick plays host to the world this September with the 21st annual Harvest Jazz and Blues Festival.

“We’re proud that our homegrown talent can share the stage and headline with well-known global acts,” says Brent Staeben, music director.

In fact, radio host Blaine Morrison says local musician Matt Andersen’s performance at last year’s festival was “one of the most electrifying” he’s seen. Andersen shared the stage that night with fellow New Brunswick bluesman Ross Nielsen, combining their raw talent and mesmerizing blues guitar styles. The air was thick with summer heat and searing soul; the vibe in the room was ripe, hypnotizing every member of the crowd.

This year, fans new and old will enjoy Gregg Allman, Jonny Lang, and Blues Caravan’s Girls with Guitars at various venues throughout Fredericton – from the raunchy party atmosphere of the Budweiser Blues

Tent to more intimate acoustic settings like the Cox and Palmer Hoodoo House. Keep your ears open for after-hours jam sessions – you never know who might show up.

Dutch Mason Blues Festival

The late Dutch Mason is highly regarded as the prime minister of Canadian blues, receiving the Order of Canada in 2005 for nationally fostering the genre. His legacy lives on with the 7th annual Dutch Mason Blues Festival (DMBF) in Truro, Nova Scotia.

David DeWolfe, festival founder and creator, currently serves as producer and artistic director. DeWolfe attributes much of the festival's success to its "formula of attracting fans who are passionate about the blues, bikes and BBQ," in reference to its theme of world-class performers, a motorcycle show, and friendly but intense BBQ competitions (these people are serious about their ribs).

Be sure to get yourself a ticket to the James Cotton Ambassador's Dinner. This event features a meet-and-greet with festival performers, soul food from the Deep South, music and autograph signing.

This year, check out artists from Eric Clapton's Crossroads Festival, Willie Nelson's son Lukas, and local favourites Matt Minglewood, Theresa Malenfant and John Campbelljohn. And truly keeping it family-style, catch Mason's son Garrett – a mainstay on the local scene and a rising talent who's capturing attention at a national level.

With so many festivals to choose from, it's easy to get a hit of music medicine – and a good dose of the summer blues may be just what the doctor ordered. ☑



An Atlantic Canadian Tour

Edmunston Jazz and Blues Festival

June 15-18, 2011

Edmunston, New Brunswick

www.jazzbluesedmundston.com

Wreckhouse International Jazz and Blues Festival

July 13-16, 2011

St. John's, Newfoundland

www.wreckhousejazzandblues.com

Acoustic Maritime Music Festival

July 15-17, 2011

Kempt Shore, Nova Scotia

www.novascotiabluegrass.com

Dutch Mason Blues Festival

August 12-14, 2011

Truro, Nova Scotia

www.dutchmason.com

TD PEI Jazz and Blues Festival

August 15-21, 2011

Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island

www.jazzandblues.ca

Caraquet en Bleu

September 8-11, 2011

Caraquet, New Brunswick

www.caraquetenbleu.com

Harvest Jazz and Blues Festival

September 13-18, 2011

Fredericton, New Brunswick

www.harvestjazzandblues.com