



Stevie Ray Vaughan & Double Trouble

BY ROBERT SANTELLI

*The guitar slinger and his band brought
the blues back to rock & roll.*

HAD STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN NOT SUDDENLY SURFACED in the early 1980s, guitar in hand and a nearly uncontrollable urge to play it, then the blues might have willed him into existence. These, after all, weren't the best times for the blues, which had been the bedrock of all American music for nearly a century. ❀ MTV was making pop music more physical and visual: Think Michael Jackson and Madonna. Most of mainstream rock was all about big sound, arena shows, and elaborate stage sets. And new wave, though it rebelled against rock's more ornate sounds and superstar mindset, was as style-conscious as it was interested in a simpler approach to making records. ❀ The blues connected to none of this. The 1960s had been the music's last golden age, a time when masters like Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, and B. B. King played to eager young rock audiences fascinated by its emotional power, and guitar kingpins like Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton, Jimmy Page, Jeff Beck, Duane Allman, Johnny Winter, Carlos Santana, and Mike Bloomfield – a member of the Paul Butterfield Blues Band – collectively created a new hybrid: blues rock. ❀ From blues rock came heavy metal and the likes of Led Zeppelin. But in the 1970s, rock also became increasingly diversified, with other new sounds and styles running rampant. It got crowded, with glam, country rock, Southern rock,



singer-songwriters, funk, punk, reggae, and disco all competing for attention and fans. This left little room for blues, and by the end of the decade, its status as a vibrant, relevant music tradition was being seriously questioned.

What the blues needed most was an exciting new artist, one knowledgeable and passionate about its long and important history in American music, yet original enough to make a new mark. It needed someone dazzling enough to grab the attention of rock fans who had lost interest in the blues, yet authentic enough to keep longtime true blues fans in his camp. The music turned not to Chicago or Memphis or the Mississippi Delta – the traditional wellsprings of great blues – but to Texas, and in particular, to Austin, where it found Stevie Ray Vaughan.

TEXAS ALREADY HAD a rich blues tradition before Vaughan arrived on the scene.

In the 1920s, Blind Lemon Jefferson became one of country blues' biggest stars. A decade later, T-Bone Walker introduced the electric guitar to the blues, dramatically changing its sound and scope. Lightnin' Hopkins' vast recording catalogue reflected his blues virtuosity on both the acoustic and electric guitar, while players like Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown, Johnny Copeland, Freddie King, and Albert Collins brought blues closer to R&B and rock & roll. Then, in the 1960s, Janis Joplin, Johnny Winter, and ZZ Top contributed to the blues-rock explosion.

Stevie Ray Vaughan's name would be added to this distinguished list of legendary Texas blues artists. Born in 1954, he was raised in the Oak Cliff section of Dallas. His earliest and most important influence was his big brother, Jimmie. "We shared a room that had a little record player in it," recalled Jimmie. "He listened to the records I listened to – Jimmy Reed, Bill Doggett, Lonnie Mack. He watched me play the guitar. And he got hooked."

Jimmie left home at age 14 to pursue a music career, arriving by 1970 in Austin, a college town with plenty of music clubs and a small but growing blues community. Before he left, he gave 11-year-old Stevie one of his electric guitars and the batch of worn blues records they had listened to together. "I gave him my Fender Telecaster. It replaced the cheap ones he'd been messin' with," continued Jimmie Vaughan. "He fell in love with it. I don't think he ever put it down."

Stevie quickly found that the guitar was an ideal emotional outlet, and that the blues was a music language he could easily translate on guitar. After high school, he joined Jimmie in Austin, anxious to grow his guitar talent and to play the clubs where Jimmie's group, the Fabulous Thunderbirds, were tearing it up. "Stevie saw that the Fabulous Thunderbirds were playing every night in Austin," continued Jimmie. "And that's what he wanted to do, play every night, anywhere you could. The idea was to play."

Stevie played guitar with the Austin band the Cobras,

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but he was meant to be a bandleader, where he could more fully define the blues sounds he heard in his head. He formed the Triple Threat Revue with African-American guitarist W.C. Clark and local blues-rock singer Lou Ann Barton. When Barton and Clark left to pursue solo careers in 1978 and 1979, respectively, Triple Threat became Double Trouble. Now, with Chris Layton on drums and eventually Tommy Shannon on bass, Vaughan had his launching pad in place. "He was sorta like the rocket booster that you put on the spaceship to make it go a little further," explained B. B. King, one of Vaughan's early supporters.

Layton (b. 1955) was the perfect drummer for Vaughan: young, aggressive, and a blues lover. Bass player Shannon (b. 1946) brought big-time experience to Double Trouble. He had played with Johnny Winter and knew the ups and downs of stardom. Vaughan also benefited greatly by being in Austin. Blues giants like B. B. King, Albert King, and Muddy Waters were finding work in Austin's blues clubs, particularly Antone's, which had become the centerpiece of the scene. Vaughan often opened up shows for his heroes, then later jammed with them, picking up advice and ideas.

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN MIGHT HAVE REMAINED merely a local or regional blues king had fate not intervened. In 1982, Double Trouble manager Chesley Milliken gave his friend Mick Jagger a live tape of Vaughan and the band. Impressed, the Rolling Stones singer invited Double Trouble to play a New York party, giving Vaughan valuable exposure far from Austin. That same year, legendary soul producer Jerry Wexler heard Vaughan and Double Trouble and got them on the Montreux Jazz Festival bill in Switzerland. That's where David Bowie and Jackson Browne heard Vaughan; Bowie invited Vaughan to play guitar on his *Let's Dance* album, and Browne offered up his California studio so

FROM FAR LEFT

Stevie Ray Vaughan and Double Trouble (from left): Vaughan, Chris Layton, Tommy Shannon, and Reese Wynans; with Mick Jagger, 1982; live in 1983.

the band could cut some demo tracks.

Finally, John Hammond, the man who signed Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, and many other greats to Columbia Records, brought Vaughan and Double Trouble to Epic Records, a subsidiary of Columbia. *Texas Flood*, Stevie Ray Vaughan and Double Trouble's debut album, came out soon after, to critical acclaim. Showcasing Vaughan's striking guitar solos and featuring the crackerjack backing of Layton and Shannon, the album won two Grammys and numerous other awards.

The band's followup, *Couldn't Stand the Weather*, included "Voodoo Chile," the Jimi Hendrix classic that Vaughan made his own. Incessant touring lifted the album and brought in more fans. Keyboard player Reese Wynans (b. 1948), who'd briefly played in a band with future Allman Brothers Dickey Betts and Berry Oakley in the late sixties, was added to the group, broadening their sound. Vaughan was now being hailed as the "next Hendrix" and the savior of the blues, a term not entirely an exaggeration.

To their credit, Vaughan and Double Trouble were careful not to act the part. Regularly, Vaughan praised those great blues artists who came before him, and, whenever possible, he shared the stage with them. Albert King, in particular, was grateful for Vaughan's rise to stardom and his friendship. The pair even recorded together.

Two more studio albums, *Soul to Soul* and *In Step*, sandwiched a live album, *Live Alive*. More touring meant more time away from Austin and brother

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY



TEXAS FLOOD
Epic 1983



**COULDN'T STAND
THE WEATHER**
Epic 1984



SOUL TO SOUL
Epic 1985



IN STEP
Epic 1989

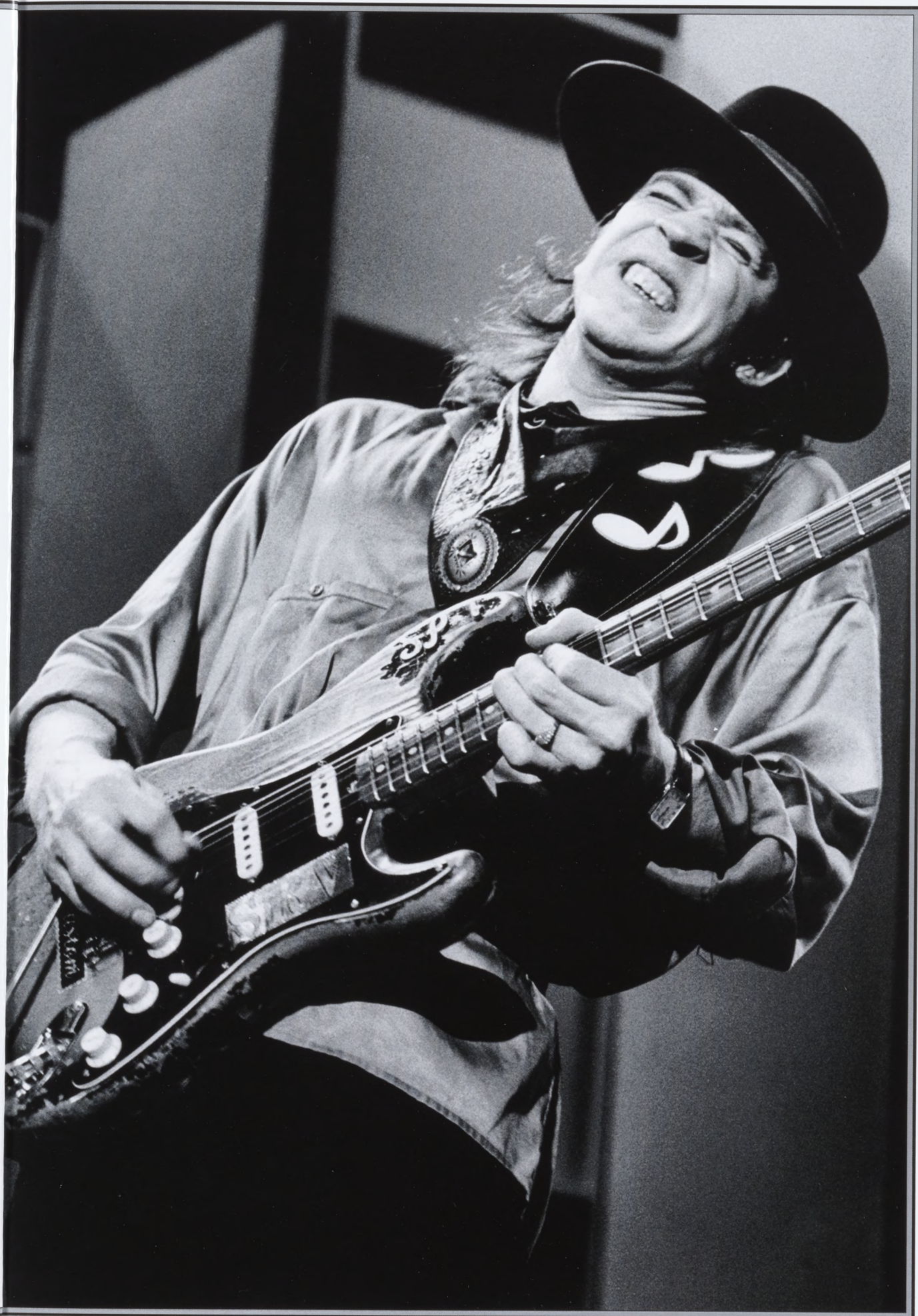
Jimmie, who had hit it big with the Fabulous Thunderbirds. The brothers were now blues royalty. But the fast life didn't suit the Vaughans, particularly Stevie. Drinking and drugs began to get in the way of his music and his ability to cope with stardom. His marriage failed. His career faltered. He continued to rely on his guitar to get him through the increasingly frequent rough patches, but it was clear he needed help.

Fortunately, he got it. He entered rehab, cleaned up, clarified his vision, and renewed his passion for the blues. *In Step*, released afterward, was a major success. A long anticipated album with Jimmie, *Family Style*, was completed. The Vaughan Brothers, as they would bill themselves, seemed poised for even bigger success when tragedy struck. On August 26, 1990, Stevie Ray Vaughan was killed in a helicopter crash just outside East Troy, Wisconsin, after performing with Jimmie Vaughan, Eric Clapton, Buddy Guy, and Robert Cray. He was just 35 years old.

Despite a quarter century since his passing, Vaughan's presence is still felt – and missed – in American music. Nearly every blues artist today claims a Stevie Ray Vaughan influence. His intense performances, powerful solos, and deep, passionate love of the music keep his blues flame burning. Tonight, we honor him and the members of Double Trouble as inductees into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. 🎸

With brother Jimmie of the Fabulous Thunderbirds, 1986. Right: Bending the note, 1983.





Blues Notes

Artifacts from the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum

SUCH PIONEERING BLUES ARTISTS AS T-BONE WALKER, Jimmy Reed, Howlin' Wolf, and Muddy Waters are among those represented in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame collection of more than four thousand artifacts. Here are some of the legendary guitars, as well as other objects that originally belonged to the greats.



1. Howlin' Wolf's money case, circa 1955.
2. Muddy Waters' Fender Telecaster, 1958.
3. Passport belonging to McKinley Morganfield, a.k.a. Muddy Waters, 1974–1979.
4. Jimmy Reed's Ariel electric guitar, circa 1960.
5. T-Bone Walker's Gibson Barney Kessel, 1967.
6. Stage shirt belonging to Bobby Bland, 1970.
7. John Lee Hooker's Gibson ES-335, 1965.
8. Fillmore poster for a concert featuring Muddy Waters, Quicksilver Messenger Service, and Andrew Staples, 1966.



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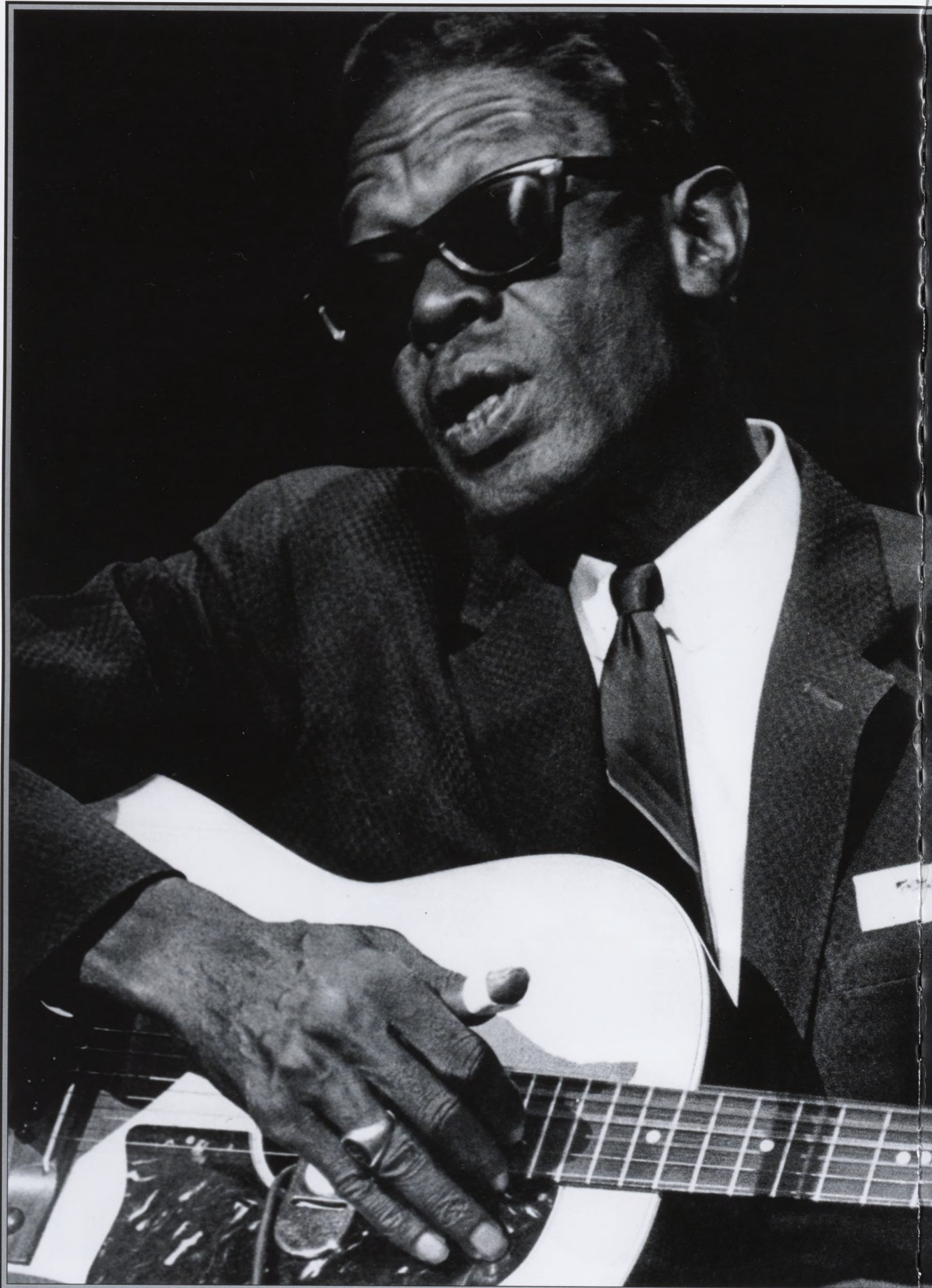
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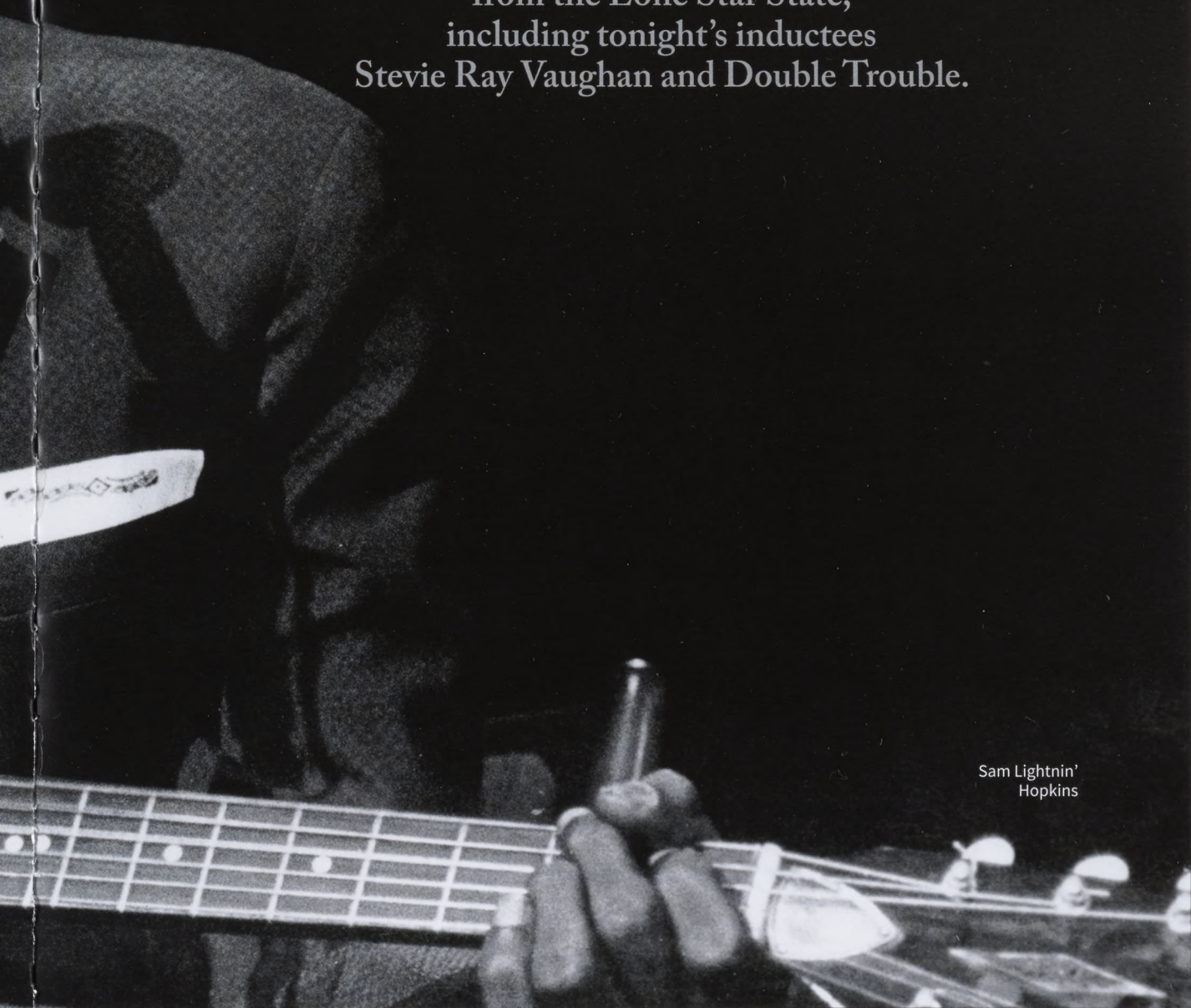
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Texas Flood

BY ANDY SCHWARTZ

Since the 1920s, blues have emanated
from the Lone Star State,
including tonight's inductees
Stevie Ray Vaughan and Double Trouble.



Sam Lightnin'
Hopkins

FROM THE RURAL ACOUSTIC SOUNDS OF BLIND Lemon Jefferson and Mance Lipscomb to the big-band blast of Bobby “Blue” Bland and Junior Parker, from electric guitar pioneers like T-Bone Walker and Clarence “Gatemouth” Brown to the chartbusting grooves of Stevie Ray Vaughan and the Fabulous Thunderbirds, the Texas blues tradition is as broad and diverse as Texas itself. And Texas has had the blues – that quintessential African-American music – ever since the blues began.

In *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*, Cornell University historian Edward Baptist wrote: “By the end of 1835, almost 5,000 enslaved Africans and African-Americans lived in Texas, making up 13 percent of the non-Indian population. . . . Music could not prevent a whipping or feed a single hungry mouth. But it did serve the enslaved as another tongue, one that spoke what the first often could not. Music permitted a different self to breathe, even as rhythm and melody made lines on which the common occasions of a social life could tether like beads.”

By 1860, an estimated 169,000 enslaved people comprised 30 percent of the population of Texas. Though President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, Union armies didn’t invade Texas to liberate those held in bondage. The enslaved remained so until June 19, 1865, when Union general Gordon Granger declared that “in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free.” Thereafter, this event would be celebrated as Juneteenth, and in recent decades many Texas blues festivals have been organized around it.

In the face of harsh Jim Crow laws, rampant economic exploitation, and widespread lynching, blacks left Texas in significant numbers for points north and west in the early twentieth century. Still, the overall number of African-Americans in the state continued to grow, totaling about 900,000 in 1940. From this population – stretching from the piney woods of East Texas to the

Mexican border, from farms and fields to burgeoning cities – grew the rich and diverse sounds of Texas blues.

BLIND LEMON JEFFERSON WAS THE FIRST superstar of country blues, and among the first blues musicians to record with just voice and guitar. Born near present-day Wortham, Texas, probably in 1893, by 1917 he had settled in Dallas, where he sang on the streets of the rough-and-tumble neighborhood known as Deep Ellum. For a time, he traveled and performed with Huddie Ledbetter, a.k.a. Lead Belly. Recording for Paramount Records, Jefferson became the best-selling blues artist of the 1920s, releasing more than eighty songs from 1926 to 1929, including the future blues standards “Matchbox Blues” and “Black Snake Moan.” Bob Dylan, B. B. King, Lou Reed, the Grateful Dead, and the Dream Syndicate are among those who later covered his classic “See That My Grave Is Kept Clean,” a.k.a. “One Kind Favor.” Jefferson died December 19, 1929, and was interred in Wortham Negro Cemetery; in 2007, its name was changed to Blind Lemon Memorial Cemetery in his honor.

Another sightless Lone Star legend, Blind Willie Johnson, was born circa 1897 near Brenham, Texas. Paradoxically, Johnson sang only religious songs and did not record a single secular blues among his thirty sides issued by Columbia between 1927 and 1930. But on songs like “John the Revelator” and “The Soul of a Man,” Johnson played guitar with a level of dexterity and blues-drenched feeling that has inspired generations of blues fans and aspiring musicians. “I’ve tried all my life – worked very hard and every day of my life, practically – to play in that style,” Ry Cooder told interviewer Jas Obrecht. “Not consciously saying, ‘Today is Tuesday, I will again try to play like Blind Willie Johnson,’ but that sound is in my head. . . . He’s so good, I mean, he’s just so good!” The brilliant singer and guitarist Lightnin’ Hopkins was perhaps the longest-lived

THIS PAGE FROM LEFT

Texas blues pioneers Blind Lemon Jefferson, Blind Willie Johnson, and Clarence “Gatemouth” Brown.





Aaron Thibeaux "T-Bone" Walker

and certainly most recorded exponent of Texas country blues. Born Sam John Hopkins in 1912 and raised in Centerville, Texas, midway between Houston and Dallas, he did farm labor and served as a "guide boy" for Blind Lemon Jefferson before teaming up with a piano-playing cousin, Algernon "Texas" Alexander. Hopkins first recorded for Aladdin Records in 1946; between 1949 and 1952, he placed five songs in the *Billboard* R&B Top Twenty, including "Shotgun Blues" and "Give Me Central 209." These seemingly spontaneous compositions were performed in a tough, undiluted style that infused the earlier country blues sound with a sly urbanity, while his free-flowing fingerpicking proved adaptable to both acoustic and electric guitars. He recorded for some twenty different labels including Modern, Gold Star, Herald, Folkways, Vee-Jay, Jewel, and Arhoolie. He performed everywhere from Houston juke joints to Carnegie Hall, and starred in the 1968 Les Blank documentary *The Blues Accordin' to Lightin' Hopkins*.

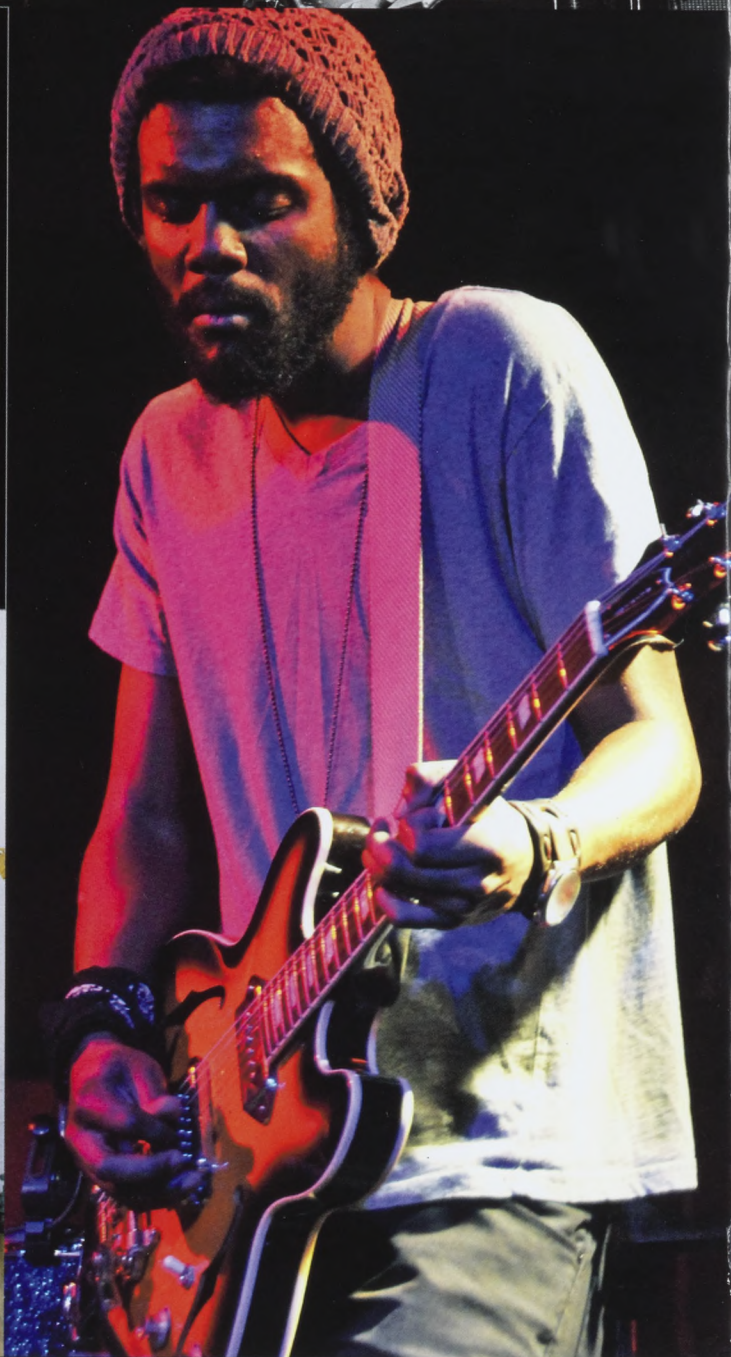
FREDDIE KING, ALBERT COLLINS, FRANKIE Lee Sims, and ZZ Top's Billy Gibbons are just a few of the names inscribed on the Texas honor roll of great guitarists. But the godfather of electric blues guitar was another Texan, Aaron Thibeaux "T-Bone" Walker (1910–1975), who was born in Linden, Texas, of African-American and Cherokee ancestry. On career-making songs like "Call It Stormy Monday (But Tuesday Is Just as Bad)" from 1947, Walker's fluid single-string riffs and chordal flourishes seemed to draw in equal measure from Blind Lemon Jefferson and jazz pioneer Charlie Christian. "Virtually every modern blues guitarist, from B. B. King to Stevie Ray Vaughan, has named Walker a prime inspiration," according to author Robert Palmer. "Walker's influence was so inescapable that blues guitarists from the Mississippi Delta to Chicago and from New York to Los Angeles had adapted elements of his approach by the early fifties."

The wealth of musical talent throughout Texas gave rise to numerous local independent labels, but most were focused on country, Tejano, and other



**CLOCKWISE
FROM TOP LEFT**

B. B. King, Stevie Ray Vaughan, and Albert Collins (from left) at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, 1988; San Antonio's Doug "Sir Douglas" Sahm; Gary Clark Jr., the Grammy-winning bluesman from Austin; Keith Ferguson, Kim Wilson, Fran Christina, and Jimmie Vaughan (from left) of the Fabulous Thunderbirds; and Beaumont's Johnny Winter.



non-blues genres. Of those imprints dedicated to black music, only Houston's Duke/Peacock Records was able to compete nationally with rivals like Chess and Atlantic through the 1950s and 1960s. The African-American entrepreneur Don Robey launched the Peacock label in 1949 when he found himself unable to secure a recording contract for the Texas blues guitarist-vocalist Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown. Robey was a canny, ruthless businessman who became notorious for adding his pseudonym "Deadric Malone" to the composer credits of many songs.

In 1952, Robey took control of Memphis label Duke Records and thus added several key artists to his roster. Johnny Ace scored eight R&B hits for Duke, beginning with his first chart-topping release, "My Song." Guided by Robey's house bandleader/arranger, the trumpeter Joe Scott, Bobby "Blue" Bland developed into one of the greatest blues singers of all time and remained a stalwart presence on the R&B charts for some thirty years, beginning with his first Number One, "Farther Up the Road," in 1957. Other significant blues artists who recorded for Duke/Peacock included Big Mama Thornton, who took Leiber and Stoller's "Hound Dog" to the top of the R&B chart in 1952; Herman "Junior" Parker, whose "Mystery Train" inspired Elvis Presley's landmark cover version; and Larry Davis, whose obscure "Texas Flood" became a global blues anthem in the hands of Stevie Ray Vaughan and Double Trouble. Don Robey never sought to compete in the rock-dominated album market of the late 1960s; he sold his Duke/Peacock masters to ABC-Dunhill, which eventually would become MCA/Universal Music, in 1973, and died two years later at age 71.

BY THE LATE 1960S, SOUL AND FUNK LARGELY had displaced the blues from black radio playlists and inner-city record shops. In Texas, the blues never really died. Nationally known artists like B. B. King, Bobby Bland, and Johnny "Guitar" Watson toured regularly throughout the Lone Star State, while others scuffled on at the local level. Albert Collins held it down at Shady's Playhouse in Houston; Long John Hunter maintained a thirteen-year residence at the Lobby Club in Juárez, Mexico, just across the border from El Paso.

Still, there was a sense that Texas blues had peaked in popularity, if not aesthetic development. It would fall to a small but diverse group of white musicians to instigate the next Lone Star blues revival.

The albino guitarist and vocalist Johnny Winter (b. 1944 in Beaumont) had toiled in regional obscurity for a decade when Columbia Records reps saw him play B. B. King's "It's My Own Fault" with Al Kooper and Mike Bloomfield at the Fillmore East in New York. Winter signed a lucrative Columbia contract, and with his self-titled 1969 debut inaugurated a long career that continued until his death at age 70 in 2014. When biographer Mary Lou Sullivan asked Winter how he would like to be remembered, he replied, "As a good blues player." National success also came to Texas-born blues devotees Doug Salm and Janis Joplin when they reached the national Top Twenty with (respectively) "She's About a Mover" (with the Sir Douglas Quintet)

in 1965 and "Piece of My Heart" (with Big Brother and the Holding Company) in 1968. At the start of the 1970s, though, the real Lone Star blues action – flying well below the major labels' radar – was in Austin, the home of the University of Texas.

"The blues scene integrated Austin like nothing before it, with UT students going to Charlie's Playhouse on East 11th Street and bands like Clarence Smith & the Daylighters backing white singers," wrote veteran Texas music journalist Michael Corcoran. "White blues musicians like Bill Campbell, the Vaughan brothers, and Angela Strehli sought out obscure East-side blues players," while white fans formed a new audience for local African-American players like W.C. Clark and Dr. James Polk. In 1976, Louis Charles "C-Boy" Parks, the African-American manager of the Rome Inn, offered a Monday weekly residency to a white blues quartet called the Fabulous Thunderbirds, fronted by singer-harp player Kim Wilson and Dallas-born guitarist Jimmie Vaughan. Meanwhile, Jimmie's younger brother Stevie Ray was playing guitar with the Cobras every week at the Soap Creek Saloon. Both bands appeared regularly at Antone's, the Sixth Street blues club opened by Port Arthur native Clifford Antone in 1975.

With his new band Double Trouble (which included former Johnny Winter bassist Tommy Shannon), Stevie Ray Vaughan released his debut album, *Texas Flood*, in 1983. Its unexpected Top Forty chart success paved the way for kindred acts like Robert Cray and the reunited Allman Brothers Band. "I think Stevie Ray Vaughan really blended being a true blues

player and being a rock player together better than anybody," guitarist Dickey Betts told Ted Drozdowski in a 2014 interview. "He had almost a religious desire for playing blues, but he played like a rock player."

The Fabulous Thunderbirds, too, benefited from Double Trouble's breakthrough. In 1986, the T-Birds scored their own surprise hit with "Tuff Enuff" and a million-selling album of the same name. Texas blues had entered the MTV era, and audiences on both sides of the Atlantic sat up and took notice.

The new millennium brought forth another group of Texas blues players. Jake Andrews, born in Austin in 1980, received guitar lessons from his father, John "Toad" Andrews, former lead guitarist with Tracy Nelson and Mother Earth. At age 8, the younger Andrews jammed with Albert King at Antone's; he went on to release three well-received solo albums and appear on recordings by such blues elders as Long John Hunter and Guitar Shorty.

Gary Clark Jr. is the most successful Texas blues artist to emerge in the twenty-first century. The guitarist-vocalist was still in his early teens when he began sitting in at Antone's with friend and mentor Jimmie Vaughan. His first two albums appeared on the independent Hotwire Unlimited label, but Clark's career shifted into high gear when he signed with Warner Bros. in 2010. Four years and several hundred gigs later, he won the 2014 Grammy for Best Traditional R&B Performance for "Please Come Home," a track from his Top Ten Warner debut album, *Blak and Blu*. *The New York Times* hailed Clark as "a guitarist of deep magnetism and tremendous feel."

Somewhere, T-Bone Walker was smiling. 🍷

The Texas blues tradition is as broad and diverse as Texas itself.
