

There is probably no more seminal association in the history of rock and pop music than those ties that bind Chicago's electric blues with the Rolling Stones. Chicago blues is at the heart of what defines the Stones, who modeled their sound on the gritty, urban, electrified and amplified music of Muddy Waters and other Chicago blues pioneers.

This association created a kinship that has forever changed modern popular music and culture in the USA, the UK and across the globe. This musical love affair between the Stones and Chicago blues continues today and, like an enviable marriage, seems to only get deeper and stronger with age.

The bond between the Rolling Stones and the Chicago blues, one of respect and mutual admiration, has been a two-way street. Without the influence of Muddy Waters and other electric blues pioneers, the music of the Rolling Stones would not exist as it does today. Conversely, it was the Stones who, at the forefront of the British Invasion of the mid-nineteen sixties, helped re-introduce the blues to American listeners through their integration of this musical form. Both Muddy Waters and B.B. King have publically attested to this; the legendary Buddy Guy has recounted, "The Stones came back from England after they started selling such tremendous amounts of records and told the Americans who we were [...] Without those guys we'd still be, I guess, less unknown than what we are today. We owe them a lot of thanks because they didn't come back here and say this is new, we got it. They said, oh, no, you had it all the time, and they woke up America to who we feel."

Keith Richards backs this up: "Muddy made you like you were really part of it. He sort of brought you in. And Howlin' Wolf was very much the same. There was none of 'Well, I didn't know white guys could play like that.' We connected, and they were not particularly impressed about what color you happen to turn out to be or whatever. Of course, Muddy and the other guys did recognize that for some reason, the Stones had brought this music back to America and re-popularized it. Or not so much popularized it, just brought it to attention again. And for that, I'm eternally proud, and that's probably the only way I'm going to get in heaven."

In June 1964, the Rolling Stones made a pilgrimage to the legendary Chess Studios for a recording session. Chess was the inner sanctuary of Chicago blues where their heroes had recorded the music that would put the Stones on the road to becoming the greatest rock and roll band of all time. In 2016, after more than five decades, they would release their first studio album in fifteen years, *Blue and Lonesome*, consisting of twelve covers of classic Chicago blues songs. It seems the Stones can't get away from their Chicago roots even when they try; they describe *Blue and Lonesome* as coming to life when, while warming up in the studio with some Chicago blues before beginning a new original album, it felt so good to them they decided to record a Chicago blues album instead, a decision that would bring them back to their musical origins.

Our album, *Chicago Plays the Stones*, became the enthusiastic response to *Blue and Lonesome* as a kind of musical love letter to the Rolling Stones from three generations of today's greatest Chicago blues artists. I had been asked to produce *Chicago Plays the Stones* which would be the first release on the Chicago Blues Experience record label and in conjunction with "Exhibitionism, The Rolling Stones", the important retrospective of the group that would be coming to Chicago. Ironically, we started developing this project before we knew about the Stones' future Chicago blues album.

Along with my co-producer and arranger Vincent Bucher, I had already decided to approach this project, which would eventually prove to be both echo and mirror of the Stones' *Blue and Lonesome* album, with the following concept. Instead of covering the Stones' songs in their signature style we would bring a selection of their songs "back home" by covering them with a Chicago blues groove.

This would be a challenging proposition. Could we respect the integrity of the expanded chord structures and melodies that identify the songs of the Stones that aren't part of the Chicago blues vocabulary? Would we be able to communicate the core essence of Chicago blues while maintaining the Stones' true identity?

Another way of looking at this would be to imagine these same Rolling Stones songs as played by their heroes, artists from the golden age of Chicago blues like Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Little Walter, Jimmy Reed, Willie Dixon, Sonny Boy Williamson I. Would they sound retro or contemporary? Or something new, something to build on?

We find the answer here on *Chicago Plays the Stones*, thanks to our illustrious artists who are, simply put, the greatest Chicago blues musicians alive today. The list includes not only the tradition's pioneers but also their direct descendants—in all, three generations of musicians representing the glorious past, present and future of Chicago blues.

And bringing this landmark project full circle, we are honored to have Mick Jagger and Keith Richards on *Chicago Plays the Stones*. Their contribution to this album—their performances and their superb songwriting—is a testament to their career-long support of Chicago blues and to their reverence for its musicians. Mr. Jagger and Mr. Richards did not allow their superstardom to dominate their tracks; in deference to the artists, they clearly preferred a supporting role. We sincerely thank them for their generosity.

This album would certainly not have been complete without the participation of the King of Chicago blues, the incomparable Buddy Guy, whose long and lasting relationship with the Rolling Stones epitomizes the kindred spirit that exists between the Stones and Chicago blues.

In addition to Buddy, we have the legendary Billy Boy Arnold, a Chicago-born pioneer of the genre who at the age of fourteen took lessons from the great John Lee "Sonnyboy" Williamson and became closely associated with Bo Diddley.

This illustrious list is rounded out by Billy Branch, John Primer, Ronnie Baker Brooks, Jimmy Burns, Carlos Johnson, Leanne Faine, Omar Coleman and Michael Avery—each in their own right an undeniably vital artist in the ongoing history of Chicago blues.

Chicago Plays the Stones also features the Living History Band with Bob Margolin on guitar, Johnny Iguana on piano, Vincent Bucher on harmonica, Felton Crews on bass and Kenny "Beedy-Eyes" Smith on drums. I unabashedly consider this band the undisputed heavyweight champion of Chicago blues backup groups. Between them they have played with every celebrated Chicago blues artist of the last half-century. All have been brought up musically on stage and in the studio by the founding fathers of this tradition; their mastery of Chicago blues styles is unparalleled.

I am grateful to all the phenomenal artists who made *Chicago Plays the Stones* possible. Throughout the sessions, I was moved by how inspired the musicians were by these great songs and above all their desire to get inside the songs and make them their own. This should come as no surprise since the essence of these songs is already part of their own DNA.

Chicago Plays the Stones brings it all back to Sweet Home Chicago.

LARRY SKOLLER, PRODUCER



The Rolling Stones in the Chess Records studio, 1964. Photo Bob Bonis Archives

W CHICAGO PLAYS THE STONES

With the recent release of their much-anticipated album *Blue & Lonesome*, the Rolling Stones paid loving tribute to the Chicago blues immortals that shaped their musical sensibilities and deeply influenced them through their formative years and up to the present day.

A cadre of Chicago's greatest blues talent returns the favor on *Chicago Plays the Stones* by taking on a dozen of their classics, not simply blasting through them in slavish copies of the originals but transforming every selection into slashing, crashing Chicago blues soaked in traditional feel yet sporting a decided contemporary edge. You'll find a cross-section of the Windy City's leading blues luminaries, including Buddy Guy, Billy Boy Arnold, and Billy Branch, along with members of the younger generation giving carefully chosen Stones copyrights their own distinctive spin. So impressed were the two creative cornerstones of the Stones that they're on board as well.

"Every musician that I approached was very enthusiastic about it," says producer Larry Skoller. "What I learned was just how much respect the artists have for the Stones. They were very enthusiastic about getting the opportunity to interpret one of their songs. One of the great things that kept coming up when we were recording with the individual guest artists was that each one of them mentioned how great the songs were, and how they really were inspired by them." Each of those songs was converted into genuine Chicago blues with the help of the Living History Band, schooled in every nuance of the venerable genre.

"We definitely had certain artists in mind for each song. So we matched up the artist with the song specifically," says Skoller. "Interpreting a Stones song with the blues vocabulary and the blues sound was the challenge, because Stones songs are not straight blues changes. The Stones' songs are expanded structures. They're different chords. The lyrics and the phrasing are quite different. So this was the real challenge of the project. But that was also the point."

"Everybody who sang them really got into the songs, understood the challenge, made them their own, and really related to the songs in their own way."

From the outset, Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, Brian Jones, Bill Wyman, and Charlie Watts were Chicago blues fanatics. Their 1964 debut album included revivals of classics by Muddy Waters, Jimmy Reed, and Junior Wells. 1965's *The Rolling Stones, Now!* featured gems by Bo Diddley and Howlin' Wolf, and *December's Children (and everybody's)* later that year offered a redo of Muddy's "Look What You've Done."

The band booked sessions in 1964 and again the next year at the recording studios of Chess Records, where their heroes made indelible history (the group worshipped the facility so reverently that they named one of their instrumentals "2120 South Michigan Avenue" after the label's address). When they headlined a 1965 episode of ABC-TV's rock program *Shindig!*, the Stones insisted that Howlin' Wolf co-star on the show, and they sat in worshipful repose as the mighty Wolf roared "How Many More Years" at the nation's television viewers, many of whom were altogether unaware of his existence until that electrifying moment.

Even after they settled into a life of jet-setting superstardom, the Stones continued to wear their love for blues on their collective sleeve. They conjured up a stylized treatment of Robert Johnson's "Love In Vain" for their 1969 LP *Let It Bleed* and summoned up the spirit of Mississippi Fred McDowell for a 1971 rendition of "You Gotta Move" on *Sticky Fingers*.

Whenever they'd roll through Chicago on their latest worldwide tour, they'd hit the local blues joints to soak up the real thing in its cozy home habitat. The Stones' 1981 visit to the Checkerboard Lounge, where they frolicked with Muddy and his band as well as Junior Wells, Buddy Guy, and Lefty Dizz, was videotaped for posterity and later issued on DVD (sadly, it's as close as you can now get to being inside the defunct South Side club).



Lefty Dizz and Mick Jagger at the Kingston Mines blues club, 1978. Photo D. Shigley



Muddy Waters onstage with the Rolling Stones on 1978; left to right: Ron Wood, Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. Photo D. Shigley

1. BILLY BOY ARNOLD

Born in 1935 in Chicago, is one of the prime architects of the electric Chicago blues sound of the 1950s and a major influence on the British blues revival of the 1960s. At age fourteen, Billy Boy was captivated by the music of the original Sonny Boy, John Lee Williamson, and visited him at his home in Chicago for a series of informal harmonica lessons just before Williamson's untimely death in 1948. Billy Boy's recording debut was the 45-rpm "Hello Stranger" b/w "Ain't Got No Money," released in 1952 on Chicago's Cool label. After teaming with street musician Elton McDaniel (a.k.a. Bo Diddley) and moving to Chess Records, he played harp on the 1955 classic "I'm a Man." Not content to be a sideman, Billy Boy then signed with Vesley and recorded the original versions of "I Wish You Would" and "Ain't Got You"—both later covered by Eric Clapton and The Yardbirds. "I Wish You Would" was also covered by David Bowie on his 1973 LP *Pirajitsu*. Billy Boy is one of the remaining Chicago blues originals and one of the most treasured exponents of American music performing today.

4. RONNIE BAKER BROOKS

was born in 1927 in Chicago to renowned bluesman Lonnie Brooks. He first picked up a guitar at age six, and by age nineteen Ronnie and his father had joined musical forces and began touring the world together. Ronnie has played with some of the most legendary names in blues: B.B. King, Buddy Guy, Koko Taylor, and Eric Clapton among others. His solo albums bridge a generational divide, fusing hip-hop and rap with more traditional blues. "With music, it all comes from the heart. It comes from the heart and from the soul."

5. BORN IN 1943 IN DUBLIN, MISSISSIPPI, JIMMY BURNS

is a younger brother of bluesman Eddie Burns, cut his teeth early in his career in the Northern soul recording industry and then retreated from the musician's lifestyle to raise his family. He returned again to the scene to sing the blues in the 1990s; after long days running his barbecue stand, Jimmy would strap on his guitar and hit the West Side's club circuit at night, eventually snagging a long-term residency at the Smokestack Club. He released his long-awaited debut album, *Leaving Here*, in 1996. Jimmy continues to ride the wave of his comeback, providing fans with soulful, electrifying blues wherever he goes.

8. THE INIMITABLE BUDDY GUY

was born in 1936 in Lettsworth, Louisiana. He learned how to play guitar in Louisiana, and made his way to Chicago in 1957 where he won a recording contract with Artistic Records. He then became a session guitarist for Chess Records and recorded with Junior Wells on Delmark Records before striking out on his own, eventually becoming an American music icon. Today the reigning King of Chicago blues, Buddy is recognized as one of the greatest guitarists of all time. He has carried on the electric Chicago blues tradition forged by such greats as Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf, and in the process he has deeply inspired the likes of Jimi Hendrix, Keith Richards and many others: Eric Clapton has called him the "greatest guitar player alive." He has been honored as a living legend by the Kennedy Center.

12. JOHNNY IGUANA

is one of the most accomplished blues piano players in Chicago today. He was raised in Philadelphia where he led his own bands since he was a teenager before moving to New York City. It was there that Johnny was hired by Junior Wells at age twenty-three; he followed Junior to Chicago where he has lived ever since. He recorded and toured the world with Junior for three years and has toured or recorded with Buddy Guy, Otis Rush, Koko Taylor, Carey Bell, Lf. Ed, Otis Clay, Lonnie and Ronnie Brooks, Sugar Blue and many more.

13. VINCENT BUCHER

learned to play the harmonica at the age of sixteen. He was quickly recognized as a blues harp player of extraordinary talent and began accompanying blues greats including Louisiana Red, Jimmy Johnson, Sonny Rhodes and others. He has led his own groups for over three decades and has played extensively with Blues, Roots and African artists throughout Europe, Africa and the United States. Considered one of the most accomplished harmonica players anywhere, he is also a singer, composer, songwriter and arranger who uses his unique versatility and experience to explore the kinship between African blues and the Blues. A founding member of Heritage Blues Orchestra, he was nominated for a Grammy Award in 2013 for his harp work on their debut album.



2. MIKE AVERY

blues roots run deep. Mike grew up on the West Side of Chicago in the same building as his cousin, the blues titan Magic Sam. As a teenager, he enjoyed the pecks, the Blues regular backyard barbecues, which performers like Otis Clay, Tyrone Davis, and Betty Wright would often attend and play blues for the other partygoers. In the mid-1970s, Mike began singing at the Majestic Lounge on 14th and Pulaski with the house blues bands, Scotty and the Rib Taps and Johnny B. Moore. He spent much of his career focused on creating R&B and soul music, but his heart has always been with the blues. "I'm not on the blues circuit, but that's where my roots are. I couldn't deny it if I wanted to. Giving me a good blues tune to sing is like taking me back home."

6. BORN IN 1973, OMAR COLEMAN

isn't afraid to cross genre lines. This harmonica player and vocalist is rooted in the Chicago blues tradition, claiming deep admiration for Junior Wells, Little Walter, Sonny Boy Williams (both of them!), and Snooky Pryor, yet he also draws from R&B, folk, funk, soul, and gospel to create his distinctive, intoxicating sound. Still early in his career, Omar's music represents an exciting new direction that the blues are taking as it evolves and grows into the next generation.

10. JOHN PRIMER

borrowed a guitar at the age of eight and learned how to play by listening to Jimmy Reed, Muddy Waters, Little Milton, Elmore James, and B.B. King on his grandmother's radio in Camden, Mississippi. In 1963, at the age of eighteen, John set off for Chicago and quickly became a respected force in the South and West Side blues scenes. In 1974 he joined the house band at Theresa's Lounge, which allowed him to play with the architects of the Chicago sound. He was recruited by a series of blues legends over the following decades, playing in the bands of Willie Dixon, Magic Slim and Muddy Waters, who was his mentor and father figure. In 1995, John broke out on his own with a debut album that established him as one of the premier living practitioners of traditional electric blues. John's centennial tribute to Muddy Waters was nominated for a Grammy Award in 2016.

14. FELTON CREWS

impressive range and musical flexibility led him to be placed in high demand among the world's top musician across multiple genres. When Miles Davis recorded his comeback album, *The Man With the Horn*, Felton was the first bassist he called, and in 1986, he joined Miles' touring band. Felton has also played with soul and blues artists such as Otis Clay, Otis Rush, Junior Wells, Son Seals, Billy Boy Arnold, and Charlie Musselwhite, among many others. He earned a Grammy nomination in 2010 for his work on the nutrient of our souls: the pulse of our spirit. It's the passport of our minds and the owner of our hearts. A World filled with love and creativity shall ring as one: a chord that resonates infinitely.

7. LEANNE FAINE

is a vocal skills data bank to her time in the church choir of Inkster, Michigan, where traditional gospel songs of the late Reverend James Cleveland and evangelist Shirley Caesar were strong influences in her life and musical career. At the age of fifteen, Leanne was a lead singer with the Southwestern Michigan State Choir under the direction of the late Mattie Moss Clark. She then relocated to Chicago and recorded with several groups and church choirs. There she met the Grammy Award-winning Reverend Alton Branson and the Thompson Community Singers, also known as the Tommies. As their premier lead vocalist, she sang on countless songs with the Tommies. A powerful voice in the traditional gospel style, Leanne continues to move and amaze her audiences.

11. BOSTON NATIVE BOB MARGOLIN

was born in 1949. At fifteen, he was inspired by Chuck Berry to join local rock and blues bands. In 1973, Muddy Waters recruited him and Bob toured the world, playing with the best for more than eight years. In 1975, he played on the Grammy-winning *The Muddy Waters Woodstock Album* alongside Paul Butterfield, Lewin Helm and Garth Hudson from The Band. The next year, he performed with Muddy at The Band's "Last Waltz," farewell concert immortalized by Martin Scorsese's documentary. After recording another handful of records with Muddy, three of which won Grammys, Bob left to start his own band. Over the years, he played on several Grammy-winning records, and in the mid-90s he began a second career as a music journalist. Bob's collaboration history reads like a list of "who's who in the blues," and he continues to back an astonishing array of musical talent.

15. KENNY "BEEDY-EYES" SMITH

grew up in Chicago in the house where Muddy Waters once lived. His father, Willie "Big Eyes" Smith, played drums in the Muddy Waters Band for decades, and he spent his childhood surrounded by blues icons. Receiving numerous awards, including a Grammy, Kenny has made his name as an outstanding studio musician and performer. He is a master of the post-war Chicago blues style, but his remarkable flexibility as a drummer has allowed him to play many different styles with a long, impressive list of artists. Among his many collaborators and friends are such names as Honeyboy Edwards, Pinetop Perkins, Buddy Guy, Billy Boy Arnold, Taj Mahal, Junior Wells, Koko Taylor, Muddy Waters, Keb Mo', Louisiana Red, and Jimmy Rogers. To name but a few.

"Obviously Chicago blues is the foundation for what the Stones did and do, and they have very respectfully and generously acknowledged that ever since," says Skoller. "We're really trying to in a sense bring those songs back home, as to what would happen if Muddy Waters or Howlin' Wolf or Sonny Boy Williamson or Little Walter or Willie Dixon interpreted these songs, or wrote these songs. What would they sound like?"

Now we know.

BILL DAHL