

Blues Abusers

BAND STORY

"

Dennis McCormick, bass player for the group founded the Blues Abusers in 2002 for the 1st annual East Tawas Blues Festival. The Blues Abusers have performed at the event seven times, winning the 1st annual Blues Challenge in 2005. The Blues Abusers competed in the 2006 state IBC Traverse City, Mi. They are scheduled to appear again this year at the East Tawas Blues Festival in August.

The Blues Abusers are members of the Mid-Michigan Northwest Blues Circuit.

The blues abusers do blues cover from contemporary to classic.

Ron Tucker - Harp; vocals

Crain Hill - lead guitar

Dennis McCormick - bass

Ted McCormick, rhythm guitar, vocals

Don Jack - Drums; percussion

"



LATEST NEWS

Keep it to Yourself

Sonny Boy II Told His Sisters "Keep It To Yourself" *But They Told Me His Best-kept Secret*

By William E. Donoghue AKA 'Fessor Mojo

Ya Gotta Wonder. What's a best-selling author of mutual fund guides (moi!) doing producing a documentary on a mysterious, hard-drinking, hard-loving, hard-living, harp-playing Delta bluesman who died 32 years ago? Heck, I can't carry a tune in a briefcase much less play a harp.

The subject of my upcoming book and video documentary is the most loved, least understood and most under-celebrated blues genius of all time. Nearly every blues record executive, delta blues musician and blues expert I have met has named instinctively Sonny Boy Williamson II as their favorite blues musician. As a matter of fact Barry Lee Pearson Author of "Sounds So Good To Me; The Bluesman's Story" confided in me that of the 230 blues interviews he has studied Sonny Boy

STATS

Visits	Plays
746	0
Streams	Downloads
0	0

Featured Songs

Williamson II was the most mentioned other bluesman. The ironic humor and revealing autobiographical content of his lyrics, the lonesome and erotic sound of his harp playing, the brilliance of his improvisations, and the mysteries of his life's story draw you immediately into the spell of his seductive web.

You know that the world hasn't forgotten Sonny Boy if no less than five new CD reissues have been released in the past two years, one of which, *Deep Harmonica Blues*, contains some of Sonny Boy's worst recordings (with Baby Boy Warren), which was for a time this Spring the best-selling blues CD in Europe (according to Red Lick). Sonny Boy's legacy is alive today but few know much about the man and his life's story is more fascinating than his music (and much of his best music is, in my opinion, still to be released.) *The Web Is Woven Tightly*

The standard story most commonly told about Sonny Boy Williamson II emerged primarily from a series of interviews he did, mostly with *Blues Unlimited* in 1963-65 in Europe. I have yet to find evidence of a substantive original interview of Sonny Boy by an American blues writer. He is referenced everywhere only in the most respectful but superficial terms with little follow-up research.

Sonny Boy, at the time, was clearly the star of the 1963 and 1964 American Negro (Folk) Blues Festivals. Along with Willie Dixon (the talent coordinator) and Horst Lippman (the promoter), he toured Europe during those two autumns along with Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Lightnin' Hopkins, Lonnie Johnson, Sleepy John Estes, Big Joe Williams, Otis Spann and a select cast of blues legends playing their most brilliant music with each other. Sonny Boy Williamson was the acknowledged and revered star of the tour. When he returned to Britain to tour the college circuit on his own with a very young Eric Clapton and the Yardbirds hanging on for dear life as his backup band, he extended his legend.

He recorded not only with his fellow legends Memphis Slim, Hubert Sumlin and Matt "Guitar" Murphy but also with the Clapton-era Yardbirds, the Animals and, on his final day in England, Jimmy Page, Brian Auger & The Trinity and two jazz sax players! He returned home to die a month later in his home of Helena Arkansas but not before returning to the jukes and his beloved King Biscuit Time radio show and a final jam with Levon & The Hawks (yes, the folks who became The Band) who told the story in a memorable interview segment of "The Last Waltz." movie. Sonny Boy died in sleep in his humble apartment on May 25, 1965. The rumor is that, had he lived but four months longer, he would have been a member of The Band (then The Hawks) when they joined Bob Dylan. One can only wonder if Dylan would have been cheered rather than booed in 1966 if he had Sonny Boy with him on that tour. The mind boggles.

The "official" story was that he was born in the 1890s as Aleck Ford, illegitimate son of Millie Ford, who married his step-father, Jim Miller (identified on Sonny Boy's death certificate as "Jim Williamson"), and was nicknamed "Rice". So he was known to his black contemporaries as "Rice" Miller. He claimed that he had been the first to use the stage name "Sonny Boy Williamson" and that John Lee Williamson (Sonny Boy I, 1914-1947) had stolen the name from him when Sonny Boy I recorded "Good Morning Little School Girl" for Bluebird in 1937. "I'm the original Sonny Boy, the only Sonny Boy. There ain't no other," he told fascinated British interviewers.

This is the story that emerged in various forms (he and his family gave a dozen different birth dates for him and he lived under a dozen names and nicknames) in the liner notes and articles on which his legend was told. Some experts even warned researchers that he would not talk about his past and that the true facts would never be known. The blues world's attention quickly turned to the "rediscoveries" of Mississippi John Hurt, Skip James, Son House and others as the folk blues revival period began. With Sonny Boy dead and so many legends living, the search for Sonny Boy II's story came to a screeching halt until 1995. *The Legend Is Set in Stone*

"Rice", Sonny Boy II, did not get into a recording studio until 1951, when Lillian McMurry of Jackson MS's Trumpet Records recorded a remarkable series of classics ("Eyesight To The Blind" which would later show up as part of The Who's rock opera, "Tommy"; "Dust My Broom" with "Elmo" James; "Mighty Long Time"; "Nine Below Zero"; and "Too Close Together." In 1955 Chess/Checker bought his contract and launched a career which included "Don't Start Me Talkin'", "Help Me", "Keep It To Yourself," "Your Funeral and My Trial," "Fattenin'" "Frogs For Snakes," "Bring It On Home" and his European theme song "Bye Bye Bird."

Lillian McMurry had a headstone placed on his grave in 1980

Limin monument had a headstone placed on his grave in 1900 which read: "Aleck Miller, Better Known As "Willie" Sonny Boy Williamson, Born Mar. 12, 1905, Died June 23, 1965, Son of Jim Miller and Millie Miller, Internationally Famous Harmonica and Vocal Blues Artist Discovered and Recorded By Trumpet Records, Jackson Miss. From 1950 To 1955," The details were based on the recollections of Sonny Boy's sister Julia Barner and Mary Ashford and Mattie Williamson, his widow. The details are not even close to the amazing truth. Flash Ahead To August 12, 1995

Raised in West Chester, Pennsylvania, a Philadelphia PA suburb, I discovered the ironic titles of Sonny Boy II's "Don't Start Me Talkin'" and "Your Funeral and My Trial" at a local record store in the late '50s. Soon I had hundreds of Chess 45s. From there I became your typically obsessed blues, jazz and rock record collector with a lifelong passion for music. In the late eighties I discovered the rich and unexplored treasure trove of vintage music videos and, through my camera man, films. In 1995, I had decided to produce my own amateur documentary of the birth of rock and roll.

August 1995, "Elvis Week," found me in the heart of the blues country, Memphis Tennessee. Discovering the Delta was not where I thought it was (near the mouth of the Mississippi) but in Northwestern Mississippi just south of Memphis, I sought out a guide. Luck lead me to Jim O'Neal, co-founder of Living Blues Magazine and through him to the homes of Julia Barner and Mary Ashford, Sonny Boy's last two living sisters.

Sitting in their living rooms I heard first hand stories of Robert Johnson, Elmore James and, of course, Sonny Boy II and their relationship with him. He was the "baby" of the family, the youngest of Millie Miller's 21 children, the only musician in the family and his name was Alex. They called him "Sonny" or "Rice." Sanctified members of the Church, his sisters loved and missed him dearly but disapproved of his itinerant life as a bluesman. The Tragedy

On October 11, 1995 both of Sonny Boy II's sisters perished in the same house fire at Mary's in the night. A niece of Sonny Boy's called to tell me of their death and asked naively, "Are you writing a book on my Uncle Sonny?" The idea was tempting and I filed the thought away. James Cotton and the Sonny Boy Blues Society had raised half the money for their burial at a fund raiser and I, out of appreciation for the sister's hospitality, made up the difference, much to the surprise of everyone involved. It was the beginning of a close relationship with his family.

The Quest

I started researching Sonny Boy's life. In the process I assembled almost complete sets of Living Blues, Blues & Rhythm, Juke Blues, and various other blues magazines that, I soon discovered, along with record liner notes constitutes the richest prime resources of history of the blues.

It became obvious that the same confusing and under researched story was being told and retold in almost every interview. I slowly dug to the original interviews and began to understand the limitations and misunderstandings that resulted in the mixed message stories.

So I went back to the sources and scheduled a trip to Helena Arkansas to interview his neighbors, friends, fans and fellow musicians. It was here that I sensed that something very special was about to happen. In my initial interviews, I sensed Sonny Boy's true story was grander, more fascinating and more newsworthy than was justified to videotape on my amateur equipment. I canceled the interviews and returned a week later with a professional TV cameraman. That was the smartest move I have ever made.

A Black "Gone With The Wind"

"Rice" Miller's story was to reveal itself piece by piece. Every person who had been in his presence had an indelible impression of him. There were surprisingly few, if any, contradictions between stories. Each fact and impression was not only clear but reliable and added to the story. The stories began to weave together and with each additional interview (I have interviewed 40 people to date), cinematic moments with great dramatic impact emerged.

Sonny Boy was a lay preacher, "Reverend Blue", wandered the Delta with a brace of harps across his chest on once occasion drawing an entire congregation out of a church. Soon, this mysterious stranger apparently became an escaped convict who became an international blues star using another man's name. The man, the personification of Legba, the Hoodoo master of the crossroads, literally the intermediary

the hoodoo master of the crossroads, literally the intermediary between the secular and the profane, blows his harp and jail doors open, tornadoes tear down the jail and he walks off into the whirlwind.

Along the way he has memorable encounters with Robert Johnson (who allegedly died in his arms), Eric Clapton (recording his first guitar solo), Robert Jr. Lockwood (Johnson's stepson), harp legends and students James Cotton, Little Walter, (Sonny Boy Junior) Parker, Junior Wells, and Howlin' Wolf, Recording executives including Trumpet Records' Lillian McMurry, Arhoolie Records' Chris Strachwitz, Delmark Records' Bob Koester, and Chess Records' Chess brothers, and fellow bluesmen Muddy Waters, Buddy Guy, B. B. King (Sonny Boy gave him his first gig and radio exposure), Howlin' Wolf (Sonny Boy was married to his sister), Elmore James (including joining him on the classic original "Dust My Broom") and, of course, his King Biscuit Entertainers Pinetop Perkins, Joe Willie Wilkens, Peck Curtis, Robert Jr. Lockwood, Dudlow Taylor, and host, the legendary "Sunshine" Sonny Payne, who still hosts the show 56 years after its inception in 1941.

Sonny Boy was the inspiration for many of the English blues stars of the 1960s. Why? Because he made a deal with, not the devil, but the Lord to play his harp every day of his life. In the Delta there were many places to jam but in England in the 1960s it took his manager's skills to find enough bands to allow him to keep his pact with the Lord. Hence the Moody Blues' first album would include "Bye Bye Bird", Led Zeppelin (with Jimmy Page) would include "Bring It On Home To Me", Ten Years After would record a classic "Help Me" and The Who would include "Eyesight To The Blind" in "Tommy." Sonny Boy's mark was everywhere.

Oh yes! The "lies" he told. We must deal with the "lies" he told on both continents. Our research tends to demonstrate that most of the "lies" turned out to have a large element of that rare commodity "the truth." For example, the claim that he recorded in 1929 for Ralph Lembo in Itta Bena, Mississippi who discovered Ishman Bracey and others. We found a source who told us that Sonny Boy, using that name as early as 1932, told him in 1932 he was going to audition for Lembo the next week! In fact, we found evidence that Sonny Boy attempted to get record contracts on six different occasions for six different companies -- Bluebird, Decca (?), Bullet, Vocalion (through H. C. Spier who discovered Robert Johnson), and whomever Lembo would have forwarded him to. Sonny Boy's Best-Kept Secret

But it was the "Big Lie" that took us by surprise. Sonny Boy claimed that he was "an 1800s' man" and that was the evidence that he was much older than John Lee Williamson who had "stolen" his stage name "Sonny Boy Williamson" from him. When Sonny Boy II died even his death certificate prolonged his claim that his father's name was "Jim Williamson." He recorded "The Story of Sonny Boy Williamson" for Storyville Records in Copenhagen in 1963 in which he proclaims "I was born, 1897, in a little town, Glendora, Mississippi ..." That claim raised a lot of unanswered questions "Why was Sonny Boy not recorded in the twenties during the classic blues era?", "Why was Sonny Boy with such a strong talent not recorded in the next era of the blues recordings the late 1930s?", and "Why was he so overlooked?"

The answer was found for us by Dr. David Evans, a longtime blues expert, who we retained to search the census records to trace Aleck "Rice" Miller's family. He found the family in 1900, with an "Allen Ford" who was born in 1888, in 1910 with a "Willie Miller" (Willie Sonny Boy Williamson was the signature on Sonny Boy II's Trumpet Contracts on which he claimed he was born December 5, 1899) and reports that nine of Millie's eighteen children were still alive, and in 1920 with a seven year old "Alex Miller." Plausibly, depending on what you choose to believe, Sonny Boy II could have been any one of those people -- unless you had been with me on August 12, 1995 when I met Julia Barner and Mary Ashford, Sonny Boy's last two sisters.

The only one of the three gentlemen listed above (Allen, Willie and Alex) who fits the description as the youngest of twenty-one children, the only musician in the family and is named Alex is, of course, Alex. That means that if he was seven on February 2, 1920, the date of the census, Alex "Rice" Miller was probably born in 1912, only two years before John Lee Williamson and one year before Robert Johnson. Bingo! We have found one key to Sonny Boy's story. While he looked to be over seventy when he died in 1965, he was only 53! Now rethink his history and his age a the key points in his life.

Sonny Boy was not recorded in the twenties because he was too young, in the late thirties because there was another artist named "Sonny Boy Williamson" and later because he insisted on using the other man's name on his radio show. His claim to being significantly older than John Lee Williamson is a lie. As to Robert Johnson, one must ask "If they were contemporaries and both playing at Three Forks the fateful night of Johnson's poisoning, were they rivals for the same married woman? If so...? (use your imagination)"

We have not dealt yet with the mysteries of the friendly but troubled relationship between the two Sonny Boys, the amazingly short time that he was on King Biscuit Time the radio show for which he was famous and which sold an astonishing amount of Biscuit Flour and Sonny Boy Corn Meal, the truth of what happened the night Robert Johnson died, and why Sonny Boy played in Chicago (almost always as "Sonny Boy Williams") so seldom when his records were outselling Muddy Waters'.

There is much to know about this man who was playing amplified harp with an electric guitarist on KFFA radio's "King Biscuit Time" as early as 1941 while Muddy Waters was recording acoustically for the Library of Congress (now who invented "Chicago Blues"?), who taught and inspired so many classic bluesmen, who created such a unique and plaintive harp sound no one has been able to recreate it today, whose career spans the history of modern blues.

"So, Bill, What Are You Going To Do With This Information?"

A video documentary on Sonny Boy is the obvious end product of this research. So is a major *book on the life and times of this fascinating rascal. Beyond that, there seems to be a story here which begs for a screenplay. We started, however with a first installment of his story, a Special Collectors' Preview Edition of "'Fessor Mojo's 'Don't Start Me To Talkin'". I don't tell everything I know (this was written in September of 1996 and our research is ongoing) but I do invite you to contribute to the greatly expanded book I am now writing and have included a \$US100reward if you are "the first person to provide us with a lead to the solution of each of these Sonny Boy Mysteries" in the book.

My book can be ordered by calling in the U. S.
1-800-982-2455 or 1- 508-478-5997 or writing to Box 309,
Milford MA 01757 (\$US19.95 [\$Canada24.95] + \$3.00 S&H).
Visa or MasterCard Accepted. Be sure to include your
expiration date. Email for orders [http://www.
Sonnyboy@Donoghue.com](http://www.Sonnyboy@Donoghue.com). Editorial comments and
questions should be sent to me at RFCW94A@prodigy.com.
Sonny Boy Williamson II CD Discography

"You better cut it now. Because if you let it cool God damnit it won't be worth a damn."

Alex Miller (Sonny Boy Williamson II) "Take your hands out of my pocket. I ain't got nothing belong to you. "

Alex Miller (Sonny Boy Williamson II)
The Trumpet Years 1951-54

King Biscuit Time, Arhoolie CD310
Clownin' With The World, Alligator ALCD2700
Goin' In Your Direction, Alligator ALCD2803
Sonny Boy's Rhythm Peavine (Japan) PCD-//2183
From The Bottom - Trumpet Masters Volume Five Collectibles
COL-CD- 5244 (includes previously unreleased take of "From The Bottom")

Early Sideman Appearances

Chicago Blues Harmonicas, (Japan) PCD-7 (includes two unreleased Cobra sides by SBW and one with Charles Clark)
Excello Harmonica / Blues Variety, (Japan) P-Vine PCD2813/4 (Includes two sides with Baby Boy Warren)
Blues Hangover / Excello Blues Rarities (Japan) Excello CD 2002 (includes four sides with Baby Boy Warren)
Tampa Red Volume 15 Document DOCD-5215 (includes three sides with Willie "Sonny Boy" Williams)
Arkansas Blues , (Japan) PCD-3040 (includes four sides with Robert Dudlow Taylor and three with James "Peck" Curtis)
Sonny Boy & The Pals / Mississippi Breakdown! (Japan) PCD-2733 (includes the two Sonny Boy Williamson sides Trumpet leased to Ace)

The Chess Years 1955-64

Down & Out Blues(American) Chess/MCA CHD-31272
One Way Out (American) Chess/MCA CHD-9116
The Real Folk Blues (American) Chess/MCA CHD-9272
More Real Folk Blues (American) Chess/MCA CHD-9277

Bummer Road (American) Chess/MCA CHD-9324

American Chess Compilations of Chess Material

Sonny Boy Williamson His Best (1 CD) (American)
Chess/MCA CHD 9377
The Essential Sonny Boy Williamson (2 CDs) (American)
Chess/MCA CHD2- 9343
The Chess Years (4 CDs) (English) Chess/Charly CD RED
BOX - 1 (Now a bootleg)

Sideman Performance

Buddy Guy /The Complete Chess Studio Recordings
(American) Chess/MCA CHD2-9337 (includes "I Dig Your
Wig")

The American Folk Blues Festival Years 1963-65

American Folk Blues Festival Box Set (5 CDs - SBW on 3)
ECD-26100
The Harp From Down South CD 52018 (includes a unreleased
live "Bye Bye Bird")

The Storyville Sessions

Blues Masters Vol. 12 Storyville STCD8012
Portrait of a Blues Man Analogue Productions CAPR 3017
(Gold Audio Disc)
Keep It To Ourselves Alligator ALCD4787 (Still in stores)
Analogue Productions APB 036

The Giorgio Gomelsky Recordings

/Sonny Boy Williamson with The Yardbirds OP-CD-0125 (
CD#1 of Set)
/Sonny Boy Williamson LIVE! with The Animals CP-CD-0125
(CD#2 of Set)
Don't Send Me No Flowers Marmalade CD LIK 80 (with Brian
Auger, Jimmy Page, et al)

Sideman Performance

Living The Blues with Memphis Slim VG671 670408 (includes
live Fattenin' Frogs For Snakes from Blues Bar in Paris)

There is much more and startling material to be released from
Europe, Live AFBF concerts, the Storyville Sessions, in Paris
with Memphis Slim, the Document "Solo Harp" recording
(several SBW cuts), two songs with Otilie Patterson and
excellent live recordings live with Chris Barber and others
(some of his finest work), some of which I have archived on
video for a documentary in progress.

In addition there are quite a few sides from a 1963 Mercury
session with Josh White, some of which are very entertaining

East Tawas Blues Festival

Tawas Bay Blues Society is looking for Blues Artists for 2010...

<http://www.bluesbythebaytawas.com>

B.A.

For additional information please contact us
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