

12 WEEKS OF BLUES



*A Trip Through Forgotten Blues Treasures
by Walter Trout*



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SURVIVOR BLUES WAS MY WAY OF PAYING TRIBUTE

to forgotten blues treasures. I searched the rich history of the blues for little-known songs that still resonate with beauty, depth, and relevance. Each week, I will present a song from the album. I will tell you a bit about the original artist, and then present the original version along with our version so you can hear what we did. For us, it was not about copying the original, but allowing the music to speak to us and play it the way we feel it. This is a labor of love for me and I hope you will enjoy this trip through the rich history of the blues.

- *Walter Trout*



“ME, MY GUITAR, AND THE BLUES”

Jimmy “Fast Fingers” Dawkins

(October 24th 1936 – April 10th 2013)



Dawkins was born in Mississippi, and moved to Chicago in 1955 like so many people from the South did. He gained a reputation as a session musician, and in 1969, thanks to the efforts of his friend, Magic Sam, his first album was released. He is generally considered to have been a practitioner of the “Westside Sound” of Chicago blues. “Me, My Guitar, and the Blues”, is the title track of an album he released in 1997. I consider this song one of the most beautiful and iconic blues songs of all time.

[Listen to the Original Song](#)

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“BE CAREFUL HOW YOU VOTE”

Sunnyland Slim

(Albert Luandrew, September 6th , 1906 – March 17, 1995).



He was born in Mississippi and moved to Chicago to pursue his dream of making a living as a blues pianist. He played with Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Robert Lockwood, Jr., and Little Walter. His first recording as a singer was in 1946, and he continued performing until his death. In the later 60s, he played piano on the track, "Turpentine Moan" with my old band, Canned Heat. Canned Heat backed Slim on a record he released in 1968, which also featured Mick Taylor. Slim's "Be Careful How You Vote" spoke to me immediately, and I feel that people on both sides of the political spectrum can relate to it. I consider it quite profound.

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“WOMAN DON'T LIE”

Luther “Snake Boy” Johnson

(August 30th , 1941 – March 18, 1976)



Johnson was born in Davisboro, GA, where he started as a guitarist in gospel groups, but then gravitated toward the blues, and relocated to Chicago in the early 60s. Here he backed up Elmore James and Muddy Waters among others. He recorded his debut album in 1969 and released his final album the year he died as a thirty-four-year old.

I was attracted to the groove and the feel of this song. We decided to add a bit of funk to the original groove. We brought in the amazing vocalist Sugaray Rayford to help me sing this one.

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“SADIE”

Theodore Roosevelt “Hound Dog” Taylor

(April 12, 1975 – December 17, 1975).



Taylor was born in Natchez, Mississippi. He moved to Chicago in 1942. He was famous among guitar players for having six fingers on both hands. The extra fingers were rudimentary and could not be moved. One night, while drunk, he cut off the extra digit on his right hand using a straight razor. He started performing in Chicago in small clubs in 1957. He performed with Little Walter and Koko Taylor among others. In 1971, his debut album, *Hound Dog Taylor and the HouseRockers*, was the first release on Alligator Records, which Bruce Iglauer initially created specifically to showcase Taylor. After the release, Taylor toured nationwide and performed with Muddy Waters, Freddy King, Big Mama Thornton and others. Taylor's most famous song, "Give Me Back My Wig," has been covered by numerous artists (yours truly included – it is on my album *Hardcore*). I was drawn to the song, "Sadie" because of the groove and the guitar lick that the song is built on. I also thought the lyrics told a great story of a broken relationship.

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“PLEASE LOVE ME”

B.B. King

(Riley B. King – September 16, 1925 – May 14, 2015).



What can I say about B.B. King? In my opinion, he is the greatest blues man of all time. Truly the king of the blues. His singing and guitar playing set the bar for everyone else. I met him when I was sixteen and he talked to me for over an hour.

That meeting completely changed the trajectory of my life. I went home that night and told my mother: “I’m going to be a blues guitarist.” I have been on that path ever since.

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“PLEASE LOVE ME” CONTINUED

B.B. King

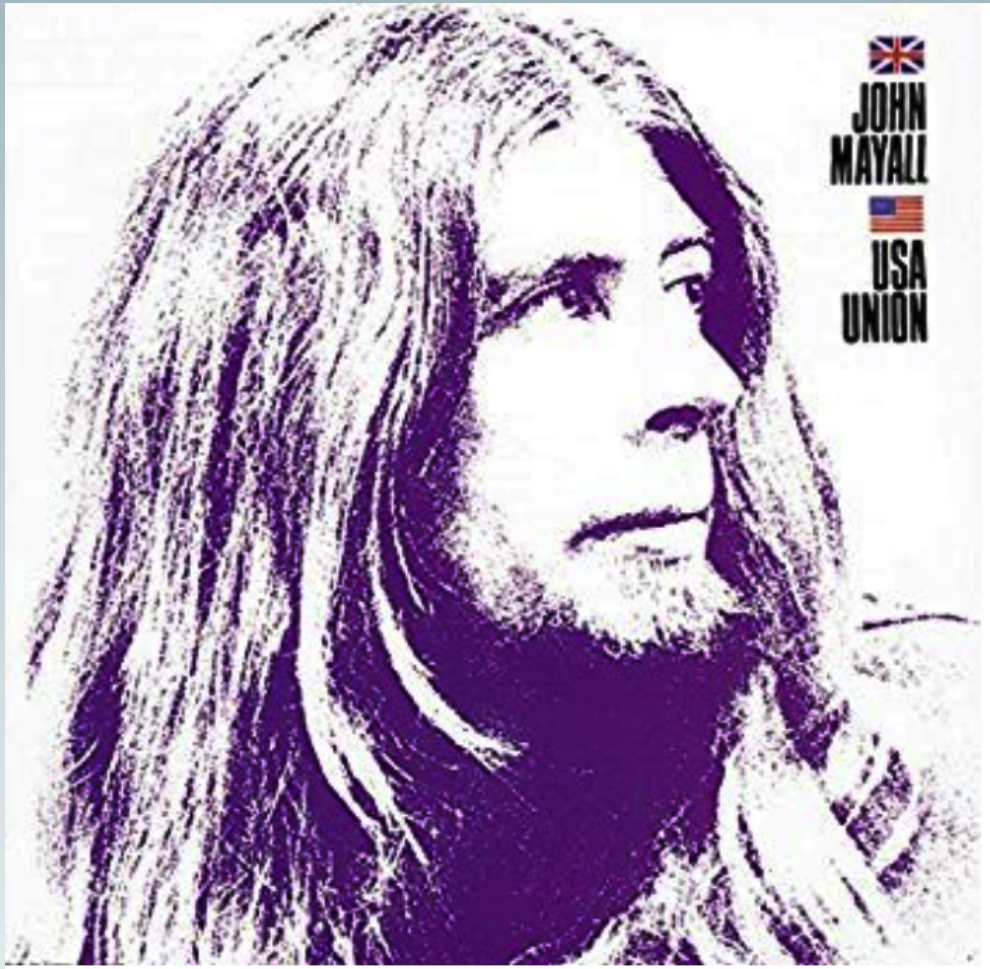
He was born on a cotton plantation in Berclair, Mississippi. In this youth, he worked on a cotton gin in Indianola, MS. He was originally attracted to music in church, and the story goes that he was given his first guitar by his cousin, blues singer Bukka White. In 1946, King followed Bukka White to Memphis, TN, where he landed a job at Memphis radio station WDIA. He worked there as a singer and disc jockey, and that is where he was given the nickname: Beale Street Blues Boy – later shortened to Blues Boy, and finally to B.B. He started recording in 1949, and many of his early recordings were produced by Sam Phillips, who later started Sun Records. He began touring and recording relentlessly. In 1956, he did 342 concerts and three recording sessions. I consider his album, *Live at the Regal*, recorded in 1964, to be one of the greatest live albums ever made. I could go on and on about his career and the incredible influence he had on every musician of my generation influence he had on every musician of my generation who ever picked up the guitar and attempted to play the blues, but suffice to say: he stands above us all. B.B. recorded this song in 1953 and I was drawn to the raw powerful quality of this early recording by Mr. King. You can hear how the guitar is pushing his amplifier to the point where it seems ready to explode, and the band is swinging like a locomotive, and young B.B.’s vocal spoke to me.

[Listen to the Original Song](#)
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“NATURE’S DISAPPEARING”

John Mayall

(born November 29, 1933).



Born in Macclesfield, England, he grew up listening to his father’s large record collection. From an early age, John Mayall was drawn to the sound of American music—particularly the blues—and he taught himself to play the piano, guitar, and the harmonica. He moved to America in 1969, and has lived on the West Coast in California since then.

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“NATURE’S DISAPPEARING”

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(born November 29, 1933).



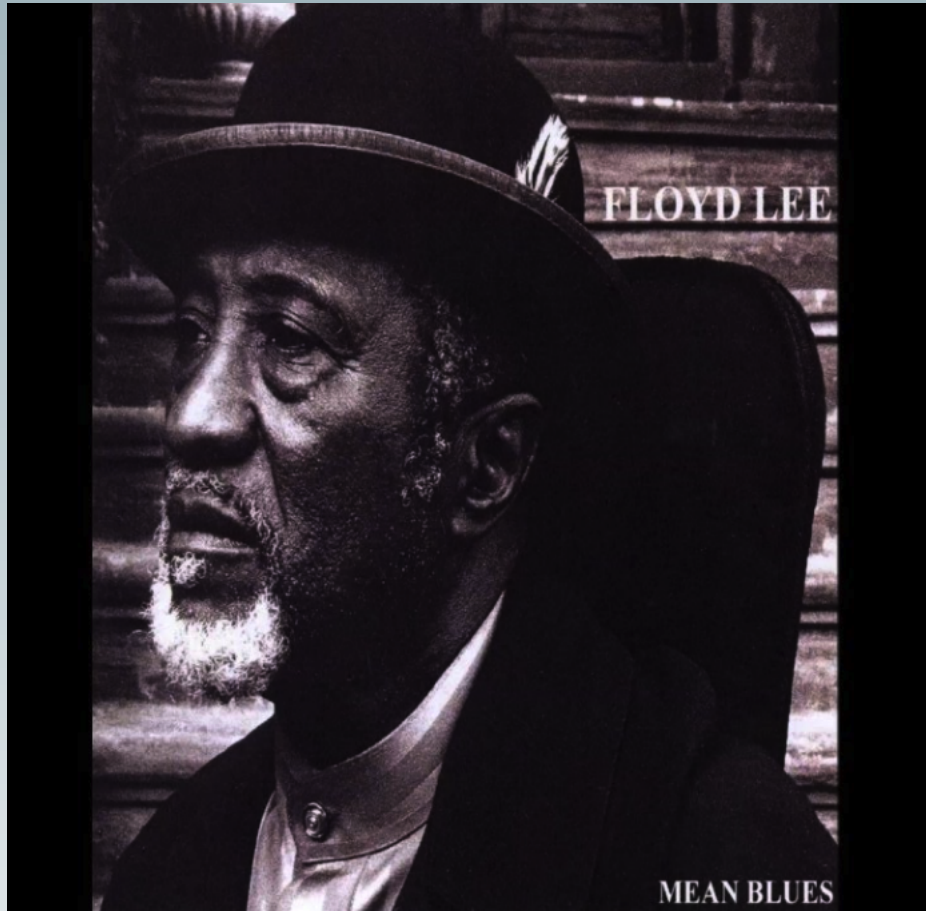
I first met Mayall, in 1981, when I was a member of Canned Heat and we did three shows with Mayall and his band. We hit it off immediately and bonded over our love of blues music. He gave me the opportunity to do some shows as a special guest with him and his newly reformed original Bluesbreakers lineup consisting of Mick Taylor, John McVie, and Colin Allen. Later that year, he toured with Canned Heat as a special guest. In 1984, I joined his new lineup of the Bluesbreakers which also featured guitarist, Coco Montoya. I toured with Mayall for almost five years and was able to record three albums with him. He has since appeared as a guest on several of my albums, and we maintain a close friendship to this day. At age 85, Mayall continues recording and touring and remains a vital force in the blues world. I was drawn to this song because of the message in the lyrics. It remains even more relevant today than in 1970, when Mayall recorded it.

[Listen to the Original Song](#)
[Listen to Our Verison](#)

“RED SUN”

Floyd Lee

(Ted Williams, 1933).



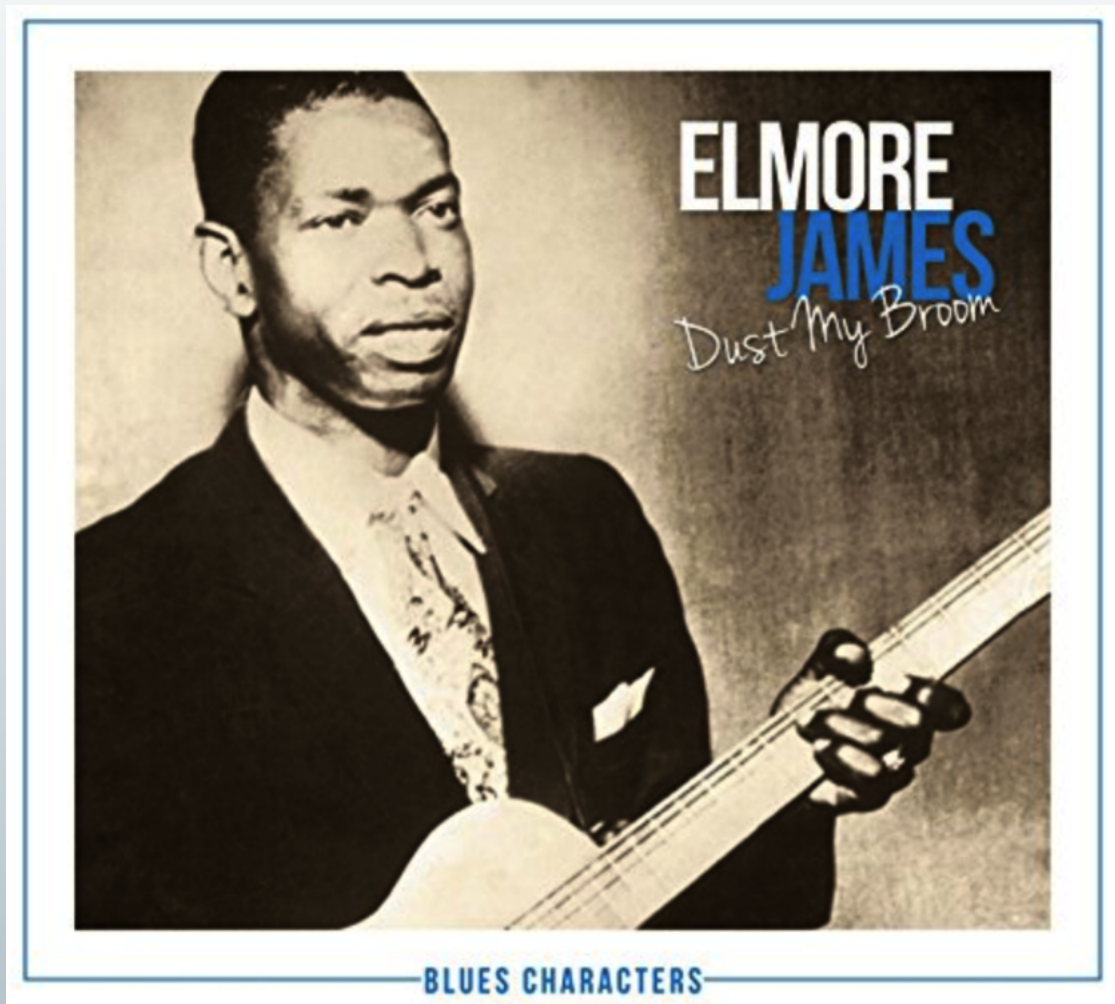
Williams was born in Lamar Mississippi. He learned to play the blues while staying with his aunt in Memphis from his father, Guitar Floyd. He started wandering around the country playing music, before he, in 1972, moved to Harlem, New York, where he played in the subways of the city. He has played with various musicians including Jimmy Reed, Wilson Pickett, and Bo Diddley, as well as fronted his own band. The song, “Red Sun”, was written by bandmate, Canadian Joel Poluck. When I heard this song, I was completely floored by the lyrics and the groove. I knew I had to record it, because of how profoundly it spoke to me.

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“SOMETHING INSIDE OF ME”

Elmore James

(January 27, 1918 – May 24, 1963).



Born in Richland, Mississippi and started playing the diddley bow at age 12. He started performing in bands in the late 30s, and after a stint in the Navy in WWII, he teamed up with Sonny Boy Williamson and performed all over the South. In 1951, he released “Dust My Broom”, which started his solo career. He moved to Chicago in 1953, recording many classic songs and playing and touring until his premature death from a heart attack at age 45. This song has a true beauty and power both in James’ vocals and slide guitar playing. It is also quite different than a lot of his more well-known songs where he plays his patented “Dust-My-Broom-Slide-Intro,” and we tried to do this song in our own style.

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“IT TAKES TIME”

Otis Rush

(April 29, 1934 – September 29, 2018).



Born in Philadelphia, Mississippi and moved to Chicago, IL in 1949 and made a name for himself playing the blues clubs on the South and the West side. He started his recording career in 1956 with his classic song, “I Can’t Quit You Baby”. He is often credited with being one of the architects of the West Side

Guitar Style. I first met Otis, when I was in John Mayall’s band, and we did a tour of Europe together and appeared at many great venues and the Montreux Jazz Festival. He was a very kind and quiet person until he got on stage and roared like a lion. Being on that tour is one of my fondest memories. Rush was truly one of the greatest blues songwriters – having written many classics.

But this song, is not as well-known as lots of his other work. I was drawn to the groove at first, and then fell in love with the way Rush improvises with the traditional blues lyrical form. His lyrics here tell a story of a relationship gone wrong.

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“OUT OF BAD LUCK”

Magic Sam

(Samuel Gene Maghett - February 14, 1937 – December 1, 1969).



He was born in Grenada Country Mississippi, and moved to Chicago in 1956. At a recording session in 1957, his bass player coined his stage name Magic Sam – a creative take on his actual name. He recorded and performed until he died of a heart attack at age 32. Sam never really achieved widespread success, but for years, he has been revered and loved by blues fans – especially musicians. In the film, “The Blues Brothers”, Jake Blues dedicates the band’s performance of “Sweet Home Chicago” to “the late, great Magic Sam.” Sam was also one of the finest songwriters of the blues and this song is one of his lesser-known numbers. I was drawn to it both by the guitar lick that answers the vocal lines, and the lyrical content in which the singer may be down, but he’s “on his way back up again.” I guess that is something we can all relate to.

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“GOIN’ DOWN TO THE RIVER”

Mississippi Fred McDowell

(Fred McDowell January 12, 1906 – July 3, 1972).



McDowell was born in Rossville, Tennessee, where he started playing at dances at age 14. Trying to escape the hard farm work he moved to Memphis in 1926 to work at a mill. In 1928, he moved to Mississippi to pick cotton and he finally settled in Como, MS. He performed music at dances and picnics, but continued to work steadily as a farmer. In 1959, he was recorded by Alan Lomax. His 1969 album, I

Do Not Play No Rock ‘n Roll, featured him on an electric guitar and became a hit on FM radio.

Fred recorded many different versions of this song, and on my version I have used two verses from one and one verse from another. Robby Krieger of the Doors joined us on our version playing slide guitar. We arranged the song in more of a Muddy Waters style and we played it live in the studio. McDowell’s version stays on one chord and is a prime example of the effective drone in blues music that makes old blues so magical.

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“GOD’S WORD”

J.B. Lenoir

(March 5, 1929 – April 29, 1967).



Born in Monticello, Mississippi. During the 1940s, Lenoir worked with Sunny Boy Williamson II and Elmore James. He moved to Chicago in 1949 and began recording in 1951. His band included pianist, Sunnyland Slim. He died at age 38 of internal bleeding relating to injuries he had suffered in a car crash which had not been properly treated in a hospital. Lenoir was a prolific songwriter, also wrote many topical and politically influenced songs. His most well-known song is a blues standard, “Talk To Your Daughter.” I first learned of Lenoir’s music when I was a member of John Mayall’s band. Mayall cites Lenoir as his favorite blues artist and major influence. Pained by Lenoir’s early and likely avoidable death, Mayall wrote and recorded two songs about him. I spent many hours in the back of a van listening to and discussing Lenoir’s music with Mayall. Lenoir’s original version of this song was recorded with just him, his guitar, and almost no time signature. The depth of the lyrics and the emotion of his delivery really drew me to this song.

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