

A Little About the Blues

Furry Lewis (by Reverend Keith A. Gordon, About.com Guide)

Bridging the gap between the early acoustic blues of the Mississippi Delta of the 1920s and the rediscovery of so-called "folk" or country blues by white audiences in the '60s, Furry Lewis was both a unique stylist and a throwback to the sound of an earlier era. Equally capable of playing guitar with an original fingerpicked style as well as delivering a mean slide-guitar sound, Lewis was a charismatic storyteller and a flamboyant showman that performed naturally with skill and humor.

Born Walter Lewis in Greenwood, Mississippi in the Delta, the exact year of his birth remains in question, and Furry himself was known to purposely confuse the issue. His family moved to Memphis when Lewis was around seven years old, and he made the city his home until his death in 1981. He picked up his "Furry" nickname as a child. Lewis is said to have fashioned his first guitar from pieces that he found around the family home, and taught himself to play the instrument with an unusual fingerpicked technique.

Lewis left home as a teen, traveling with medicine and minstrel shows, where his natural storytelling ability and innate charisma allowed him to charm audiences. An accident with a train in 1917 cost Lewis his leg, and he would wear a peg leg for the rest of his life. Lewis came to the attention of Vocalion Records, which brought the country bluesman to Chicago in April 1927 to cut six sides with guitarist Landers Walton (ne Waller).

Furry would return to Chicago in October to record seven more songs unaccompanied. Among this baker's dozen were enduring country blues classics like "Rock Island Line," "Mr. Furry's Blues," and "Casey Jones Blues." None of the records sold particularly well at the time, and Furry would return home to Memphis. He would subsequently record a number of sides for RCA Victor in 1928, including "John Henry," "Kassie Jones," "Judge Harsh Blues," and "I Will Turn Your Money Green," all long-time staples of Furry's live performances.

When the Depression came along and performance opportunities for blues artists dried up, Lewis took a job with the Memphis Sanitation Department, sweeping up the refuse on Beale Street where he once performed. Although he would work for the city for over 30 years, Lewis continued to play on street corners and parks, sometimes accompanying friends like Memphis bluesmen Will Shade and Gus Cannon. Lewis also performed with the Memphis Jug Band at house parties.

When the late-1950s/early-60s "folk revival" occurred, Lewis was "rediscovered" by blues historian Sam Charters in 1959. With many of his contemporaries from the '20s having passed on, Lewis was quite a find for Charters. Furry possessed a wealth of knowledge of traditional songs and styles, coupled with a unique guitar style and no little amount of personality. Charters recorded Furry in Memphis for the Folkways label, releasing the self-titled Furry Lewis album in late 1959. (continued on back)

Davey J and the Jones Tones are a veteran band of four musicians, all with a distinctive style and personality that blends into a powerful whole. As bandleader, Davey J's approach to the blues is all about the shuffle, a style and tempo pioneered in acoustic Delta blues and electric Chicago blues. When the four-piece band gets its groove on, you can hear the foot-tapping acoustic-electric sounds from the era of rockabilly, Nashville country and western, early rock and roll, and of course, classic Chicago blues. And in the midst of the traditional shuffle tempos and rich vocals, Davey J also uses processing tools of the 21st century to add an edge to his acoustic guitar sound. So, as the Jones Tones perform songs that range from the 1930s Delta blues to the blues styles of our time, the band pays tribute to blues traditions as well as creating an original new sound.

Davey J (aka David Jones) is a native of Omaha, Nebraska. Calling himself a first-generation Midwesterner with family roots in Arkansas, David grew up hearing the sounds of soul, rock and roll, and folk from the 1960s and 70s, and is an avid listener and fan of several genres of music. After picking up a bit of piano and guitar as a child and teen, David's first band was "The Earplugs," a folk-punk band formed in 1982 when he was a college student in Iowa City, Iowa. He then taught high school in Las Vegas, Nevada, spent a lot of time songwriting, and after moving to Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1989, spent the decade of the 90s performing in several blues, reggae, and variety bands. The Jones Tones were originally formed in 1996 as a blues and urban folk band, and David kept the name when he completed a Ph.D. in English Studies and moved to Eau Claire in 2000. With the creative collaboration of a now-established core of musicians - Catya, Duffy Duyhuizen, and John LeBrun, Davey J and the Jones Tones remain a fixture in Western Wisconsin blues scenes, and their sound continues to grow.

The Jones Tones have two CDs that will be available at the Owen Park performance. The first CD was recorded in Minneapolis with the original urban folk sound, called "Jones Tones Featuring Davey J." The second CD is called "Bridgewater Blues," a live recording of a recent show in Chippewa Falls. David also released a CD with his primary band from the 90s, The Parsley Brothers, called "What is the Meaning of Parsley?" The Jones Tones original sound can be heard at www.myspace.com/daveyjandthejonestones.

The Jones Tones Upcoming Schedule

- 6/11 Open Air Festival of the Arts, Phoenix Park
 - 6/11 Dimi's in Stanley, Davey J solo
 - 6/23 Bottle and Barrel, Davey J solo
 - 7/9 Dimi's in Stanley, Davey J solo
 - 8/7 Blues on the Chippewa, Davey J solo
 - 8/7 Durand House, Davey J solo
- find more at amblues.com

Next Week (June 14) Howard Guitar Luedtke & Blue Max

One of the most versatile band's around, Howard "Guitar" Luedtke & Blue Max is a Western Wisconsin rock blues band, that performs all over Wisconsin and Minnesota. Many who have seen Howard and Blue Max have become fans of Howard's talented slide guitar playing and the band's rockin' electric blues sound.

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Pete Neuman Band
Ross William Perry Band
Catya & Code Blue, Combo Flambe
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Owen Park, Eau Claire

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*August 3 will be held at Phoenix Park.

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facebook.com/lucasandthesaints
- June 7 The Jonestones**
AMBlues.com
- June 14 Howard 'Guitar' Luedtke & Blue Max**
HowardLuedtke.com
- June 21 Left Wing Bourbon**
LeftWingBourbon.yolasite.com
- June 28 Sparky & Friends**
Facebook.com/SparkyAndTheWipers
- July 5 Jayson Collins Group**
- July 12 Code Blue with Catya & Sue**
Catya.net
- July 19 The Steve Meyer Band**
MySpace.com/SteveMeyerAndTheBluesDogs
- July 26 Deep Water Reunion**
MySpace.com/DWReunion
- Aug 2 *Pete Neuman and the Real Deal**
PeteNeuman.com
- Aug 9 The Love Buzzards**
LoveBuzzards.com
- Aug 16 The Sue Orfield Band**
SueOrfield.com
- Aug 23 Ross William Perry**
http://www.rosswilliamperry.com/
- Aug 30 Mojo Lemon**
MojoLemon.com

During the 1970s, Lewis became the Memphis "ambassador of the blues," increasing his popularity (and that of the country blues) through recordings, performances, and a series of appearances in films like the Burt Reynolds box office hit W.W. and the Dixie Dance Kings and on The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson. Playboy magazine ran a feature on Lewis, Joni Mitchell wrote the song "Furry Sings The Blues" about him, and hippie novelist Richard Farina named his 1960s-era novel Been Down So Long, Looks Like Up To Me for a line in Furry's song "I Will Turn Your Money Green."

In 1971 Lewis toured as part of The Alabama State Troupers Road Show, headlining with Memphis songwriter Don Nix and singer Jeanie Greene. One entire side of the resulting two-disc live album featured Lewis classics like "Furry's Blues" and "A Chicken Ain't Nothin' But A Bird." Lewis would continue to work with Nix, making appearances on several of the artist's albums. In 1972, Lewis toured as part of the Memphis Blues Caravan with Bukka White and Sleepy John Estes, among others, and would later also open for the Rolling Stones.

Lewis died of pneumonia in 1981 but, benefiting from consistent reissues and re-packaging of his recordings, the music of Furry Lewis continues to reach generation after generation of blues fans.

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Tuesday Night Bluesletter

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The Jones Tones



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