

A Little About the Blues

When **Esther Phillips**, (born Esther Mae Jones in Galveston, Texas) was an adolescent, her parents divorced, and she was forced to divide her time between her father in Houston and her mother in the Watts area of Los Angeles. Because she was brought up singing in church, she was hesitant to enter a talent contest at a local blues club, but her sister insisted and she complied. A mature singer at age fourteen, she won the amateur talent contest in 1949 at the Barrelhouse Club owned by Johnny Otis. Otis was so impressed that he recorded her for Modern Records and added her to his traveling revue, the California Rhythm and Blues Caravan, billed as 'Little Esther Phillips' (she reportedly took the surname from a gas station sign).

Her first hit record was "Double Crossing Blues", recorded in 1950 for Savoy Records. After several hit records with Savoy, including her duet with Mel Walker on "Mistrusting Blues", which went to number one that year, as did "Cupid Boogie". Other Phillips records that made it onto the U.S. Billboard R&B chart in 1950 include "Misery", "Deceivin' Blues", "Wedding Boogie", and "Faraway Blues". Few female artists, R&B or otherwise, had ever enjoyed such success in their debut year. Phillips left Otis and the Savoy label at the end of 1950 and signed with Federal Records.

But just as quickly as the hits had started, they stopped. Although she recorded more than thirty sides for Federal, only one, "Ring-a-Ding-Doo", charted; the song made it to number 8 in 1952. Not working with Otis was part of her problem; the other part was her drug usage. By the middle of the decade Phillips was chronically addicted to drugs.

In 1954, she returned to Houston to live with her father to recuperate. Short on money, she worked in small nightclubs around the South, punctuated by periodic hospital stays in Lexington, Kentucky, stemming from her addiction. In 1962, Kenny Rogers re-discovered her while singing at a Houston club and got her signed to his brother Lelan's Lenox label.

Phillips ultimately got well enough to launch a comeback in 1962. Now billed as Esther Phillips instead of Little Esther, she recorded a country tune, "Release Me," with producer Bob Gans. This went to number 1 R&B and number 8 on the pop listings. After several other minor R&B hits on Lenox, she was signed by Atlantic Records. Her cover of The Beatles' song "And I Love Him" nearly made the R&B Top Ten in 1965 and the Beatles flew her to the UK for her first overseas performances.

She had other hits in the 1960s on the label, but no more chart toppers, and she waged a battle with heroin dependency. With her addiction worsening, Phillips checked into a rehab facility. While undergoing treatment, she cut some sides for Roulette in 1969, mostly produced by Lelan Rogers. On her release, she moved back to Los Angeles and re-signed with the Atlantic label. A late 1969 gig at Freddie Jett's Pied Piper club produced the album Burnin'. She performed with the Johnny Otis Show at the Monterey Jazz Festival in 1970.

One of her biggest post-1950s triumphs was in 1972 with her first album for Kudu Records. The song penned by Gil Scott-Heron, "Home Is Where the Hatred Is," - an account of drug use — was lead track on From a Whisper to a Scream which went on to be nominated for a Grammy Award. When Phillips lost to Aretha Franklin, the latter presented the trophy to Phillips, saying she should have won it instead.

(continued on back)

Ellen Whyte has just released her fourth album, appropriately titled: Four Way Stop, a soaring achievement from an accomplished singer songwriter. Long time Portland, Oregon KINK FM 102 Blues Show radio personality, Bob Ancheta raved that it gave him "goose bumps!"

Ellen has fronted bands continuously now for 30 years, as she has three critically acclaimed albums in addition to the latest effort. She was captivated by music since she was a child growing up in Fort Lauderdale Florida. Leaving the humidity and the taffeta dresses of her accordion marching band behind, Ellen branched out to blue grass, gospel, rock, blues and jazz. Her eclectic tastes in music include heroes such as Ray Charles, Ella Fitzgerald, Joni Mitchell, and Bonnie Raitt.

Ellen is known for her astonishing vocals, as she gracefully moves among genres from blues to jazz to funk and ballads. Her percussive rhythm guitar work is well suited to her voice, and she plays solo, in duos and trios, up to a full nine piece band complete with a horn section. She's won numerous awards for her work, including consideration for two Grammy Award nominations in 1999.

Speaking of such, Grammy award producer Dennis Walker had this to say after working on the third CD, Standing at the Sunrise: "She not only sings like an angel, but brings her own styling and phrasing to every song that is completely individual. Thank God for Ellen Whyte who is one of the last few who can still sing blues and pop and jazz, and still stand up on a stage and sing big band standards with the best of them."

Ellen, guitarist Garry Meziere, and her husband John Mullin, have collaborated with veteran musicians—"The 'A' List Commandos," as Ellen likes to refer to them-- to produce a sophisticated, yet accessible sound that synchs up well with thoughtful and emotionally infused lyrics. In addition to the Northwest, Ellen tours in The Midwest and on the East Coast, and was a featured artist in the International Blues festival in Montreal.

The Sue Orfield Band writes and plays songs that resonate with blues, funk, rock, and countrified world-beat sounds. Their music grooves with high energy and unexpected improvisations, while their compelling melodies will move you, amuse you, and even touch you. SOB (as they call themselves) plays primarily instrumental music, but occasionally peppers in the haunting vocals of Randy Sinz and Dave Schrader. They have two CDs out entitled "Now Let Us Sing" and "BONKI!" The Sue Orfield Band is: Sue Orfield (tenor saxophone), Mike Schlenker (guitar), Randy Sinz (bass + vocals), and Dave Schrader (drums + vocals).

Ellen Whyte w/ the Sue Orfield Band Upcoming Schedule

8/20 Sunset Tavern, Black River Falls
7/22 Gelly's Pub, Stockholm

visit them online:
ellenwhyte.com
sueorfield.com

Next Week (August 24) Tommy Bentz

Tommy Bentz is a multi-instrumentalist who has performed and composed several album projects, commercials and recording sessions. He has recorded two albums of original music with his band, and has performed and shared the stage with the Temptations, Rufus Reid, Clark Terry, David Baker, Ira Sullivan, Willy Porter, Tim Mahoney and the Pat McGee Band.

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Tuesday Night Blues 2010

Owen Park, Eau Claire

Shows begin at 6:30 unless noted

In case of inclement weather, shows will be held just down the street at the Grand Theater, 102 West Grand Avenue.

June 1 Left Wing Bourbon

MySpace.com/LeftWingBourbon

June 8 The Pumps

ThePumpsBand.com

MySpace.com/ThePumpsBand

June 15 The Blues Dogs

MySpace.com/SteveMeyerAndTheBluesDogs

June 22 Pete Neuman and the Real Deal

PeteNeuman.com

June 29 Code Blue with Catya & Sue

Catya.net

July 6 Mojo Lemon

MojoLemon.com

MySpace.com/MojoLemonBluesBand

July 13 Dave Lambert

DaveLambertBand.com

July 20 Deep Water Reunion

MySpace.com/DWReunion

July 27 The Nitecaps

MySpace.com/TheNitecapsBand

Aug 3 *Young Blues Night with The Love Buzzards

(show begins at 7:00pm)

LoveBuzzards.com

MySpace.com/LoveBuzzardsBluesBand

Aug 10 South Farwell

MySpace.com/FarwellOnline

Facebook.com/SouthFarwell

Aug 17 Ellen Whyte w/ The Sue Orfield Band

EllenWhyte.com / SueOrfield.com

Aug 24 The Tommy Bentz Band

MySpace.com/TommyBentzBand

Aug 31 Howard 'Guitar' Luedtke & Blue Max

HowardLuedtke.com

If you'd like to sponsor Tuesday Night Blues, just talk to one of the CV Blues members at the park.

(Esther Phillips continued)

Taylor continued to cut albums with her until in 1975, she scored her biggest hit single since "Release Me" with a disco-style update of Dinah Washington's "What a Difference a Day Makes". It reached a high of a the Top 20 , and Top 10 in the UK. On November 8, 1975 she performed the song on an episode of NBC's Saturday Night hosted by Candice Bergen. The accompanying album of the same name became her biggest seller yet, with arranger Joe Beck on guitar, Michael Brecker on tenor sax, David Sanborn on alto sax, and Randy Brecker on trumpet to Steve Khan on guitar and Don Grolnick on keyboards.

She continued to record and perform throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, completing a total of seven albums on Kudu and four with Mercury Records, for whom she signed in 1977. In 1983, she charted for the final time on a tiny independent label, Winning with "Turn Me Out," which reached #85 R&B. She completed recording her final album a few months before her death, but it was not until 1986 that the label (Muse) released the record.

Phillips died at UCLA Medical Center in Carson, California in 1984, at the age of 48 from liver and kidney failure. Her funeral services were conducted by Johnny Otis. (Wikipedia)

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Tuesday Night Bluesletter

Aug 17, 2010 at Owen Park



Ellen Whyte

with The

SUE ORFIELD BAND



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