

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT



About the interviewer: Monte Adkison, aka "The Blues Stalker", has been a regular contributor for the Suncoast Blues Society's publication the "Twelve Bar Rag" and the website Lahoradelblues.com in Barcelona, Spain for over a decade. We are proud to have Monte as a contributor to Blue Monday.

Fillmore Flashback

Labor Day weekend of 2019 will long be remembered by Florida residents. As Hurricane Dorian bearing down on the Bahamas with monstrous 185 mph winds, storm weary Floridians began bracing for the worst as preparations began in anticipation of a Florida landfall. As the track became evident that the Gulf coast was going to be spared, the long-anticipated concert at the Palladium in St. Petersburg of the "Mushroom Brotherhood" with the popular Backtrack Blues Band opening got the green light to proceed. I was in dire need of a live music fix to take my mind off a Dorian dominated scene and the concert was a memorable experience and did not disappoint. Afterwards, I caught up with two of my favorite musicians, Chuck Ross aka Sonny Charles of the Backtrack Blues Band and B3 master Wayne Sharp of the Mushroom Brotherhood and caught up on their recent summer projects.

BS: Chuck, Backtrack has a new release coming out early in 2020 entitled "Your Baby Has Left" that I know that you are real proud of. Can you tell us about it?

CR: The new album is one that we are really feeling proud about. First, it consists of original songs written and arranged by the band. Then we were able to record at Big 3 studios and have access to their classic 2 inch tape machine. That was so cool to get back to tape again! I think it sounds much warmer and old school just like how all the greatest blues albums were made.

Next, our producer, George Harris, and stellar engineer, Pinky Beeman, did a great job of capturing our sound. They even let me run 4 old Tweed Fender amplifiers for harp ... a '59 Bassman, two vintage Princetons, and a '57 Champ. Every minute was a joy! I've never had so much fun recording.

Then we had our friend, Bruce Katz (Allman Brothers , Ronnie Earl) add Hammond B3 and piano. Latonya Oliver and Dana Merriwether sang sweet backup vocals . And the icing on the cake was going to Fame Studios in Muscle Shoals, Alabama to cut horn parts. Imagine that! Same studio as graced by Aretha, Duane, Wilson Pickett and so many others.

This is our 7th album and, I'm certain, it will be our best. We hope our blues friends will enjoy it!

BS: What a summer the band has had! In early June your band played the Utah Blues Festival in Salt Lake and Wayne Sharp joined you on B3 organ. Is that how the idea to book the "Mushroom Brotherhood" at the Palladium came about? By the way, thank you for a memorable night of music.

CR: . I've known Wayne Sharp for years though his tenure with the Michael Burks band . He's super talented and one of nicest cats I've ever known . When we were booked to play the Utah Blues Festival , I asked Wayne to perform with us . That was a good call. It was one of our finest live shows ever , and the festival producer said we were one of the best band's of the weekend . I'm not sure that was true ...with guys like Ronnie Earl and Mike Welch on the bill ... but it was a nice compliment!

Wayne and I often discussed his long friendship with Gregg Allman , Jaimoe and the Allman Brothers Band . So when he decided to put the Mushroom Brotherhood together , I offered to promote it at the Palladium Theater . It was a fantastic night of music and Wayne really delivered the goods on vocals and B3 organ . That was a truly fun night !

BS: The end of June took you and the band to Quebec, Canada to play the Festival de Blues Val D'Or. How was



that experience for Backtrack? You have played other festivals in Canada also?

CR: Backtrack has been fortunate to play lots of major blues festivals in Canada . Tremblant International Blues Festival , Trois-Rivieres en Blues, Donnacona Blues Festival , etc. The fans up there are so friendly and knowledgeable about blues music . They really dig more classic blues up there , that's not so influenced by rock music .

Our lead guitarist, Kid Royal, grew up in Ontario, so we feel like it's always a bit of a homecoming when we play Canada . The Eldorado Blues Festival in Val D'Or was our first time headlining a big blues festival in Canada . The crowd was wonderful... standing ovation and lots of noise !We loved it!



BS: In August, Backtrack played the Notodden Blues Festival in Norway. You have a lot of fans in Norway and have been there several times. How did the Norway connection become established and how was this year's Norwegian festival experience?

CR: What can I say about the Notodden Blues Festival ? Amazing ! It's one of the biggest and best blues festivals in Europe and it was a dream for us to play there. The Notodden manager , Jostein , and I know one another from the Memphis Blues Foundation and try and hook up at the BMA's each year . That's how the Notodden connection started .

One of Norway's top blues artists , JT Lauritsen , and his band ,The Buckshot Hunters , have also become great friends . That's how we were asked to play the Color Line Blues Cruise , sailing from Oslo to Germany and back . And we will return to the Blues Cruise in Norway on October 15 , 2020. We can't wait for that !

If you get a chance to visit Norway , I'd certainly encourage it . Beautiful country and gorgeous people , and they dig the blues . Everything is so clean and classy there ... lots of outdoor sculptures , art museums and amazing architecture. I've never seen anyone frown in Norway!

BS: Since 1995, you have promoted and booked one of the world's greatest blues festivals, the Tampa Bay Blues Festival at Vinoy waterfront in St.Petersburg, Florida. What can we look forward to in April of 2020?



CR: Has it been that long ? I guess so , since 2019 was our 25th anniversary. We've got big plans for 2020. It's a blend of the top , established blues performers and the best of the new generation . Multiple Grammy winner , Aaron Neville , JJ Grey & Mofro, Jimmie Vaughan, Ronnie Earl , Ronnie Baker Brooks , Rod Piazza , and the Proven Ones with Kid Ramos . Then it's the newer talents like Larkin Poe , Danielle Nicole, Jason Ricci , and Kingfish . I like to bring the best of the old and new performers together . Details are at : tampabaybluesfest.com

For Backtrack Blues Band it's also special , as we will be hosting our album release event on Sunday , April 5 at 1 pm , performing on the main stage at the Tampa Bay Blues Festival . Wayne Sharp will join us on B3 and the Backtrack Angels , Dana and Latonya , will add backing vocals . It's the perfect place to share our new music with all our local friends and the larger blues media contingency as well .

Monte , I know you'll be there too , with your camera and your smile down front !

Many of Wayne Sharp's fans became fans through his work for 12 years with the late Michael Burks. Some of those fans may not know of his early relationship with two of the original members of the Allman Brothers dating back to the 60's when he first moved to the coast of Mississippi. It was here that he met Jaimoe/Jai Johnny Johnson and Lamar Williams at a backwoods club that played the music that he loved. Jaimoe

was introduced by Jackie Avery (Chi-Lites, Otis Redding, Johnny Taylor) to Duane Allman and ended up in Macon and the Allman Brothers was born. Wayne moved to Macon and worked alongside Jackie Avery and Tony "Bone" Dorsey. Lamar Williams joined the ABB after the early tragic death of bassist Berry Oakley and Wayne headed out to LA to start his own band. When the ABB disbanded in 1980, Wayne contacted Jaimoe and Lamar and they joined Wayne's SharpShooter Band and played until Lamar became ill and passed in 1983. Jaimoe went back to the reunited Allman Brothers Band and Wayne joined Elvin Bishop and eventually formed an Allman Brothers tribute band, the Allmost Brothers that was given Gregg Allman's blessing while Sharp was recording and producing Gregg in LA. Within a year Wayne got the call to join Michael Burks and performed over 2500 shows with him until his passing in 2012. With the passing of Burks, Butch Trucks and Gregg Allman, the timing for a group to keep the music of the Allman Brothers alive seemed perfect. As Sharp put it, "I play the same instrument, look the part, and know the music" so as Jaimoe put it "he seemed the only cat qualified to do it." The Mushroom Brotherhood came to be.



Wayne Sharp and the Sharp-Shooters fabulous 2013 release "Living With The Blues" included his sons as well as a stellar list of musicians such as Terrance Greyson, Jon Woodhead, Jimmy Hall and Jackie Avery. It will certainly be a hard act to follow however, Wayne is constantly producing, recording, touring, and booking showcasing his exceptional talent in all of these areas.

His passion for the music and willingness to meet the fans and share memories of the music and artists that they love is priceless. At the recent Palladium concert, he sat on the stage after the show until the last fan got an opportunity

to talk to him, get a selfie or an autograph or just share a memory. Too many musicians today do not take the time to meet the fans who buy their music and attend their shows Whether it is performing with the Brotherhood, his own band, the SharpShooters, or backing any number of prominent artists---you can be assured that Wayne will give you 100% of the love and passion that he has for the music.

In April, he will take the stage again in St. Petersburg at the Tampa Bay Bluefest on Sunday and be reunited with the Backtrack Blues Band when they host their album release event. Come and share the love. It's a groovy thing.

