

## GUITAR MIKEY PRESS COVERAGE

### Guitar Mikey & The Real Thing Out of the Box (Earwig Records)



*April, 2012 Dave Rubin - 2005 KBA winner in journalism*

With megawatts of pure blues energy to burn, it is a wonder that Michael "Guitar Mikey" McMillan took decades to move to "blues central" in Clarksdale, Mississippi in 2006. Nonetheless, the Canadian singer, songwriter and multi-instrumental dynamo clearly found a home in the Delta. His third album literally explodes "out of" and "outside" the "box" with 15 hard hitting, original compositions while containing a gleaming array of guest artists, including harp blower extraordinaire Billy Gibson and keyboard wizard Mark Yacovone.

The audacious "Back to You" shows classic Zeppelin influence as Mikey slides fluidly on top of his urgent mandolin and banjo intro before the band powers into a rousing anthem of love. The thumping shuffle of "That's No Way" crunches via a nasty, driving riff while showcasing his chesty tenor and striking turn of a phrase with "...you say what's your name and I say what's

your game...what's your pain?" His lauded virtuosic slide work is revealed on the jumping Delta vamp of "Blues Attack," as is his fretting that makes his axe talk and squawk as Gibson brutally overdrives the reeds of his harp and both propel the momentum inexorably forward. "It's a Sin" presents a raucous, funky N'Awlins groove featuring Yacovone pounding the 88s, Gibson busting a gut and Mikey throwing "snakes" with his slippery slider. Slowing the tempo to a sensuous slow drag, Mikey pays masterful lyrical and instrumental tribute to Robert Johnson with "It's Goin' Down," stretching his sinewy vocal chops to an appropriate falsetto and also playing expert mandolin and bass.

The easy grooving Gulf Coast R&B of "Livin' in the Big Time" has Mikey confessing a tale of romantic woe in the most soulful of dulcet tones, while doing a fine imitation of pedal steel guitar. On the snappy Chicago shuffle "Blues Head" he cops to being a, "...no good blues head, she may be right, she kicked me from my bed," while Nellie "Tiger" Travis slyly sings the part of the disgruntled lover with Super Chikan helping Mikey argue his point of view. "The Bigger Fool" is an aching slow weeper reminiscent of Mikey's original inspiration, Muddy Waters, and spotlighting former "Mud" sideman Steady Rollin' Bob Margolin buzzing like a "Honeybee" on slide. The sassy shuffle "Need \$100" recalls Axis: Bold As Love with Mikey, Gibson and Yacovone on organ in a cornucopia of harmony and melody. "Freedom Road" is a worthy contribution to the world of road songs with Mikey intoning, "Too many nights, an unbalanced equation, that long white line looks like my only salvation," while "spanking the plank" with a squealing solo.

Clanging a riff like the hammers of Hades on "Who Is She," Mikey and organist Peter Nunn blast the bruising rocker into orbit. If the female object in question is as hot as the music on "Heart Shakin' Mama," someone better call an ambulance! "She Needs Time" vividly proves how Mikey absorbs his influences and makes them his own as he and backup singer Nellie "Tiger" Travis duet on the scalding country blues stomp. "When Leo Starts to Growlin'" is funky old soul featuring the honking Hammerhead Horns and Alphonso Sanders on tenor sax to bolster the boasting lyrics regarding, "When the lion roars, it's like a hand grenade." The stunning minor key, big bore blues-rock of "Out of the Box" closes the set with Mikey at his most passionate vocally and instrumentally.

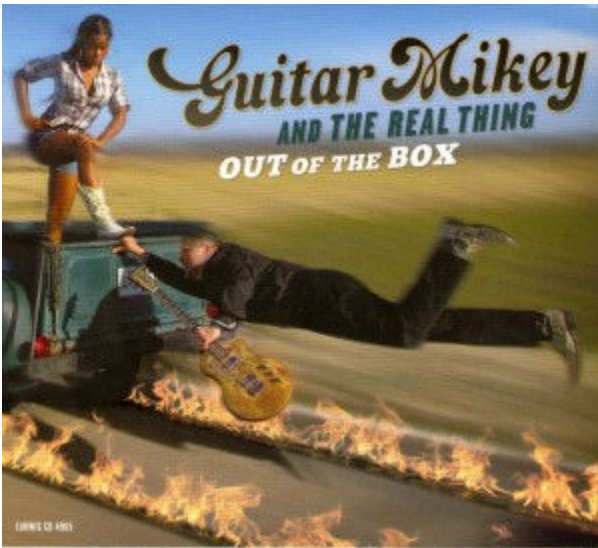
Guitar Mikey has the heart of the "King of the Jungle" as he rules his blues with the wisdom to honor the tradition and the courage to pounce on a fresh idea. The spectacular results are deeply profound with lyrical insights, while still rocking with unbridled exuberance.

# MUSIC NEWS Nashville

[www.musicnewsnashville.com/guitar-mikey-the-real-thing-out-of-the-box](http://www.musicnewsnashville.com/guitar-mikey-the-real-thing-out-of-the-box)

## Guitar Mikey & The Real Thing – Out Of The Box

Posted on [July 3, 2012](#) by [ChuckDauphin](#)



by Chuck Dauphin

Ontario-born Mike McMillian has loved the blues for a long time. That comes across in many of the tracks on this disc. As a vocalist, writer, and an instrumentalist, he makes it sound so easy on this disc.

There are a variety of styles involved here, from the Rock & Roll of “That’s No Way,” as well as the straight-up roadhouse sound of “Blues Attack.” He opts for a laid back approach on “It’s Goin’ Down,” as well as effective modern day boogie of “Freedom Road.”

In addition to the lyrics and the vocals, the instrumentation is very impressive, as well. Marty Richards nails the drum beat on “It’s A Sin,” while David Maxwell provides the tingle on the keyboard throughout – but especially on “The Bigger Fool.” However, you could listen to any cut here, and hear crisp lyrics and innovative musicianship. And, that’s a good thing. A good thing, indeed. For more information, log on to [www.GuitarMikey.com](http://www.GuitarMikey.com)



Guitar Mikey has been making music for thirty plus years but it all began in Hamilton before he was even a teenager. He returns to his old hometown with his first studio album in two decades, *Out Of The Box*, and plays as part of this weekend's tenth anniversary Blues With A Feeling tribute to Hamilton blues legend Richard 'King Biscuit Boy' Newell.

"The last studio album I did was with A&M in 1990 so it's been quite a while," muses Guitar Mikey McMillan on his time away from recording and the road relocating from Hamilton to Mississippi. "I didn't really work hard enough to find another record company after I left A&M. I was focusing on playing live, which was the initial reason I moved to Chicago, had some other business opportunities in New England. Didn't like it so much so I moved to Clarksdale where it's a little more rural and a little more personal, personable and friendly. Clarksdale is the home of the legendary 'Crossroads' [made famous in many a blues set]. There's a lot of history in this vicinity and Clarksdale is the

centre of it. Now, I live five minutes from where Muddy Waters grew up."

Twelve years in the making, Guitar Mikey and the Real Thing return to form with his latest CD inspired perhaps as much by his recent locale so steeped in blues history as his own history growing up in Hamilton so similarly steeped in the blues. We reminisce about McMillan venturing forth thirty-five years ago at eleven years old to see his idol Waters play at Hamilton place.

"I still have that autographed program hanging in my studio," smiles McMillan. I don't know what made me do that, I just thought, 'I want to meet him, why not go backstage and do it?'

It was that gumption and a raw talent that showed itself at a young age that made a big name for Guitar Mikey around Hamilton. At sixteen, McMillan started the Steel City Blues Band and would perhaps get to meet an even more influential blues legend. "I was sixteen and backstage for an after party at the Festival of Friends main stage," recalls McMillan. "Long John Baldry and Richard were jamming backstage and I was just listening. Richard had heard about me I guess and started talking with me. I connected with Richard and we became really good friends. It'd probably be a year before I started playing with him. He started playing with me as a member of the Steel City Blues Band but when his *Mouth Of Steel* album came out, that band became his band.

"Richard was my mentor and just about everyone I know from the area's mentor," he adds. "John Lewis, Jack de Keyzer and all of those guys owe a lot to Richard. My fondest memories of Richard are just he and I hanging out, listening to records and laughing a lot. We had some really good times playing; we had some not so good times. It was really an experience. It was amazing the wealth of knowledge he had about music. It was always great to go into his record library and see where he'd scratched out a musician's name and wrote someone else's name in place because he knew that the credits were wrong.

"Richard taught me a lot about playing guitar but he probably taught me more about singing," continues McMillan. "When I first started singing, my approach was more like Johnny Winter and do that growling kind of singing which was fine for Johnny. I really needed to find my own voice and Richard taught me to do that. He taught me some good philosophies on singing and introduced me to a lot of singers that influenced me to find my own style."

Guitar Mikey's style is what makes his newest collection of songs, *Out Of The Box*, so special. Not confined to anyone type of blues, McMillan is able to make whichever direction he takes, just seem so right. He's been a natural from the beginning, and with the tutelage of Newell and many more, Guitar Mikey has become a legend in his own right. While it's been 35 years since he last saw Muddy Waters at Hamilton Place, his own return to those hallowed performing halls was a resounding success and perhaps it gave Guitar Mikey a chance to think about what he's missed in his old hometown.

"I'm thrilled to be playing the tenth anniversary of BWAFF," smiles McMillan. "It's a significant milestone for the event. I did play the first one but, well maybe I've played twice but it has been a while. I'm especially thrilled about this one because Billy Gibson

who is one of the premier harp players in the world today, who played a significant role in making this album what it is, he's also coming up to pay tribute to Richard, which is awesome for me. There is a certain authority and maturity that Billy and Richard have and of all the harp players I've played with, and there are a lot of them, he and Richard are the top two.

"We did our record release at Hamilton Place back in April and that was an incredible experience," adds McMillan on his hometown return.

"I was excited about playing Hamilton because it would be ten years since I've played Hamilton. It was a magical night because I really felt the support of Hamilton like I never had in my life. It made me think that I ought to start doing this more often. This BWAf show for Richard is almost like an encore to that show for us. We're very jazzed about coming up and why we're coming up is just the icing on the cake. At this juncture, I've decided to make an annual appearance in Hamilton, whether it works out tour-wise or not, I'm just going to get there to revisit my alma mater and let everyone know in Hamilton how much I appreciate what they've done for me and how much I appreciate coming back and performing for them." V

*Guitar Mikey plays this Saturday June 9 at the Leander Boat Club with Steve Strongman, Shrimp Daddy and Ronnie Cople.*

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## **From Hamilton to Clarksdale and back**

*The Spec - April, 2012*

*By Graham Rockingham*

Guitar Mikey in action Guitar Mikey will take part in a live video concert/video at The Spectator Thursday prior to his release concert Saturday. Special to The Hamilton Spectator

Many people consider Clarksdale, Mississippi, the home of the blues - the place where legendary blues pioneer Robert Johnson supposedly sold his soul to the devil in exchange for mastery over his guitar.

Now, Clarksdale is also home to Hamilton's Guitar Mikey.

"We're pretty happy in Clarksdale," says Mikey, a.k.a. Mike McMillan. "It's the friendliest place I've ever been on the planet. That's what inspired us to move there after taking a musical history tour."

The "musical history tour" Mikey is talking about is a three-week visit he and his wife Pamela made to the Mississippi delta town in 2003. But, in truth, Mikey's musical journey started back in the late '70s when he was growing up on Hamilton's East Mountain. He had a couple of rock bands while still a student at Barton Secondary School and even won a citywide battle of the bands.

But Mikey's musical education didn't really start until 1980 when he met Richard Newell, the great Hamilton blues artist known as King Biscuit Boy.

"Just after I won that band competition, I got booked into the Festival of Friends," Mikey explains. "I met Richard backstage where he was jamming with Long John Baldry. We started talking and, about a year later, we started playing together. I was about 17 or 18 when we started playing together. Richard joined my band, The Steel City Blues Band."

Mikey tapped into Newell's vast knowledge of the blues and gained access to his formidable record collection. Mikey became a blues fanatic and a very good guitarist in the process. In the mid-'80s, King Biscuit Boy resumed recording solo while Mikey put together a new band he called The Real Thing.

The band played a regular Sunday night gig for about eight years at the Gown & Gavel in Hess Village. His reputation grew and his residency became a regular stop for travelling blues musicians. Mississippi harmonica player Carey Bell sat in, as did Memphis guitar slinger Luther Tucker and Phil Guy, brother of the great Buddy Guy.

His thirst for authentic blues lured Mikey to Chicago where he lived for four years, starting in 1997. His music career, however, got sidetracked by a computer software business he had developed. He spent another six years in Boston before making the decision to move to the deep south, the place where it all started for Robert Johnson.

King Biscuit Boy's tutelage paid off handsomely in Clarksdale. The locals were impressed with both his talent and his knowledge. Mikey

soon found himself hosting the popular Thursday night jam sessions at Ground Zero Blues Club, a popular destination for blues tourists from around the world (Academy Award winner Morgan Freeman is a co-owner).

"People (in Clarksdale) were telling me that I was raising the bar there musically," Mikey says.

He became a regular at blues festivals, including Clarksdale's Juke Joint Festival, meeting southern musicians such as harmonica player Billy Gibson and former Muddy Waters guitarist Bob (Steady Rollin') Margolin, as well as catching the eye of Chicago-based blues label Earwig Music.

Earwig signed the Hamilton-born guitarist and is releasing a new CD by Guitar Mikey And The Real Thing on April 17. The CD is called Out Of The Box and contains 15 original tracks, written by Mikey (nine are cowritten with veteran Hamilton bassist Doug Carter, who was with Newell at the outset of the harpist's career).

The album spans a wide array of blues styles from acoustic country blues to hard-driving blues rock and features musicians from both Ontario (Peter Nunn, keyboardist of Honeymoon Suite) and the U.S. (Margolin, Gibson and Mark Yaccavone on piano). It's a superbly produced album, recorded in Clarksdale, that will be appreciated by blues fans on both sides of the border.

On Saturday, April 7, Guitar Mikey is bringing his Real Thing band to Hamilton for a hometown preview of the new album. Expect a few special guests to join The Real Thing onstage at the Molson Canadian Studio at Hamilton Place.

Guitar Mikey will also visit The Hamilton Spectator newsroom to perform a special live webcast on Wednesday, April 4, at 7:30 p.m.

#### **Guitar Mikey and The Real Thing**

**What: CD release concert for Out Of The Box**

**When: Saturday, April 7, 8 p.m.**

**Where: Molson Canadian Studio at Hamilton Place**

**Tickets: \$15, plus service fees at Cops Coliseum box office, Ticketmaster.ca or by phone at 1-855-5000**

**Website: [guitarmikey.com](http://guitarmikey.com)**

#### **Guitar Mikey at thespec.com**

**What: A live video concert/interview featuring Guitar Mikey and hosted by Hamilton Spectator music editor Graham Rockingham**

**When: Wednesdays, April 4, 7:30 p. m.**

**Where: thespec.com**

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### **Guitar Mikey & The Real Thing Out of the Box - Earwig**

*Toronto Blues Society - March, 2012*

*By John Valentyn*

It's been a while since we've heard the name of this Hamilton native. He released a CD here and played with **King Biscuit Boy** but decided to pursue his career in the USA. After stints in Chicago & Boston, he now resides in Clarksdale MS. Mike McMillan has made some very useful contacts in that time. One of them was **Michael Frank** of Earwig Music, who's now signed his second Canadian bluesman (BC's Les Copeland is the other). Over the last couple of years, he's been recording this new album in Clarksdale and calling on some other new friends: **Bob Margolin** & harp ace **Billy Gibson** as well as fellow Hamiltonian **Donna Panchezak**. His time here showed a heavily electric **Guitar Mikey**, but this disc of originals is a well-conceived blend of acoustic and electric. The opener, "Back To You", is an excellent example, with mandolin, banjo and acoustic slide and even some crickets. The full band with the **Hammerhead Horns** takes it to the climax. Mikey has, for all his travelling, kept in touch with his Hamilton band members: **Peter Nunn** is on keys here along with long time member keyboard player **Mark Yacovone**. "That's No Way" is probably closer to what we'll see live next month with powerful electric guitar and prominent organ. "Blues Attack" features Memphis harp man **Billy Gibson** to good effect along with a duet vocal from old friend from Chicago, **Nellie "Tiger" Travis**. Mikey's bio talks about many occasions on stage with Travis at the Kingston Mines and she helps out on several other songs here. Mikey's slide solo is a treat. A recently divorced man has even more woman trouble, a keeper for sure. "It's Goin' Down" re-purposes **Robert Johnson** for acoustic change of pace, with Mikey on exquisite slide. "The Bigger Fool" takes us to Chicago & **Muddy Waters**. **Bob Margolin** is on slide, **David Maxwell** on piano and Gibson on harp. Mikey's lyrics are a treat. "When Leo Starts To Growlin'" is a lengthy big band funk workout on the theme of don't make me lose my temper - another highlight in an album full of them. The closer provides the title as well

being the most ambitious composition here. For a blues album, a French chanson theme, complete with accordion, a string section as well as the horns really does take it out of the box. I suspect its live electric band version may sound a little different. The homecoming CD release is at Hamilton Place on April 7 and TBS members get a discount, just call the office.

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## **Guitar Mikey Blows Blues Tradition Out Of The Box**

*Clarksdale Press Register - Feb 22, 2012*

*By Jesse Wright*

In his biography of Skip James, Stephen Calt notes that a lot of early blues musicians would sing about sadness, about losing women and money, but musically the songs were meant to be entertaining, meant to accompany dancing, and pack clubs tight. Guitar Mikey-AKA Mike McMillan, the Canadian-born blues musician now living in Clarksdale-keeps that tradition alive with his new album "Out of the Box."

The album - his first studio album in almost 20 years and his first studio album in Clarksdale-represents a different direction, musically, from most blues around here. It's different from a lot of blues anywhere. The first track, "Back to You," is a raucous fusion of organ, over-driven guitar tone, slide guitar, drums and mandolin and country lamentation of lost love. Even so, it's hard to keep from tapping your foot along to the rocking 4/4 beat.

The attempt to straddle tradition with expansion is a constant balancing act throughout the album. One of the more traditional songs, "The Bigger Fool," is McMillan's tribute to Chicago Blues. McMillan knows Chicago blues; he met Muddy Waters when he was 11; he lived in Chicago for four years after he left his hometown of Hamilton, Ontario in 1997. Even so, "The Bigger Fool" is his first attempt to replicate the sound and, he said, it didn't come easy.

"That was the most difficult song for me to write on the entire album," he said. "How do you write a Muddy Waters Chicago Blues song as make it sound official?"

In other words, how can you go back in time and do what's already been done by people who did it better than anybody else, before or since?

You can't, really. Which is probably why Guitar Mikey is not a Chicago Blues musician, which is why his songs are filled with so many iconoclastic flourishes-a tango tempo here, some over-driven tone there.

"How can you keep writing the same construct over and over and expect it to sound fresh and new," he said. "It's just been done, and it's been done so well, how can you do it again?"

McMillan is trying instead to relaunch his blues career.

In 1990 McMillan released his first major studio album, "Caught Between the Squeeze," with A&M Records. This was supposed to be the first album in a seven year contract and it should have been the first stop along a lengthy and successful career path. But with management problems and other disagreements, McMillan left the label and never made another record for them. He said that part of the problem was, people didn't know what to do with him. Was he rock? Was he blues? He's always been a bit of both, and he said that's been a problem-or at least it was.

"The working title of "Out of the Box" was "File Under Blues, File Under Rock," he said, laughing. Of course, with fewer record stores to file with, perhaps the limiting filing categories will be less of a problem, and, anyway, live audiences seem to like what he has to offer, even in Clarksdale.

"My impression is that both the tourists and the locals love the variety of the music that I put in the show," he said. The album's revised title, "Out of the Box," refers to that variety.

"My hope is that I can be farther out of the box, but still retain a blues sensibility," he said.

Every year he plays an annual Elvis birthday tribute concert (he's a big fan of rockabilly and Ronnie "the Hawk" Hawkins once considered hiring McMillan as a member of Hawkins' own band). "I like the Elvis shows," he said. "I get to play material I don't get to play very often. This year, toward the end of the night, as things got a little loser, I played some Hendrix songs and people went wild."

There's no Elvis on this album (there was on his first) or Hendrix, and in fact there're no covers at all. As it is, his original material is varied

enough, including the eponymous "Out of the Box," a tango that surprised even him.

"Who'd've thought I'd write a tango? I didn't think I'd ever write a tango," he said. But from a guitarist who says cites his influences as Scrapper Blackwell and Deep Purple, a tango isn't such a surprise. The album, which is out on Earwig Music, is due out in April and McMillan said he will have an album launch party at his Juke Joint Festival show. That show will be at Hicks BBQ, 30 South State Street, April 14. Hicks is a special place for McMillan, as that was the first Juke Joint show he ever played featuring Billy Gibson. It was there he met Michael Frank (the owner of Earwig).

For the remainder of this year, and for most of next year, McMillan said he expects to be touring the new album, across the U.S., Canada and Europe. McMillan said he is excited and hopeful.

"It's all very exciting," he said. "I kind of feel like my papers might be in order to break out. I don't feel like I've ever broken out, and I feel like more musicians know who I am than fans."

He also expects to become a naturalized citizen this year. In a journey that's taken him from Canada to the Mississippi Delta, by way of Chicago and Boston, McMillan said he's happy to make Clarksdale his permanent base of operations. Clarksdale is a small place, compared to his Canadian hometown with more than half a million people, but McMillan said he's only got one complaint.

"I haven't slowed down as much as I'd hoped to," he said. "I still have it programmed in me, that big city mentality. I'm a bit better, but living in Clarksdale hasn't had as big of an impact as I'd hoped."

Sunday, May 9, 2010

61 Review

### Guitar Mikey honors mentor Muddy Waters



Guitar Mikey is invited to assist Chris Overton unveil the Walk of Fame Marker Ceremony honoring Muddy Waters at the Clarksdale Station Train Depot.



Bill Morganfield, Guitar Mikey and Mud Morganfield in the Muddy Hut at the Delta Blues Museum.

# THE CLARKSDALE Press Register

August 16, 2009

SUNDAY



TROY CATCHINGS/ Clarksdale Press Register

## 'We got a good thing going on'

Local transplant and performing favorite Guitar Mikey entertains the crowd on the Main Stage beside the Delta Blues Museum on John Lee Hooker Lane during the opening night performances of the 21st Annual Sunflower River Blues and Gospel Festival Friday evening. The crowd was shoulder-to-shoulder filling the festival grounds and spreading down Third Street and along Issaquena, Yazoo, Delta and Sunflower Avenues.



## Guitar Mikey pays tribute to the King By Sam Styers

Canada native and Clarksdale resident Mikey "Guitar Mikey" McMillan performed with his band, The Real Thing, Friday night at Ground Zero to celebrate the 75th birthday of rock-n-roll legend Elvis Presley.

The King has had a strong influence on Guitar Mikey's musical development, and he performed some of his favorite Elvis selections Friday night as well as some of his own interpretations and original music as well as a few traditional blues covers.

Guitar Mikey coaxes sound from his instrument with a combination of delicate precision, intense emotion and steely concentration; the image of him playing evokes a feeling of summoning, as if through his music he brings the spirits of the musicians that he loves to the forefront, revealing his own soul in the process.

Though he started playing guitar at seven years old, Guitar Mikey got serious about the instrument at 10 and hasn't looked back since, making headway in the blues scene over the years, called "one of the best slide guitar players I've ever seen by blues vocalist Paul Butterfield.

I knew when I was about five years old that I was going to be doing music", said Mikey. "I started recording myself when I was six, singing Trini Lopez and I just knew that music was going to be it for me."

Mikey and Pamela McMillan, his wife, moved to Clarksdale over three

years ago, coming from southern Ontario by way of Boston.

"I moved to Chicago for the music, and an opportunity came up outside of the music business and I moved to Boston for six years," recalled Mikey "Then Mark Yacovone my keyboardist and I met in Boston. We came down as tourists to Clarksdale with our wives, because of the blues history, and we just fell in love with the people and the way of life and this pace and the sanity of it all. We just couldn't wait to leave Boston.

Mikey has put out three albums, and is working on a fourth.

"I did my first independent album which came out in 1988," said Mikey. "In 1990, I put out an album with A&M records called "Caught Between the Squeeze", and I didn't put out another record until 2007, and that was a live Ground Zero gig.

I'm happy to say I'm active in the studio right now. I will have a record complete this year. I've been very focused; I've re-teamed up with a guy I used to write with back in Canada in the '80's Doug Carter who used to work with King Biscuit Boy back in the '60's.

Carter played the blues scene in Ontario from 1962 until the mid-1990's and is a talented visual artist.

"I'm happy to be writing with him again. We've got some very unique sounds; we're breaking new ground

with blues-based music. It's not going to be a hardcore blues record – there're songs on there that I can't even tell you what kind of music it is, but it's still very blues-based. I'm a blues guitar player and I always will be, but there're other influences outside the blues world."

Many of his early influence came from his parents, who were avid jazz fans and took Mikey to a plethora of live music events.

I was just surrounded by jazz, all the time. I was more lured into blues because it was more primitive, more guttural, kind of the rock-n-roll rebellion to jazz I remember my parents taking me to concerts, to see Joe Williams and Count Basie and Ray Charles, and I've been very lucky to be exposed to a lot of great music in my lifetime."

Guitar Mikey's combination of traditional blues influences, an early exposition to jazz and live performance, and his desire to push the blues forward as a genre makes him not only a fantastic performer, but one of the most interesting musicians in Clarksdale.

"As far as traditional blues goes, it's all been done, so I think it really serves the music to try and take it somewhere else. Blues is the roots and everything else is the fruits – Willie Dixon said that. I like to say that blues is a language and everything else is a dialect", finished Mikey.

**THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR** - January 2008 - Jeff Mahoney

JAM ZERO 1

61 RECORDS - GUITAR MIKEY

Guitar Mikey, a.k.a. Mike McMillan, is a Hamilton guy who was wowing them from an early age. He went to a Muddy Waters concert at age 11, and when his dad came to pick him up afterward, Mikey was back stage, talking to the great man himself. He has been playing in working bands since age 12. Guitar Mikey helped form the Steel City Blues Band in 1980, and that year it won first place, in a field of 50 bands, at the UNICEF telethon. Shortly after, the band would welcome new member King Biscuit Boy, no less. In the '90s Mikey moved to the U.S. and has lived in Chicago, New England and now Clarksdale, Miss., where, blues legend has it, Robert Johnson sold his soul to the devil in return for the key to the blues. It's also Waters' hometown.

It takes stones to put your instrument before your first name and make it legal, like if I called myself Musical Taste Jeffy. You hear two bars of Mikey's live record from the crossroads, and you know the man's papers are in order; his axe is whetstoned and his chops just chop right through you. This is some of the most justified, jumped-up live blues I've heard in awhile. The band is tight, the singing strong (great guest spot by Nellie "Tiger" Travis) and if you love five-alarm blues guitar, this is for you. It's full of classics -- Little Red Rooster, Hoochie Coochie Man -- and Mikey and band leave their unique fingerprints on them. Available at [CDBaby.com](http://CDBaby.com) and [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com).

# Columnist had inspiring experience in 'Bluesville' over the weekend

For several months now, I have talked with Stone (Ellis) about starting a section of the paper dedicated to entertainment, especially with the increasing number of new artists that are migrating to the Delta for the slow-paced charm of the south and, of course to be in the mecca of where it all began.

Most local people are aware of the musicians who play here on a regular basis; but over the weekend, many of our guests I spoke with, read the *Clarksdale Press Register* via the internet.

This leads me to believe that the entertainment section will give fans of the Delta blues worldwide, a way to access what's going on in "Bluesville" year 'round.

So I landed at the front door of Bluesberry Cafe to check out one of our newest transplants, and do I have some bad news for those of you that missed what I witnessed Friday night in downtown Clarksdale — a packed house, four guys from Boston, thunder and lightning and a chilly rain. Say can it get any bluer???

Well, the thunderstorm and lightning show outside held no candle as to what went on inside.

Inside was "on" — Guitar Mikey and The Real Thing.

From the first chord of the opening number to the last encore and standing ovation, the entire room was totally mesmerized.

This was nothing short of a jaw-dropping, heart-pounding, in-yer-face-blues, never before heard by my ears or anyone else in our musical mecca in several years.

As a musician myself I am not easily

## Guest Column

By CHARLIE MOORE

impressed by bands, whether it be rock, blues, country or any label that fits the bill.

I was told these guys were exactly what the band's name implies — "The Real Thing."

Now, three days later, I still can't believe what I heard.

The show at the Bluesberry Cafe was a reunion, the band not having played together since Mike and wife Pamela moved here in 2006.

The Real Thing consisted of drummer Steve Sasso, keyboards Mark Yacovone, bass player John Allouise and THE man himself, Mikey McMillan.

Most three or four piece bands sound like something is always missing — horns, another guitar or percussion. But with this quartet, I caught myself looking around to see where the other two or three members were. The sound was so full and balanced — absolutely incredible!!!

It is very hard for any band playing in a small room to get a full, balanced sound at low volume. Seems there is always someone too loud or too soft.

Not in this case.

Guitar Mikey and The Real Thing seemed to have built-in sound technicians

in their heads. Without fail and through the entire evening, the band performed with the roar of a lion and the whisper of an angel — the most dynamically controlled artists I've heard in a long time.

Mike has also been deemed one of the best slide players around, and, I must say, I momentarily had my doubts until he brought out his "Dan Electro" and, without a doubt, the comment given Mikey by Paul Butterfield could not have been more precise.

Mike is also very accomplished in the style of playing what some call traditional Delta blues, where a slide/finger picking technique is used. Many have tried to copy this, but few can do it with the finesse that Mike has achieved through the years.

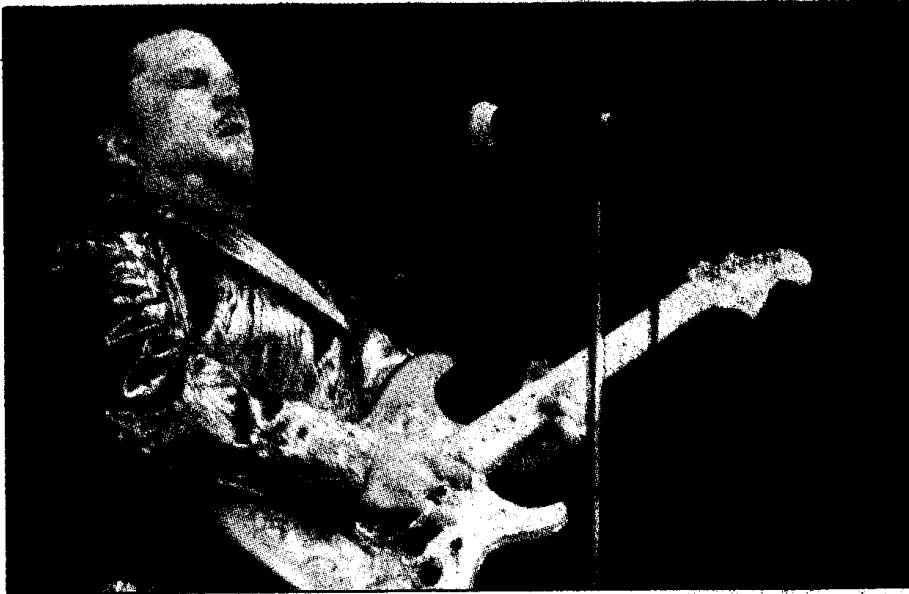
Guitar Mikey also does an acoustic set with Clarksdale's own La La Craig on keyboards and vocals — another show you don't want to miss.

All evening, lick after lick, song after song, the crowd cheered, the people danced and jaws dropped in sheer amazement.

Clarksdale got a taste of "The Real Thing," a blues musician second to none — and in my humble opinion — probably the next legendary artist about whom we can proudly say, "Guitar Mikey? Yes, he's from Clarksdale."

Check out Guitar Mikey and The Real Thing online at [www.TheRealThing.com](http://www.TheRealThing.com)

*Charlie Moore is a lifelong resident of Clarksdale. He graduated from Clarksdale High School, and he is also a musician as well as music critic.*



Guitar Mikey

# Canadian blues artist moves to Clarksdale

## *Special to the Press Register*

Canadian blues artist Guitar Mikey has moved to Clarksdale. One might think it because of the music but actually, he and his wife and Manager, Pamela chose to leave his ever building presence in Boston to join this community offering a general better quality of life.

"The fact that Clarksdale has such a prestigious music history and continuing culture was just icing on the cake," Mikey said. "We chose to live here because the people are so friendly and we love the pace."

Guitar Mikey has been playing, singing and writing blues since the age of 10. By 11 years of age, he was sneaking back stage to hang out with heroes like Muddy Waters. Earning a modest income by the age of 16 playing clubs while attending high school, he built a reputation in Canada and an on-again/off-again partnership with the late Richard Newell, a.k.a King Biscuit Boy. In his late twenties, Mikey signed a seven year contract with A&M records, only to step down from his full time pursuit of music in 1993. Like many of his peers he subsi-

dizes his income with other work. Mikey has continued to build his reputation in the United States; four years in Chicago and six in Boston.

Guitar Mikey's talent is strong as a singer and guitar player, (be sure to catch him playing slide guitar). An awesomely deft guitarist; he can go from knock-down-the-walls power to gentle tenderness in a beat.

He has shared the stage and toured with countless names and legends; Yank Rachel, Honeyboy Edwards, Otis Rush, as well as stars Johnny and Edgar Winter, Buddy Guy, and even the late Paul Butterfield.

Now he is happy to be settled in Clarksdale, the true home of the Blues. Mikey loves to play on stage. Recording has never been at the forefront of his endeavors. He's the first to admit that completing an album (in the works for six years) needs to happen and here in Clarksdale is where he intends to do that.

He will be making his first official appearance on Thursday, Jan. 11, at Ground Zero Blues Club.

# The Dead is live, Whitney astounds and Guitar Mikey is the real thing

**ALBUM REVIEWS** by Nick Krewen

.....We didn't know a duet written by and recorded with Stevie Wonder, takes an almost anti-melodic approach and maybe just the vehicle Wonder needs to get back on the charts, while *Lover Of Live* has a touch of understated jazz.

Houston breathes so much life and sensuality into *After We Make Love* that the windows around the house maybe steamed for weeks.

There's never been any contention that Whitney Houston is a great vocalist, but she's never been really tested. *I'm Your Baby Tonight* is the assurance that the lady rightfully takes her place among the Arethas, Barbras, Billies, and Bessies of this world.

**ALBUM: CAUGHT BETWEEN THE SQUEEZE**  
**ARTIST: GUITAR MIKEY AND THE REAL THING**  
**LABEL: SPY/A&M**

For the first major league album, Hamilton's *Guitar Mikey* gives a charming little smoker that serves as a lively showcase for his considerable six-string talents.

But the great thing about *Caught Between The Squeeze* is its lack of self-indulgence. While Mike McMillan has the prowess to impress with dazzling technique and the ability to produce hour-long guitar solos, everything is kept in tasteful check in respect to the song.

This self-discipline strengthens the album considerably, and should give even those diehard *Guitar Mikey* fans a new found respect for the man as a songwriter/arranger.

*Elephant Shoes*, *Mighty Man* and *Little Maria* are three of the 10 very good reasons to pick up this blues-flavoured package. Bassist Curtis Cripps, drummer Robert Latzer and producers Ian Thomas and Ed Stone must be commanded for stellar support.

*Caught Between The Squeeze* firmly places *Guitar Mikey* in the ranks of Jeff Healey and Collin James in terms of expertise.

The Spectator (Hamilton), Nov. 1990

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## Guitar Mikey Releases "Caught Between The Squeeze"

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**GUITAR MIKEY:  
POP THE GATOR, KITCHENER  
NOVEMBER 16 - 17**

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Good news for *Guitar Mikey* fans. The Steel City performer is releasing his new album, *CAUGHT BETWEEN THE SQUEEZE* on November 19th.

*Guitar Mikey* was born Mike McMillan August 8, 1964. By the age of nine he began to attend concerts by artists such as Sonny Terry & Brownie McGhee and Ray Charles. At the age of twelve he had the opportunity to meet one of his mentors of the slide guitar. He was none other than the late, great Muddy Waters (*Mikey* had

already been playing slide for two years by this time). With this kind of start, it is not hard to understand how he has been able to bring the maturity and authority to the music at such a young age. By the age of sixteen, he began to front his locally acclaimed "Steel City Blues Band", and at eighteen began a two year stint with *King Biscuit Boy*.

His band, *THE REAL THING*, comprised of Bob Latzer - drums; Curtis Cripps - Bass; and *Guitar Mikey* hold live performances be possibly the most important part of the music. Their shows are dynamic and intense and could easily please the palettes of everyone from the

hard-core blues enthusiasts to those with a taste for today's heavy mainstream.

To date they have billed with such artists as Paul Butterfield, The Thunderbirds, Johnny Winter, Otis Rush, Matt Murphy, and even have had the opportunity to back legends like Honeyboy Edwards.

Since 1984 the band has been hosting a Sunday Night Blues show at The Gown & Gavel Pub where the weekly guests have included Luther Tucker, Carey Bell, Eddie Kirkland as well as established Canadian artists including Donny Walsh and Morgan Davis.

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Spotlight Magazine

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# Winter chews through the blues with abandon

By NICK KREWEN  
The Spectator

A hot Winter was cooled off a little early last night.

Legendary blues guitarist Johnny Winter was forced to cut his set short by a song after tempers flared at Dallas on Barton Street East where he played to a sold-out crowd of 750.

The 45-year-old Texan wasn't hurt or endangered in any of the three scuffles that occurred during his encore, but his road manager played it safe and had Winter escorted back to his tour bus, protected by a bevy of bodyguards, after he finished his second number of a three song run.

The situation was quickly brought under control by Dallas staff, but when you think about it, the blues is the most selfishly indulgent type of music around—a genre where the musician calls his own shots; a music that incites passion.

The blues is an art form that one doesn't perform as much as own. It's that

personal stamp that fosters reputations, and Winter's two-decade status as one of the hottest American guitarists was proven in a combustible tally of firebrand licks and steamy grit.

For a little over an hour Winter and sidemen Jon Paris on bass and harp and Tom Compton on drums cooked up a storm, with fast, furious blues licks and the thundering roar of Winter's harsh vocals.

After initially heating things up with a jam, the show really clicked when Winter launched into Boney Maronie, an old standard he's played since the early '70s.

Winter reached even further back into the vaults for Chuck Berry's Johnny B. Goode, but built up the solo to a point where it stood on its own as an almost different song.

**The differences between Winter and his opening act, local blues unit Guitar Mikey And The Real Thing,**

were almost as dramatic. In fact, Mikey was downright polite about the whole thing, and although he was technically perfect and proved him-self to be an above-average instrumentalist, his hour-long set was a little too clean and pure.

But he is a fine guitarist, and his venturing into the crowd for an elongated solo was a welcome diversion from the routine of watching an artist stand frozen behind a microphone all night long.

Guitar Mikey should also be commended for his dynamic range of louds and softs that highlighted his sensitivity. It was the only thing lacking in Winter's otherwise perfect set.

Yes indeed, Johnny Winter is still alive and will, thank you very much.

The Hamilton Spectator '89

# Thunderbirds really are a Fabulous band

by Gary Curtis

IT'S UNCLEAR exactly where the name The Fabulous Thunderbirds comes from. Is it from the Little Walter harp solo Thunderbird? or is it from the cruising low-ridin' tricked-up T-Birds that motor slowly through the El Paso barrios? Thunderbirds may be open to discussion but The Fabulous isn't for this four-piece amped-up slicked-down band from Austin Texas is exactly that, Fabulous.

This band is the sum of its parts, and that's considerable. When Wilson pulled hard on his harps low end a power surge seemed to rise up out of the floor and the metallic crunch must've been enough pop the rivets on the new twinned Sky-was. This is a man with a serious Little Walter fetish and he's among the finest harmonica blowers this side of our own King Biscuit Boy, but more on that later.

Jimmie Vaughan, who co-founded the band 11 years ago with Wilson, is among the top Texas blues guitarists.

He's idolized by his little brother Stevie Ray and for good cause; he knows as his brother apparently doesn't, that one note can do the work of 18 and that pauses can say as much musically as any flash-fingered run along the six strings.

DRUMMER, FRAN Christina band's the band's new bassist, Preston Hubbard found a steady groove and kept it Hubbard fingered mostly an upright electric bass. Although both are refugees from Roomful of Blues, a lighter swinging blues group, they rocked out from the opening rim shot. A solid wall of throb is an apt description of The Fabulous Thunderbird's sound. And the Fab T-Bird philosophy was seemingly summed up in their second song, Can't Tear It Up Enough, although they certainly did try.

**Guitar Mikey and The Real Thing opened the evening with Three Hundred Pounds of Joy by**

Big Twist and the Mellow Fellows, For Mikey, sharply dressed in a pinstriped suit jacket and blue leather tie, it wasn't altogether appropriate as he's lost considerable weight to get down to his current 230 pounds. Perhaps he should be called Big Spiff instead.

Mikey and his band, with Claude Des Roches on drums and the veteran Doug Carter on bass, earned their encore with a Lone Star hello to the Texas visitors with a smoking version of Johnny Winter's Rock 'n Roll. Guitar Mikey's performance, however, begs an answer to the obvious question: When is someone going to get some of these one Hamilton blues bands down on vinyl.

The Hamilton Spectator '86

# This is *The Real Thing*

*Hometown bluesmasters win fans at the John*

By Katherine Thompson

You can add Guitar Mikey and the Real Thing to your list of good time blues bands if they aren't already there. The Hamilton based trio played solid unpretentious blues-rock to a large and enthusiastic crowd during its appearance at The John Tuesday night. The group did its own material as well as putting its stamp on some oldies-but-goodies. The band obviously new its stuff and liked it, and its enthusiasm was obvious to the audience.

While Guitar Mikey and his band are no exotic showmen (that is - there was no dry ice in evidence), they play great dance music, and their down to earth style makes them appealing to a wide range of music lovers.

The audience was light and cool when the show started at 9:30, but warmed up as the lights went down and the band loosened up. The crowd began to fill out as the evening wore on, and it became more animated as the band's enthusiasm spread through the John.



Mikey himself

Any listener could tell Guitar Mikey loves what he does, and this gives the group a kind of spontaneous drive the audience can pick

up. The fact that the band puts out tight, well-rehearsed music while still seeming natural adds to the appeal.

## *Unpretentious*

Another facet of the group's Charm is its unpretentiousness: the band is obviously more concerned with its music than its image. Band members appeared in sweatshirts and jeans giving them a similarity to their audience that many performers try to avoid.

In all, Guitar Mikey and the Real Thing gave the impression that they were there to have a good time and play good music, and they wanted the audience to have as much fun as they did. Their repertoire and enthusiasm serve to make them a fine dance band, with potential to appeal to variety of blues-rock lovers. In this era of computer gizmos and calculated, pre-planned images, it's nice to find the Real Thing in our very own campus bar.

The Silhouette - McMaster University March '87

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## Blues Society delivers white hot night by the bay

The Blues Society of Hamilton's first live show has to be termed a success—the Leander Boat Club was jammed Saturday night, the dance floor was packed from 8.30 p.m. and it seemed to be perpetually three-deep at the bar.

Jackie Washington opened the festivities and sauntered through his seemingly endless repertoire of big band tunes, touching off briefly at swinging guitar jazz, scat and barrelhouse piano boogie.

Johnny and the Jumpers turned up the red stage lights and delivered a very punchy set.

But the star of the show was Guitar Mikey McMillan who was on-stage with his band for two hours, doing his

own set plus backing bluesy belter Jude Johnson.

McMillan opened with **Boogie Thing**, which was more than appropriate, and summed up with a mean version of **Mean Town Blues**, which attracted a gaggle of would-be guitarists who stood close by the stage with mouths agape.

That little Texas roadhouse band, **ZZ Top**, would've had nothing on these guys on this night.

Johnson came on-stage with two saxophonists, and this segment could've marked the last local performance by Darcy Hepner before

his summer Artie Shaw tour and all teaching duties at Berkley.

Her contingent's jazzy approach made for an interesting contrast with McMillan's band's hardcore blues feel. By show's end Crowbar had invited many of the earlier participants to share their stage. There were three saxes, two guitars and a whole pile. of singers Gail Copple tore into Got My Mojo Working to set the stage for the anthemic oh What A Feeling, which ended just as the last of four power outages darkened the house.

The Blues Society has to take encouragement from such an auspicious concert debut, and here's hoping this won't be the last blues night by the bay.

The Hamilton Spectator - July '85

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## The Legend continues to mine Hamilton's blues

MYSELF, I wouldn't cross the street to hear Ronnie Hawkins sing but there's no escaping the impact the man's had on music in Hamilton.

He made Hamilton his very first Canadian base — at the long-defunct Golden Rail— when he came north from Arkansas in the late 1950s, and over the years has shown a distinct bias towards Steel City musicians in his band.

His former bantams have both good and bad to say about him, but they claim the gritty, in-your-face rockin' blues and R & B feel that makes up the Hamilton sound is directly attributable to him. Some say it's because of Hawkins, others say it's despite Hawkins.

HE'S THE guy who pinned the King Biscuit Boy moniker on Richard Newell (which stems from the first ever blues radio broadcasts featuring Sonny Boy Williamson and sponsored by the King Biscuit Flour Co.) and gave his ex-roadie and singer Kelly Jay the inspiration to dub his late 1960s band Crowbar. Hawkins, apparently miffed that his backup band was quitting him, said the guys were alternately 'dumber than a crowbar,' or could "screw up the moving parts on a crowbar."

Crowbar, no dummies, became well-known for sold-out tours and gold albums and lives to this day as rocking, bluesy Hamilton band.

Richard Newell, Kelly Jay, John Lewis, Jack de Keyser, Bill Dillon (Hawkins' current guitarist and musical director) and Mike Short (Martin's brother) help make up the list of Hawkins Hamilton alumni.

Appropriately a slimmed-down and less-red-in-face Hawkins, perhaps scared into good health following heart problems during his opening night at the Imperial Room a year ago, was in town at last week-end's blues show at Eddie's Lounge ostensibly to scout Guitar Mikey for his band.

Gone are the headliner days for Hawkins, now his band plays "show-case" bars on the order of Lulu's. Not quite the big time but still a cut above, and a valuable experience for a 21-year-old like Guitar Mikey who'd appreciate the regular work, regular pay, European tours—and the chance to meet

influential music industry honchos. Then there's an additional road benefit as out-lined by ex-Hawkins guitarist Robbie Robertson (who led The Band to greater heights) in The Last Waltz: More women than Frank Sinatra. Except he didn't exactly say women.

Mikey, for his part, is noncommittal. "Unless the money's right, I won't do it," he says, adding Hawkins' is interested in him as he's a blues player who can handle rockabilly and 'that's what he plays, a white man's blues.'



RONNIE HAWKINS

Ex-Hawkins players say Mikey could learn and earn quite a bit, but to be wary. "It's a different league," says guitarist John Lewis who was with the legendary rocker from 1979 to 1982. "He's King of the Bar Acts. and it's a lot different than playing the International (on James Street North).

BUT IT'S a very directionless, kind of thing that's stagnant with no musical growth. After the party—and it's one long party, you know—you sort of wonder what you're going to do with the rest of your life."

"He's young enough that it won't hurt him," Lewis says, adding Mikey's sojourn with Richard Newell only increases his worth in Hawkins' eyes.

Kelly Jay, who was with Hawkins from 1967 to 1969, feels his emboss looks so closely at Hamilton musicians as they're the "only ones left playing this kind of stuff," and that the interest in Mikey is natural as "he's one of the few guys left that Hawkins can use, a guitarist who's been trained by Richard Newell."

Jay says he learned much but claimed Hawkins is a "tyrannical guy...I love him dearly now that I don't have to work with him."

Hawkins says "Hamilton cats have always been especially good at blues and R & B, ever since I can remember.

"And Mikey has a lot going for him. He's 21, still polite and not burnt-out. I can't put him into the big time because, I can't get there myself, but I think I can move him up four or five notches from where he's at.

"A kid of his age needs to be playing six nights a week and practicing seven days per week. My method or school is that a musician is a lot like a fighter; you don't learn by shadow boxing in your room, you have to get into the ring."

Hawkins plans to bring Mikey, who's already played for him at Lulu's, up to his Peterborough area farm for a week of jamming. It's up to Mikey, he says, but if he doesn't end up in the Hawkins band he could instead go out on the road with players of Hawkins' choosing. "By the time he's 25," the old legend says, "he could have his own thing going real good."

HAWKINS' shows currently feature rockabilly and country. Soon, he'll be dropping country and going with rockabilly and blues.

Hamilton has superb talent, he feels. Of Bobby Washington, he says: "I used to think if I could sing half as well as Bobby Washington all the money in Hollywood wouldn't be enough for me." And John Lewis: "He had the potential to be champion of the world. When he was on the road with me he had so many fans. He wanted to start his own thing, which is something eventually he had to do."

And of his all-time favorite, the King Biscuit Boy, he says: "At one time when he was trying hard and at his peak, he was the best harp player in the world. I liked him better than Paul Butterfield and all those greats.

"He's one of the greatest talents, the best that ever was. And he's taken a lot of those great Hamilton players to-school. It's too bad he can't seem to get it together."



## ENTERTAINMENT



# Experienced producer pushes band through first big break

THE HARDEST part was learning how to relax.

For months, ever since his Steel City Blues Band won a UNICEF talent contest at Westdale Secondary school, 17-year-old Mike McMillan had been preparing himself.

He knew the day would come when he'd have to pull out all the stops, when he'd be getting his big chance at Grant Avenue Studio. He knew Ian Thomas would be producing a three-song demo. And he knew, just knew, that everything had to be just right.

Yet, when the day finally came yesterday, he still hadn't shaken the jitters.

"I was a little apprehensive," he said, after the 7½-hour session was finished. "I had a rough idea of what was going to happen, but when I walked into that engine room it was like walking into a lunar module."

Not to worry. McMillan and other Steel City Blues Band members, Greg Simon (bass), Gary Downie (drums) and Greg Brown (harp), found Thomas was a capable studio leader who eventually brought out the best in them. He made sure the rough edges were left on but he eliminated the individual

excesses. And he helped make it a day they'll never forget.



McMillan, let it be known, was the main reason the Steel City Blues Band ended up in Hamilton's swankiest recording studio. His guitar playing and singing at the talent contest floored each and every judge.

He had a maturity most 30-year-old musicians only dream about and he fully understood the rationale behind the blues idiom. Reared on the guitar/singing exploits of Johnny Winter (she's been my hero since I was nine") he also has a traditionalist style all his own.

The talent contest opened doors for the group—a week at Jackson Square, a pub at Mohawk College and a spot at The Festival of Friends—and the demo should allow the trend to continue.

When it was completed and the final mixing was being done, you couldn't help but be impressed. Thomas had taken a raw—and sometimes self-indulgent—unit and tightened up the loose ends. Along the way, he had to step on toes, but in the end even McMillan admitted the changes had been for the best.

At one point in the after-noon, after nearly all the instrumental parts had been laid down, Thomas suggested McMillan do the vocals on the song, *Hanging Around*. But the

Grade 12 student at Barton Secondary School didn't want to sing. He wanted to add the slide guitar parts instead.

McMillan hemmed and hawed, still not satisfied with the order of things. He tried singing, but it wasn't working. Finally tried to call it quits again. But Thomas wouldn't budge.

"Tell him to put a guitar on and turn it off," Thomas instructed. "He can play dead guitar while he's singing. It might make him relax more."

That seemed to rectify part of the problem, but McMillan still had to be coaxed through the vocals. Thomas pushed, McMillan squirmed, but eventually the work was done right.

There were moments when Thomas could only shake his head in amazement. And McMillan's guitar proficiency was the reason. The kid could play. The point was, why could he play so well? You're not supposed to be able to get that kind of response from a guitar at the age of 17.

Later in the day, the pieces all began falling together and the band members finally appeared to see matters as Thomas did. They heard themselves playing as they'd never heard themselves before. And they were visibly pleased.

At this stage in his career, McMillan is adamant about one thing: He likes traditional blues and he never wants to change.

He says he'll be perfectly content to play pure unadulterated blues until he's 95 years

old. He doesn't care if he ever gets rich as long as people turn out to see him play.

"I don't want this kind of music to die," he said, unflinchingly. "I just want to be comfortable playing the blues. If that means playing the bars until I die, then so be it."

After the work was done, a drained Ian Thomas couldn't help but rave about McMillan and company. He was satisfied with his contribution and felt he'd achieved the goals he set early on.

"Mainly, I wanted to let whoever listens to this demo see the raw, unrefined talent," he said. "He (McMillan) is a very, very excellent guitarist. He's 17-year-old kid who plays like a 50-year-old black man."

