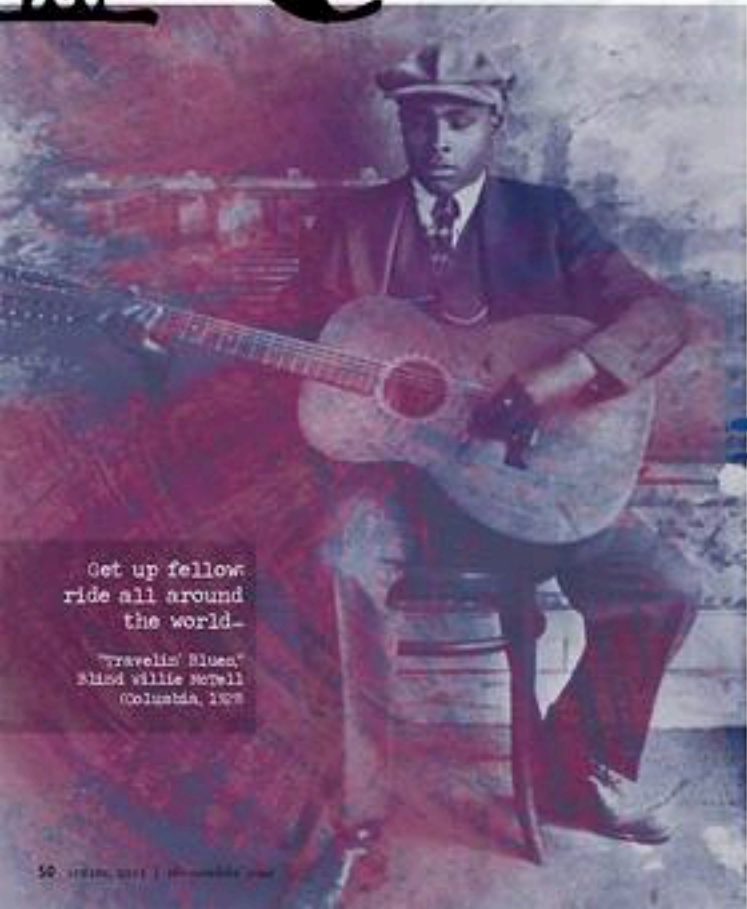


RAMP BLUES



written by ELIZABETH LEIGHTON JONES
photography by JUSTIN EVANS



Get up fellow
ride all around
the world—

"Travelin' Blues"
Blind Willie McTell
Columbia, 1949

Wander through the
life and music of a
Georgia bluesman at
the **Blind Willie McTell**
festival in Thomson



Seen them big plantations
burning/Hear the cracking of
the whips/Smell that sweet
magnolia blooming/See the
ghosts of slavery ships/I can
hear them tribes a-moaning/
Hear that undertaker's Bell/
Nobody can sing the blues
like Blind Willie McTell.

Bob Dylan, "Blind Willie McTell"
The Bootleg Series, Volume 1-3
Rare and Unreleased, 1963-1991



SPRING DAYS ARE GOOD DAYS FOR TRAVELIN'.

Good days for listening to good music under a fine sun at the Blind Willie McTell Blues Festival in Thomson, Georgia, a one-day blues festival that commemorates its native son, Blind Willie McTell.

If you were lucky enough to attend last year's festival, you were rewarded amply. The grassy field just outside of town resounded to the incredible wail of the harmonica under the lips of blues legend James Cotton, one of the few remaining blues musicians to have played with Muddy Waters. The day's fare also included music by bluesman, playwright, and storyteller, Guy Davis, the Athens-based Randall Beardsley, Grammy-winner Delbert McClinton, and the folk-rock break-out artist Cory Chisel.

This year's 20th anniversary line-up will again do mighty fine justice to the outstanding bluesman Blind Willie McTell, and his musical descendants. Music lovers of all stripes should put a big "X" on their calendar for May 18, 2013.

If Willie were alive, he'd strap his 12-string guitar across his back and ride the rails home to jam with his kinsmen on the stage.



GOT THE BLUES Estonon artist J.J. Periva depicts McTell and the soul of the blues in her artwork. This year's festival poster features a jam session at a railroad depot. Her sketch (right) was the signature piece of last year's festival. (Previous page) Cory Chisel performs at the festival. James Cotton, one of the greatest blues harmonica players, was born in Tunica, Mississippi, in 1935. He played with Howlin' Wolf and Muddy Waters. Last year was his first appearance at the festival.





TAKIN' THE STAGE at this year's 20th annual Blind Willie McTell Blues Festival on May 18 is an all-star line-up including Buddy Miller, Tab Benoit, Jim Lauderdale, Eric Lindell, Anson Funderburgh, Randall Bramblett, The Revelers, and the Crossin Wilkars.

Twenty Years of Art in Music

View the entire poster catalog for the Blind Willie Blues Festival at www.blindwillie.com



I followed my baby from the station to the train
And the blues came down like night and showered me

"Searching the Desert for the Blues,"
Blind Willie McTell (c.1925)

IT JUST MIGHT HAVE BEEN A GOLDEN DAY IN MAY

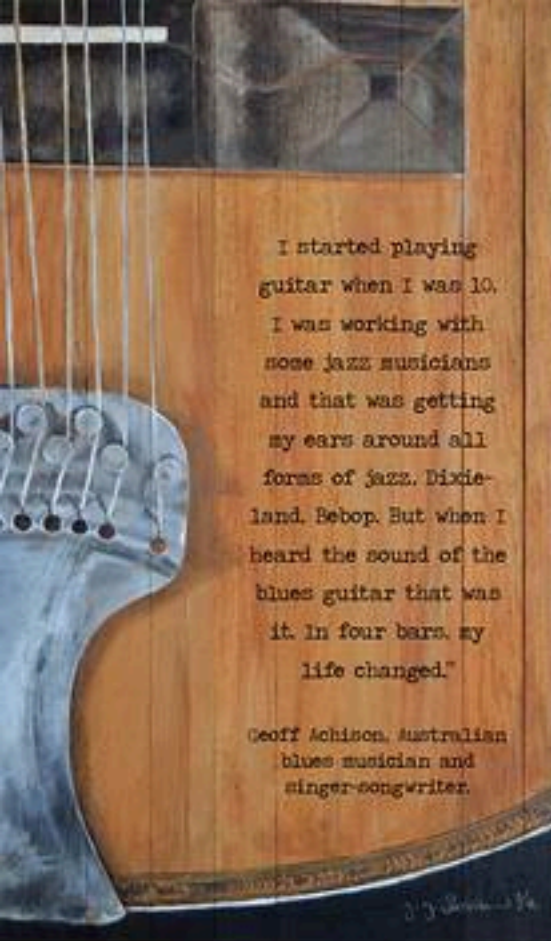
when a teenage Blind Willie McTell went from the station to the train in Thomson, Georgia. The clackety-clack sound of the track and lonesome blue of the horn had made its way into Willie's music, and his music was about to make its way

out in the world by the same train. On that fine day, Willie had no idea how many miles would roll out from under his feet though the coming decades, how many meals he would eat on the back stoop of some kind lady's house, or how many men and women would hurry by, or tap their toes, or break their hearts over one of his songs.

He didn't know that he'd come home and marry a girl named Kate. He didn't know that she was made to put down roots and he was made to drift. He didn't know he would record almost 60 singles and two long-play records for Victor, Columbia, OKeh, Decca, Atlantic, Regal, Siriv' In With, Melodisc, and Bluebird. He didn't know his music wouldn't reach much past the sidewalk of the studio or

that his last known taping would be made in trade for a bottle of cheap corn liquor. Nor could he know that he would be inducted into the Georgia Music Hall of Fame posthumously. He couldn't see a future where his music would be accessible to the world through YouTube or iTunes. He couldn't foresee that the Allman Brothers Band or Bob Dylan would record his songs or that his hometown would launch

a festival in his honor. On that fine day, how could he know that he would be a living parable of the restless, plaintive, beautiful, enduring power of the blues? On that fine day, almost one hundred years ago, his head was full of trains and women, the reeking streets of Augusta and Atlanta and points in between, and above all, his soul was full of the blues.



I started playing guitar when I was 10. I was working with some jazz musicians and that was getting my ears around all forms of jazz, Dixieland, Bebop. But when I heard the sound of the blues guitar that was it. In four bars, my life changed."

Geoff Achison, Australian blues musician and singer-songwriter.



Musing on the Blues



"I'm a bluesman moving through a blues-cooked America, a blues-cooked world, a planet where catastrophe and celebration—joy and pain sit side by side. The blues started off in some field, some plantation, in some mind, in some imagination, in some heart. The blues blew over to the next plantation, and then the next state. The blues went south to north, got electrified and even sanctified. The blues got mixed up with jazz and gospel and rock and roll."

Cornel West, "Brother West: Living and Loving Out Loud: A Memoir"



"For me there is something primitively soothing about this music, and it went straight to my nervous system, making me feel ten feet tall."

Eric Clapton



"I think blues and soul are first cousins to each other, but it's just blues. It's blue notes—projecting pain and ways to overcome (pain). You get the blues just by living a certain way and caring for a certain kind of music."

Cory Chisel, American folk-rock artist.

OF THE TWO COUSINS, blues is the prodigal boy lifting greenbacks from his daddy's wallet and slipping away in the night for cold moonshine and a hot girl. He'll end up with his head split and his wallet gone. He'll sleep like the dead until the sun goes down then wind right up and do it over again. He'll know he's in trouble and he'll try to come home, but he'll only make it back piecemeal. There's a juke joint or two along the way, and a woman or two. But he'll survive and play on.

Bluesman Guy Davis calls it "Survivor Music." Like many young men of his era, Guy found his way to the 12-bar world through blues icon Taj Mahal. He was fifteen, and the raw, earthy, sexy sound of blues exploded through the veins of the testosterone-fueled boy like lightning. The bent notes and bruised lyrics were freighted with angst and sexual energy—with the raw, earthy humors of human life. He picked up a banjo,



"She's no lady. Her songs are all unbelievably unhappy or lewd. It's called Blues. She sings about sore feet, sexual relations, baked goods, killing your lover, being broke, men called paddy, women who dress like men, working, praying for rain, jail and trains, whiskey and morphine. She tells stories between verses and everyone in the place shouts out how true it all is."

Ann Marie MacDonald, "Fall on Your Knees"

