

# **Edmonton Blues Society Memphis Bound Blues Challenge Fundraiser Backgrounder**

## **About David Vest**

Like Otis Spann, Pinetop Perkins and other blues piano legends, David Vest spent a long time in the shadows as a sideman before stepping out on his own. Born in Alabama in 1943, David grew up in Birmingham, not far from Tuxedo Junction. He played his first paying gig in 1957. Half a century later, he finally saw one of his CDs (recorded as co-leader of the Paul deLay Band) make it into the Top 10 on Billboard's blues chart. "I guess I missed the short cut," he says.

Maybe that's a good thing. Had David not taken the long route, he'd have missed performing with Big Joe Turner and with Bill Black's Combo in the early 1960s, touring with blues legends Jimmy T99 Nelson and Lavelle White, and receiving the direct "laying on of hands" from Texas piano titans like Floyd Dixon and Big Walter the Thunderbird. After one performance in a Houston juke joint, a woman David hadn't met threw her arms around him and shouted for all to hear, "My name is Katie Webster, and I knows it when I hears it!"

Once David began leading his own groups, audiences far and wide had a similar response. As one west coast night club manager put it, "Last month, we saw the first performance from David Vest at Jimmy Mak's. We knew very little of him, except that he was an old-school boogie-woogie pianist. Well folks, that was a massive understatement. David Vest is the Original Boogie-Woogie Starchild!"

David's obvious influences include Memphis Slim, Champion Jack Dupree, and Amos Milburn. Although he's a bluesman to the bone, his playing also reminds people of early Fats Domino and Jerry Lee Lewis, which is probably inevitable given his origins. His style owes a little something to jazz icon Sun Ra, another Birmingham native.

## **About Jimmy and the Sleepers**

Jimmy and the Sleepers are a gritty, genuine house rockin' blues band based in Edmonton. For years, Edmonton has had a modest but reverent blues scene which has fostered a blues sound a little more traditional. Perhaps it's those long, cold, Canadian prairie winters whose bone chilling winds blow like that off Lake Michigan and Chicago in the early days of the electric blues. Whatever it is, the blues is alive in Edmonton and Jimmy and the Sleepers are disciples of the sound and dedicated to its roots. After smouldering like an underground fire for close to 10 years, they are more ready than ever to burn out of the frozen Alberta north and showcase their Edmonton-styled blues to the world.

## **About Breezy Brian Gregg**

A local Blues veteran, Blues was unheard of in his area in the early 60s. Growing up in Edmonton Canada through new American school friends, Breezy Brian Gregg had access to a stack of Chicago Blues LPs. From them, by ear, he learned the songs and started a blues band that ended up opening for Led Zeppelin in 1969. Though his career has taken him through many bands and many styles of music, Blues is always what he comes back to. He still does some local club and festival dates but his main gig is playing solo electric guitar every noon hour in the main city square for the Edmonton Arts Council.

## **Memphis Bound Blues Challenge**

EBS created the Memphis Bound Blues Challenge to showcase Edmonton and area blues talent to a greater community while providing an opportunity for musicians to receive concrete feedback on their skills, network with other musicians, and learn new skills and styles in the blues genre.

The competition awards one Solo/Duo act and one Band act to represent Alberta at the International Blues Challenge January 29-February 2, 2013 in Memphis, TN, USA.

This year we have expanded the boundaries of entrants to Red Deer north in Alberta to discover talent in a wider area and to bring awareness of this event and the opportunities it presents to musicians.

## **Memphis Bound Blues Challenge 2011**

For our inaugural year, we had 3 entries for each of our two categories, Solo/Duo and Band.

The final competition in Edmonton was a great success – the venue was sold out, and people were being turned away. Even the adjudicators were amazed by the crowd, the energy and excitement! (Holger Petersen, Cam Hayden, Carroll Deen, Roger Levesque & Ron Casat).

2011 Winners:

1. Breezy Brian Gregg in the Solo/Duo Category
2. Jimmy and the Sleepers in the Band Category

**Memphis:** 226 acts from 16 countries, played in 575 competition performances over 4 nights in 21 venues before 5000+ people. In addition, Breezy Brian Gregg was one of 16 acts selected to perform in The International Showcase the night before competition. All Canadian acts performed to an over-capacity inaugural event, "The First Great Canadian Polar Bear Blues Showcase" for which the Canadian Consulate was a sponsor. The Sleepers were a crowd favourite at their venue. Both acts increased their fan base, got their names known to industry and festival people, had fun and learned a lot.

The competition is NOT about winning, it's about the experience, networking, learning and growing as musicians. Our acts did all of these and represented Edmonton proudly! We are pleased to have provided them this opportunity and proud of them!

## **About the International Blues Challenge**

The 2013 International Blues Challenge will be the 29th year of Blues musicians from around the world competing for cash, prizes, and industry recognition. The Blues Foundation will present the 29th International Blues Challenge January 29-February 2, 2013 in Memphis, TN. The world's largest gathering of Blues acts represents an international search by The Blues Foundation and its Affiliated Organizations for the Blues Band and Solo/Duo Blues Act ready to take their act to the international stage. In 2012, 119 bands and 86 solo/duo acts entered, filling the clubs up and down Beale Street for the quarter-finals on Wednesday and Thursday, the semi-finals on Friday and the finals at the Orpheum Theatre on Saturday. We will have at least that many in 2013.

## **About the Edmonton Blues Society**

The Edmonton Blues Society is a non-profit society in Edmonton founded in 2006 by a group of volunteers with a focus on keeping the blues alive in the Edmonton area. The Society

encourages and educates young blues musicians to keep the blues alive, and is 100% run by volunteer blues fans and/or musicians.