

FRIENDS OF THE SIXTIES
JUNIOR WELLS: HOODOO MAN BLUES
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Well dear friends, I fear you are going to be guinea pigs for this new TV series I am working on, actually more like a podcast with graphics. I am just getting started, and here is the script for my first segment, a show about one of the great blues harmonica players, Junior Wells. Humor me, because I am on a learning curve here. And you won't be able to hear music yet, but I will post it to YouTube when it is finished. Thanks for your attention. Here is the first part:

"That was the great Chicago blue artist and amplified harmonica player Junior Wells doing a tune called "Chitlins' Con Carne" by the great jazz guitarist from Detroit, Kenny Burrell.

I am Michael Erlewine, founder of the All-Music Guide, and welcome to "Friends of the Sixties," a program devoted to the 1960s. I am a child of that era and I'm here to share some stories about what happened way back then.

In the summer of 1965 my brother Dan and I decided to start a rock band. At the same time, 2300 miles away in San Francisco, another new band had the same idea. They were called the Grateful Dead. Change was in the air.

Dan and I didn't want to be just another pop band playing teen clubs and the fraternity circuit (although we did that of course; anything to make money). I had spent the previous year living in Berkeley California where I had taken LSD, and I knew from that experience that the crew-cut mentality of the 1950s I was raised in was breaking up, at least in my mind.

Times were a' changing. Something new was being born and I knew that somehow Dan and I were going to be part of it. I came up with a name for our group, the Prime Movers, and soon we were called the Prime Movers Blues Band. And the house we lived in at 114 North Division in Ann Arbor became known as the "Prime Mover House." We all lived there and that included our drummer, Iggy Pop, although at that time he was just Iggy to us.

Iggy came from a local band called "The Iguanas," so in the beginning we called him "Iguana" for a while, but that soon was shortened to just "Iggy," and there you have it. My brother Dan played lead guitar and I was the lead singer and played amplified harmonica.

Of course we played all kinds of tunes, just to get some gigs, but we soon settled on blues and a little gospel as to what we were all about. I was by that point studying the blues full-time (and maybe even living them a little). I especially loved the modern-electric blues players that came out of Chicago. It didn't take too long for us to figure out that these great blues players were still alive, and that Chicago was less than a three-hour drive from Ann Arbor. Let's go!

And off we went, the whole lot of us, including Iggy. We piled into our 1966 Dodge van and headed for Chicago. Of course we knew next to nothing about Chicago and we knew no one there, so mostly we found ourselves digging through bins at tiny record shops for old 45-records of blues players like Little Walter, Muddy Waters, Junior Wells, and others. We went to Chicago many times.

One of the music stores we came across was the “Jazz Record Mart” at 27 East Illinois Street, and the proprietor of that shop was a man named Bob Koester. We didn’t know it then, but Koester had been producing blues recordings for almost ten years, and in the process founded Delmark Records, one of the great blues labels of all time. Koester, who can still be found at the Jazz record Mart even today, was kind enough to chaperone our band around to some of the clubs on Chicago’s South and West side, clubs a group of white boys like ourselves might have been afraid to go into.

It was in a little step-down-into-the basement club at 48th and Indiana Streets called Theresa’s Lounge that I first saw Junior Wells perform live. In that dimly-lit bar, Wells was standing up by the tiny floor-level stage arguing with another player. And my eyes popped out when I realized Junior Wells was arguing with no less than Little Walter, one of the all-time blues harmonica greats. This was like going to heaven for me. You know we were out of our bodies by that point and living in a dream come true.

Anyway, enough stories. I want you to hear some cuts from one of the greatest blues albums ever recorded, the Delmark album “Hoodoo Man Blues,” and it features the singing and harmonica playing of Junior Wells, backed by the phenomenal guitar playing of a young Buddy Guy, with Jack Myers on bass, and Billy Warren on drums. It was recorded in September of 1965, not long before our first trip to Chicago. Blues experts agree that this is a landmark album. I know you will love it.

If I had to go to a desert island and could only take a handful of albums, this would be one of them.

END OF PART ONE

Well, there you have a taste of what I am knee-deep into. I am learning a lot, but there is a lot to learn. I am writing the script, narrating it, doing all the graphics, and programming to create the video, and this is only one of many to come.