

## FOLK REVIVAL TO ELECTRIC BLUES: A HISTORY

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[I would like to take some time here on my Facebook blog to share some music history. I know, it may not be as exciting as some might like, but it is time I make sure some of you out there get to read this because, it is our history. And so, for the next few (or however many I need) blogs, I will share in quite some detail, information from my own experience about the transition from the folk revival of the 1950s to the emergence of city electric blues. My hope is that some few of you will appreciate hearing how this went down.]

### **The Ann Arbor Blues Festival**

On a warm summer night in August of 1969 a music legacy was born. Several thousand blues lovers gathered in a small athletic field called Fuller Flats near the North Campus of the University of Michigan (a spot along the Huron River in Ann Arbor, Michigan) to witness the first “Ann Arbor Blues Festival.” By the time blues icon Sun House took the stage to close the show it was clear that something magical was happening in this southeast Michigan college town. Few present also knew that music history was being made, for the 1969 Ann Arbor Blues Festival was the first electric blues festival of its kind in North America.

When we look back at the roster of performers at those first two Ann Arbor Blues Festivals, it is hard to imagine that all of this great talent managed to converge at one place and time, blues greats like Bobby ‘Blue’ Bland, Big Joe Turner, Buddy Guy, John Lee Hooker, B.B. King, Albert King, Freddy King, Lightnin’ Hopkins, Howlin’ Wolf, Magic Sam, Muddy Waters, Son House, T-Bone Walker, and Junior Wells, to name a few. And that is just the short list.

## **How I Happened to Be There**

Before I begin, let me tell you something about why I happen to be writing this and how I got involved with these landmark festivals in the first place. It is simple: those first two Ann Arbor Blues Festivals changed the course of my life forever.

Sometimes I think of myself as similar to the lead character in the movie “Forest Gump,” always on the edge of history, witnessing, but never quite front and center, never in exactly the right place at the right time. However, when it comes to those first two blues festivals in Ann Arbor, I was there AND then, one-hundred percent. Those festivals were life-altering events for me, a pivotal point in deciding who I was going to be and what I would do in my life. Let me give you a quick idea what I was about back then.

In 1968, when that first blues festival was being organized, I was part of the only blues band in the area. The “Prime Movers Blues Band” first came together in the summer of 1965, the same summer that the Grateful Dead formed in San Francisco. This was a time of real cultural change across the country. I was studying and learning to play Chicago-style blues 24x7. It was my passion.

We hooked up with the blues festival organizers pretty much by default: we were the only band in the area that knew anything about modern city blues. We had been to Chicago years before and seen all the blues greats live, not to mention: you couldn’t keep us out of that festival for the world. This festival was like a dream come true for me, a chance to see my idols, these great blues players up close and right here in my own home town. Who could ask for more?

My brother Dan and I volunteered (we probably forced ourselves on the organizers) and ended up being put in charge of feeding all the performers and making sure

they had drinks. Trust me, providing drinks proved to be ‘key’ in gaining access to these players. The opportunity to meet our heroes was way beyond anything we could have imagined on our own.

And to put the icing on the cake, I ended up officially interviewing (on reel-to-reel tape) almost every blues artist and sideman at the festival - scores of them. Later in my life, the experience of putting all that interview information together led to my becoming something of an archivist of music data in general and I eventually founded and built the All-Music Guide ([allmusic.com](http://allmusic.com)), which today is the largest database of music reviews, bios, tracks, and information on the planet. So, you can see what I mean when I say that these festivals were life-changing for me. They gave me direction. Now you know how I fit into all of this, so let’s move on.

In this writing, I have two stories to tell. One of course is the importance of those first two Ann Arbor blues festivals, how they came about, who was involved, and the artists that played there – the music itself. The second story I want to share with you has more to do with my experience of how white America first became aware of electric-city blues music and, as you will see, the two are to some degree interdependent.

## A Short History of Blues Festivals

To appreciate the uniqueness of those first Ann Arbor Blues Festivals, some historical context may be helpful. Blues as a genre did not always have festivals.

Although some blues was included in many of the early folk festivals, it was almost exclusively of the acoustic ‘folk-blues’ variety, more of an add-on than a featured style at folk festivals like those held in Newport Rhode Island. It was the ‘folk’ in folk-blues that was what most people came to hear, not the blues. The “blues” was just a feeling that the folk-blues held for many of us and was not recognized as the genre it is today, at least not by folkies like me. Until the late ‘60s, modern, electric,

citified blues was almost exclusively the province of black Americans, made available on black record labels or served up in hundreds of small clubs and bars across the land. White Americans didn't go there. All that began to change with that first Ann Arbor Blues Festival in 1969, but let's back up just a bit.

### **The Chitlin' Circuit**

Chitterlings or 'Chitlins' as they are called are the large intestines of pigs that have been specially cleaned, stewed, and then fried. The Chitlin' Circuit as it was called consisted of hundreds of small venues (mostly in the South) where chitlins were served along with plenty of beer and music. These were the places where black musicians travelled to play the blues and where black audiences could congregate in a racially divided country and time. The chitlin' circuit also included (on the high-end) some major black theaters like the Apollo Theater in Harlem, the Howard Theater in D.C., the Cotton Club in NYC, the Royal Theater in Baltimore, the Fox Theater in Detroit, the Uptown Theater in Philadelphia, and so on.

But for the most part, this kind of blues was played in the hundreds of small bars, clubs, and way-stops along the circuit. Many of the great blues musicians featured at those first Ann Arbor blues festivals knew the chitlin' circuit only too well. For years, these performers had traveled the circuit playing the blues - one-night stands at roadside bars and clubs. To white America, the chitlin' circuit was practically invisible. City blues at that time was black music played in black venues - music for blacks.

### **The Folk Festivals**

By the 1950s, more and more young Americans became interested in their own indigenous music – American folk music. In the later '50s and early '60s,

festivals and folklore societies became increasingly popular, in particular on college campuses and among more affluent white Americans. Along with the interest in folk music came the folklore societies. My first experience with these groups was the University of Michigan Folklore Society in Ann Arbor in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In 1957, freshman student Al Young (today a poet laureate of California) and Bill McAdoo founded the University of Michigan Folklore Society. Great players like Marc Silber, Perry Lederman, and others were part of that.

And of course there were the folk festivals, of which the one in Newport, Rhode Island is perhaps the most famous, if not the first. The Newport Folk Festival was established in 1959 by George Wein, the same man who in 1954 established the Newport Jazz Festival. The first Newport Folk Festival was held on July 11-12, 1959 and featured, among other acts, the Kingston Trio, a group that had exploded to national prominence only the year before. Flanking the Kingston Trio were classic folk singers like Odetta, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, and of course, the ubiquitous Pete Seeger. During a set by the singer/songwriter Bob Gibson at that first 1959 festival, a young Joan Baez made her national debut to a wildly enthusiastic audience of over 13,000 people. The Newport festival is still considered to be the granddaddy of all folk festivals, even though it has been reduced in size in recent years.

The folk scene in the early '60s was very active and organized enough to have a well-established set of venues (coffee houses, church sponsorships, etc.) and routes that stretched across the country and over which performing folk artists traveled, mostly by hitchhiking. By the early 1960s, folk enthusiasts everywhere were learning the rudiments of music research, at least to the point of tracing particular songs back through time to their roots or at least trying to. It was axiomatic at that time that the original version of a song was preferable to later versions, almost always enriching the listener's

experience and enjoyment of the tune. “Sing Out! Magazine” was one of the main repositories of this research, our musical collective heritage.

It should be remembered that the folk-music revival emerged toward the end of the 1950s and the early 1960s, a time when more and more young people were rejecting the culture of the 1950s (the flattop haircuts and what they felt was a cookie-cutter mentality) and thirsting for something a little more authentic. It is a simple fact that most of us looked to the folk music tradition as a way of grounding ourselves, a way to somehow get underneath or break through the social veneer in which we were raised. Future events cast their shadows and the counterculture revolution that was to come later in the mid-1960s was already nascent and emerging.

## **The Folk Scene**

Unlike folk music, whose roots were often in England or Ireland, with blues, to the surprise of most white folk-blues lovers, a trip into the history book was often as easy as venturing into a different part of town, only we didn't know it then. The folk music scene was flourishing on college campuses and what started at Newport in 1959 was echoed in the next few years by startup folk festivals all across America, including the Berkeley and Chicago Folk festivals, both of which debuted in 1961. And, although these folk festivals also featured some blues (country blues), the blues at those festivals was mostly treated as part of the folk genre, and as a sidelight at that.

For example, one could hear Jessie ‘Lone Cat’ Fuller at Hertz Hall (Berkeley, CA) in 1959 and at Newport in 1960. In 1960 Robert Pete Williams performed at Newport. Other festivals in the early 1960s had Lightnin' Hopkins, Mance Lipscomb, and Mississippi John Hurt, Rev. Gary Davis, Sleepy John Estes, Jesse Fuller, and occasionally John Lee Hooker. It is hard for me to

imagine John Lee Hooker or Lightnin' Hopkins not getting mainstream attention wherever they played. In 1965, an electrified Bob Dylan, backed by the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, shocked the Newport folk crowd and helped to bring awareness of modern city blues to a mostly white folk crowd. Dylan was booed.

## **The Folk Revival – Looking for Roots**

This folk music revival in the later 1950s and early 1960s was just that, a revival, an attempt to revive a music that most felt was already deeply embedded in the past. The revival started out looking back and, for the most part, stayed that way for many years. We sought to revive and find our future in past songs rather than writing our own songs for the future.

Initially, younger folk artists were just too shy. Emerging players like Bob Dylan, Ramblin' Jack Elliot (and scores of now-unknown players schooled in traditional folk music) were (at first) not focused on writing songs themselves. Their favorite contemporary songwriter was probably Woody Guthrie, but most of the songs they played came from even earlier times, sometimes all the way back to England and Europe. The great majority of folk artists did covers of earlier songs, Dylan included. The goal then was to do them well, to revive and make them live again.

Pivotal artists of the time like Joan Baez and the New Lost City Ramblers were not writing their own songs, but instead re-enacting and re-presenting the finest in traditional folk music. Their technique was flawless, but it was not their own songwriting creativity that was being featured. Groups like the Kingston Trio and the Weavers are perfect examples. The folk music magazine "Sing Out!" is a written testimony to this approach. White America was exploring its roots, but we were looking backward to find what we felt was missing in the present – our living roots. Folk artists as a group had not yet empowered themselves to write for

the present, much less for the future. They were too busy trying to make the past live again, reviving their heritage. That's why it is called a revival.

I was fortunate enough to be part of the early folk scene in the late 1950s and early 1960s. There was a route we all traveled that went from Cambridge, Massachusetts to New York City, to Ann Arbor, to the University of Chicago, to Madison, Wisconsin, to Berkeley, California, and then round back again. For the most part we all hitchhiked or piled into cars that could barely run all the way across this wide country. If I remember right, I believe I hitchhiked the distance from Ann Arbor to New York City some ten times and hitchhiked to and lived in Venice Beach and North Beach, San Francisco as early as 1960. I even travelled with Bob Dylan for a while, hitchhiking together with my friend Perry Lederman, who back then was a legendary guitar instrumentalist.

The folk route also included side trips to places like Oberlin and Antioch colleges in Ohio, and so on, wherever colleges and universities were. In Ann Arbor, folk artists like Bob Dylan and Joan Baez were frequent visitors, while groups like the New Lost City Ramblers and the Country Gentlemen were pretty much regulars and Ramblin' Jack Elliot spent a lot of time there. We met mostly in houses or apartments and it seems we spent an inordinate amount of time drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes in the cafeteria of the University of Michigan Student Union. I can recall sitting around the Union with a nervous Bob Dylan who was awaiting the Michigan Daily review of one of his earliest performances in Ann Arbor. He couldn't bear to leave town until the review came out. When he saw that the review was good, Dylan was on his way to the edge of Ann Arbor, hitchhiking out of town.

## **Singers, Not Songwriters**

For the most part, the folk movement at this time was oriented around covering traditional folk tunes. The folk artists originality was in how well they sang the song and not yet in the writing of contemporary songs. This is not to say that no songs were written; some were. My point is that back then it was all about the 'singer' in 'singer/songwriter' and not yet so much about the 'songwriter'. For most of us, that came a bit later.

I can remember well traveling in 1961 with Bob Dylan and stopping at Gerde's Folk City on West 4<sup>th</sup> Street in New York City. Gerde's was 'the' happening place back then and the folk star of the moment in that club was a guitar virtuoso named Danny Kalb, who later became part of the group known as the "Blues Project." Dylan was obviously aware of and perhaps a little jealous of the attention Kalb was getting (you could hear it in his voice), but it was not just petty jealousy. He honestly could not understand what Kalb had going for him that he didn't. It boggled his mind. I didn't know then that my traveling companion was "The" Bob Dylan, but I am certain he must have. After all, he had something to say.

Remember, all of this was in the early 1960s, well before Haight Ashbury and the hippie scene. Most folkies (like myself) were wanna-be Beatniks, but that train had already left the station. We stood outside conventional society, but we were not so much politically alienated from that society as we were repulsed by it, and fascinated by the world of music, literature, art, and our own little social scene. Things were happening man! I was 19 years old.

## The Folk Blues

Real folk-blues artists like Elizabeth Cotton and Jessie 'Lone Cat' Fuller began to be featured at festivals like the Berkeley Folk Festivals in the late 1950s. Many of them came to Ann Arbor where I lived and we heard them live, songs like "Freight Train" (Cotton) and "San

Francisco Bay Blues" (Fuller). To folk enthusiasts like myself, this was still just folk music, but you did get a different feeling when you heard the blues. To me at the time, this just sounded like really good folk music – 'really' good. Back then we didn't know much about the blues, but we sure could feel that music.

While folk enthusiasts heard some blues early on (as mentioned), it was at first mostly only the folk blues, and folk blues were seen as just another form (albeit, with a lot of feeling) of folk music. Later, and only very gradually, more and more country blues began to appear, but usually only southern acoustic blues, not music from the North and nothing at all from the inner cities. There was no awareness of inner-city blues or electrified blues and no interest either. At that time electric-folk music was an oxymoron.

### **Being Part of the Scene**

As a folkie myself, I can remember listening to acoustic folk-blues and really loving it, but I treated it the same way I treated traditional folk music, as something that also needed to be preserved and revived: learned, played, shared - kept alive. It was a natural assumption on our part that we were listening to the vestiges of what had once been a living tradition and we wanted to connect to that past, to revive and relive it. We had no idea that modern electric blues music was not only 'not-dead', but was playing 'live' most nights of the week probably only blocks away, separated from us by a racial curtain. We just had no idea. The folk music scene had few blacks in it (other than a handful of performers) and those that were present were usually the older folk-blues artists like Sonny Terry, Odetta, and so on. Their music was perceived by folkies as coming out of the past, not part of the present. Their singing was seen as some kind of recreation.

Please don't get the idea that our exposure to folk music was only at concerts or folk societies. Like most

musicians, we played or practiced music all the time, if only to learn the songs and how to play our instruments. We were also exposed to a lot of jazz. In Ann Arbor in the early 1960s, before bars could serve liquor by the glass, everyone met in apartments and houses around town to drink, smoke pot, and play music. This was primarily a jazz scene and young folkies (underage high-school kids like me) were tolerated as long as we kept to the shadows and sat along the far edges of the rooms. We took this all in.

And quite a scene it was. I remember one house on E. Williams Street in Ann Arbor. Protruding horizontally from its second story hung a huge flag with a picture of Thelonious Monk. At nights, especially on weekends, there was impromptu jazz in that house that went on most of the night, with players like Bob James, Bob Detwiler, Ron Brooks, and many others. It was music, music, music plus wine and pot. High school kids like me sat on the floor, squeezed in along the back wall. We didn't rate any pot, but we used to snort the ashes from joints that others had smoked. That should tell you how desperate we were to be part of the scene!

## **Searchin' for Roots**

We experienced jazz along with our folk music, but still not much blues. And the jazz was anything but bluesy jazz; it was more frenetic, like bop. And if it wasn't jazz we heard, then it was classical music played in the background on the stereo. Again: not much blues. This is an important point, because when the mostly-white folk musicians like myself were suddenly exposed to modern (and virile) inner-city blues players like Junior Wells, Magic Sam, and Howlin' Wolf, we were astonished.

As folkies made the gradual transition from studying and researching traditional folk music to also searching out historic country folk blues and then on to discovering modern city blues, all of a sudden things lit

up. We got it. Blues was not simply R&B or pop music like you heard on the radio, but music by plain folks – folk music! We could see that blues was the same as folk music, only modern, fresh – alive and well, plus incredibly potent.

What we had assumed must always be lost in the past, like folk music that depended on our efforts to restore and revive it was, when it came to blues, very much alive and in the present – staring us in the face and more-or-less happy to see us at that. This blues music we were hearing lived in the present and not just in the past. It did not need us to revive it. Our idea of folk music as something to restore and treasure suddenly moved from the past into the present in our minds. We made the connection. Blues didn't need restoration. It was still with us and it was powerful. It was like the movie Jurassic Park; we had found a living dinosaur, folk music that lived in the present! And this music revived us and not vice-versa!

The blues scene in the early 1960s as played out in the small clubs and bars of Chicago, Detroit, and other major industrial cities, while very much still alive, was by then itself on the wane, only we newcomers didn't know that yet. To us, it was way more alive than the standard folk music we knew. Intercity electric blues music was still authentic and strong, but (for the most part) the next generation of younger blacks was already not picking up on it; they were just not interested. Chicago-style city blues was, to younger blacks at that time, old-peoples music, something from the South, a past and history they wanted to get away from rather than embrace. Younger blacks had already skipped ahead to R&B, Motown, and funk. Forget about those old blues.

My band played in a black bar for something like a year or a year and a half, a bar filled with mostly older black folks and a sprinkling of hippie whites who had come to see us. This was in 1967. Right next door was another black bar, where all the younger blacks hung out and

where they played only the latest R&B hits. The younger blacks seldom came into our bar and, in general, were embarrassed that their parents and elders were listening to blues played by a racially-mixed band – listening to white boys play the blues. How embarrassing! Interest in the classic Chicago blues was just not there for the younger generation of blacks. They felt that blues was music from an older generation, music for old people.

While within the black community the door was slowly closing on the Chicago blues artists (even the artists knew this), another and much wider door for this music was opening onto white America, an open door that would extend the careers for many of these artists and secure their music well into the future.

B.B. King said in Time Magazine in 1971:

“The blacks are more interested in the ‘jumpy’ stuff. The whites want to hear me for what I am.”

### **1965: A Sea Change**

As pointed out, in the early 1960s the folk music revival was one of the main things happening on all the major campuses across America: Cambridge, Ann Arbor, Chicago, Madison, Berkeley, etc. What happened to it?

For one, in the mid-1960s, pop music groups like the Rolling Stones were busy recording covers of blues classics and pointing out the source – the artists who originally wrote and recorded them. White players like me, eager for guidance, hunted down the original blues 45s, which were a revelation to us. I can remember rummaging through bins of old 45s in downtown Chicago and finding just incredible music.

That first “Rolling Stones” album, of the same name, was released in April of 1964. It contained tunes like Jimmy Reed’s “Honest I Do,” “Willie Dixon’s “I Just

Want to Make Love to You," "I'm a King Bee," plus songs by Chuck Berry and Rufus Thomas.

The Stones second album, also released in 1964, veered away from the blues and contained tunes recorded by Chuck Berry, Wilson Pickett, Dale Hawkins, songs like "Under the Boardwalk." It also included the blues-R&B tune made famous by Irma Thomas, "Time Is on My Side." In 1965, the album "Rolling stones, Now!" had the Dixon-Wolf classic "Little Red Rooster."

From that point onward, the blues content of Rolling Stones albums decreased. In 1965, the album "Out of Our Heads" had no real blues tunes, and neither did their other 1965 album, "December's Children." It was those first two albums in 1964, and in particular the first album, that pointed the blues out to many in the white audience. The U.K. was all about authentic blues well before white America ever heard of them.

In the wake of the Beatles and Rolling Stones, late summer and early fall of 1965 saw the emerging dancehall scene in San Francisco and the arrival of bands like the Grateful Dead. This was the beginning of the hippie era, and it's when my own band, the Prime Movers, formed in Ann Arbor, Michigan. We knew nothing of the Grateful Dead, yet we too arose at the same time and represented a new era in music and lifestyle.

In fact, the summer of 1965 was the trigger point for so very much. It marked a change in the folk scene with the advent of groups like the Paul Butterfield Blues Band. If there was a single band that opened up blues to white players, it was the Butterfield Band. That first Butterfield album appeared late in 1965, and it totally kicked ass. The Butterfield band in person was way more powerful than anything they managed to record.

This racially mixed band playing authentic Chicago blues sent a lightning bolt-like signal to all of us who were just waking up to the blues anyway. Their message was that white players could overcome their fear to play black music, including the blues. The Paul Butterfield Blues Band set the standard and set white musicians on notice that anybody was free to try to play the blues. We were emboldened to try.

Unlike many areas of folk music, modern city blues at that time was anything but a dead art. While the lineage of most folk music required revival, like trying to trace out the history and line of the music, this was not true of blues. The blues lineage was not only unbroken, but indeed very much alive, both on black record labels and in thousands of bars and clubs across the nation. Perhaps some forms of country blues were endangered, but inner-city blues (at least for the older generation of Blacks) was in full swing. White Americans just knew little or nothing about it. During the later 1960s, all that changed. And last, but not least, many of the modern city blues players were still reasonably young and more than willing to be discovered. They needed the money and appreciated the recognition.

Historians would agree that from the middle to the late '60s, music in general was, to a real extent, fusing. The whole psychedelic era blurred the boundaries of different music genres and emboldened white players to play music of all kinds – black, Indian, Asian, etc. The first extended psychedelic-like guitar solo/jam was Michael Bloomfield and the tune "East-West" on the Butterfield album of the same name in 1966. It was over 13 minutes in length and inspired legions of heavy metal players that followed. My brother Dan and I recorded an early version of "East-West" sitting behind a curtain in a Chicago bar with a reel-to-reel" tape recorder. Our recording was released some years ago.

## The American Folk Blues Festival in Europe

The first large-scale blues festivals, “The American Folk Blues Festivals” were not really festivals and were never held in America. Established in 1962 and lasting through 1972, these so-called festivals were in fact tours of Europe by groups of black blues artists thankful to get the work. This is what informed the British blues-oriented groups like the Rolling Stones in the first place. Starting in 1962, at a tour run of three weeks, the American Folk Blues Festival excursions eventually would run up to six weeks. Individual concerts often lasted three to four hours. The tours started up again in 1980 and lasted until 1985.

Europe has always been in love with American black music, especially blues and jazz. Whereas in this country players like Muddy Waters and Howlin’ Wolf found it hard to get a job outside of their home-town bars and the Chitlin’ Circuit, in Europe these players were treated like VIPs and played to rapt audiences. Race was never a real issue on the continent. This is why so many black blues and jazz artists have relocated to Europe. They found jobs that paid well and they were not considered second-class citizens.

Thanks to these touring festivals, Europe heard such blues greats as T-Bone Walker, Memphis Slim, Willie Dixon, Sonny Terry, Brownie McGhee, and John Lee Hooker. In 1963, the list was joined by Muddy Waters, Otis Spann, Victoria Spivey, Big Joe Williams, Lonnie Johnson, and Sonny Boy (II) Williamson. 1964 brought Hubert Sumlin, Lightnin’ Hopkins, Sunnyland Slim, sleepy John Estes, and Howlin’ Wolf. And in 1965, there was Mississippi Fred McDowell, J.B. Lenoir, Big Walter Horton, Roosevelt Sykes, Buddy Guy, Big Mama Thornton, Doctor Ross, and others.

In a very real sense, Europe was privileged to hear the more modern, electric, city blues well before the general (white) public in America knew anything about it. White

America for the most part did not even know this music existed until the later Sixties.

## **Memphis Country Blues Festival 1967**

Perhaps the earliest festival in this country dedicated exclusively to blues, albeit the more acoustic folk or country blues, was the “Memphis Country Blues Festival.” Although it was organized in 1966 with the help of the great blues journalist Robert Palmer, the first festival was actually held in 1967. For example, the 1968 festival featured artists like Bukka White, Nathan Beauregard, Joe Callicott, Furry Lewis, and Rev. Robert Wilkins. Again, as the festival title suggests, this was country blues and acoustic artists, not the inner-city electric blues that had not yet been celebrated. That was to happen in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

## **The Ann Arbor Blues Festival: The First of Its Kind**

There is no doubt that the first North American all-out blues festival for modern, electric city blues (in fact all types of blues) was the Ann Arbor Blues Festival held in the fall of 1969. It featured artists like Muddy Waters, Junior Wells, B.B. King, Otis Rush, J.B. Hutto and the Hawks, Howlin’ Wolf, T-Bone Walker, Magic Sam, Freddy King, and dozens of modern-electric blues players as well as traditional blues artists like Son House, Lightnin’ Hopkins, and those in between like Clifton Chenier, Roosevelt Sykes, and many others.

In the Ann Arbor festivals, the accent was off the folk and country blues and right on modern, big-city, electric blues artists. After all, Ann Arbor is only about a three-hour drive from Chicago. While the Newport Folk Festival sometimes featured more than folk music, and to a small degree helped blues to segue from folk and country blues to a more modern blues, this was not something they actively featured. For many years, electric anything was frowned upon at the Newport

festival. It was in Ann Arbor that we find the first all-out presentation of modern electric city blues.

It has been said that those first Ann Arbor blues festivals mark the end of the city-blues era and the beginning of its exploitation. Of course, there is some truth to that if we mean that by reaching a wider audience, the music will be more easily embraced and imitated. But in fact, the electric city blues by that time was already dying out of its own accord. The younger blacks had turned away. Reaching the larger White audience actually prolonged the music's decline and extended its life. Today (2020), with most of the original blues giants gone, we may be facing what amounts to reenactment and revival once again – blues as folklore.

There is no record of a blues festival of any similar scope and extent that predates that first Ann Arbor Blues Festival, which was organized in 1968 and held in 1969, much less one that endures to the present day. Actually, the popular Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festival, which saw its roots in those first two Ann Arbor Blues Festivals, was suspended in 2007 due to lack of funds. The last festival was in 2006.