

# Detroit bands continue legacy of blues

By JIM WINDELL

Ever since the migration of people from the South to work in industrialized Detroit around World War I, Detroit has had a blues tradition. That tradition has been quiet the last few years, but two area bands are carving out respected names playing the blues.

Working a rich heritage that reaches back to the Mississippi Delta are the Detroit Blues Band and the Progressive Blues Band. They're sometimes confused because of the similarity of names, but each band has a separate sound, albeit a common legacy.

The Detroit Blues Band is a slightly disreputable-looking aggregation of six men who have musical roots that extend back to Chicago and the blues of Little Walter, Muddy Waters, Sonny Boy Williamson, Little Richard and Jimmy Reed.

Together since 1978, the members of the Detroit Blues Band have been playing the blues since the early '60s. In those days, only a few clubs, like the Chessmate, would employ a blues outfit.

"IN THE 1960s when the blues starting appealing to whites," Detroit Blues Band singer and harmonica player Garfield Angove said, "that's when I started going to the Chessmate in Detroit. Then, I moved to Chicago and played with Muddy Waters and Otis Rush."

The band was interviewed recently at the home of Bob "Bert" Rabout, a singer and harmonica player. Said Rabout, "I was turned on to the blues by Garfield. He taught me to play the blues harp."

In addition to Rabout and Angove,

*'There's room in this city for several blues bands. I just want for the blues to get the attention.'*

— Martin Gross  
Progressive Blues Band

the Detroit Blues Band is made up of drummer Tom "T-Bone" Walker, electric bass player Don "Mickey" McKenize, guitar player Emanuel Garza and pianist Brian O'Keefe.

The Detroit Blues Band has been featured at the Soup Kitchen in Detroit's Warehouse District and at Piper's Alley in Troy. The band will play Sept. 26-27 at Alvin's Delicatessen in Detroit and will return to Piper's Alley in October.

It's a high-energy band that has drawn much of its inspiration from the electric blues bands of Chicago, the band members agree.

With a drum-heavy, insistent beat, wailing harmonicas and the electric bass, the Detroit Blues Band has the unmistakable frantic sound of the blues that comes from Mississippi by way of Chicago. The band doesn't want to be labeled as a purist because it likes keep a youth-appealing energy in its sound.

"THERE ARE other blues bands in Detroit," Rabout said, "but we are unique with our drive and push; we have more energy."

Don "Mickey" McKenize said, "Our kind of blues makes people want to express themselves. There's no way to dance to the blues, but when we play, somehow people dance."

The Progressive Blues Band plays every Monday and Tuesday night at the

Blue Parrot in Southfield and every Wednesday night at the Soup Kitchen.

The band continues Sunday nights through Sept. 21 at Piper's Alley in Troy. When the Progressive Blues Band plays, the result is inevitably mellow. It's the blues, but with a decided jazz feel. Basic instrumentation is similar to other blues bands — mouth organ, bass, electric guitar and drum — but the difference lies in the hands of veteran tenor saxophone player Don "Hank" Hankins.

Hankins has played with Otis Rush, Junior Wells and Howlin' Wolf as well as on dozens of blues records. He defines the ultimate character of this blues band with his jazz tenor solos. The walking bass lines of Keith Harber, on acoustic bass, also announce that this is a band with a special affinity to jazz.

DURING A RECENT Monday night set, when the soloists traded bars on a Horace Silver-based blues, there was no doubt about where their inspiration was derived.

Nevertheless, the tradition of the blues goes deep in the Progressive Blues Band. Lead rhythm guitar player Lowell Cauffiel and singer and guitar player Willie D. Warren both see to that. Warren, who hails from Arkansas, has played and sung with some of the best of the Chicago bluesmen.

Nominal band leader Martin Gross, the drummer, calls Warren "probably the most well known blues singer in Detroit now."

"The band started out," he said, "at the Gnu Joint on Cass Avenue with myself, Willie Warren sitting in with us, Don Hankins on tenor and Kenny Walk on harmonica. Eventually, we added Keith Harber on bass and Lowell Cauffiel on guitar."



Emanuel Garza is lead guitarist with the Detroit Blues Band, returning to Piper's Alley in Troy in October. (Photos by Labe Waddell)

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