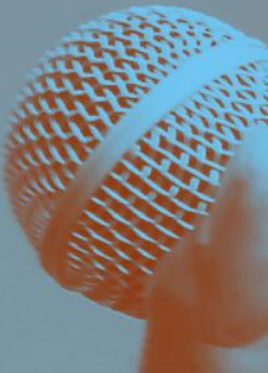


2024 AUSTIN BLUES FESTIVAL

STL.IMAGES

AUSTIN

CAN'T SHAKE
THE BLUES



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“When the Artist rises high enough to achieve the Beautiful, the symbol by which he makes it perceptible to mortal senses becomes of little value in his eyes, while his spirit possesses itself in the enjoyment of the reality.”

Herman Melville



Robert Finley



30 Grammys and a Guy You Might Know

Before it got hotter than it should be for an outdoor music festival in Texas, the 2024 Austin Blue Festival offered a hot lineup boasting 30 Grammys, including a pair of Lifetime Achievement Award winners.

On April 27-28 at Moody Amphitheater in Waterloo Park, the festival brought back 87-year-old blues legend Buddy Guy for the second straight year of his Damn Right Farewell tour. Guy was the headliner on Saturday, and Brittany Howard, who released her second post-Alabama Shakes album in February, had star billing on Sunday.

The festival seemed warm, comforting, even intimate at times. Promoters estimated the two-day crowd at more than 5,000 – respectable given the competition from Eeyore’s Birthday Party and the Austin Psych Fest, not to mention Sunday morning’s thunderstorm

that dropped nearly an inch of rain downtown. Lines for food, drinks, and merch were short and friendly.

Musical styles at the event were extraordinarily diverse for something billed as a blues festival. Traditional blues, soul, jazz, techno, hip-hop, zydeco, bounce, and funk acts showed up on the bill, as did the multi-Grammy-winning Blind Boys of Alabama – belting gospel since 1939. The variety gave fans of any genre occasion to dance in front of the stage or bob along on blankets on the lawn.

“Our entire lineup plays diverse music,” said Zach Ernst, talent buyer for the festival and for Antone’s Nightclub. “The only factor in deciding who to book is, do they move our souls?”

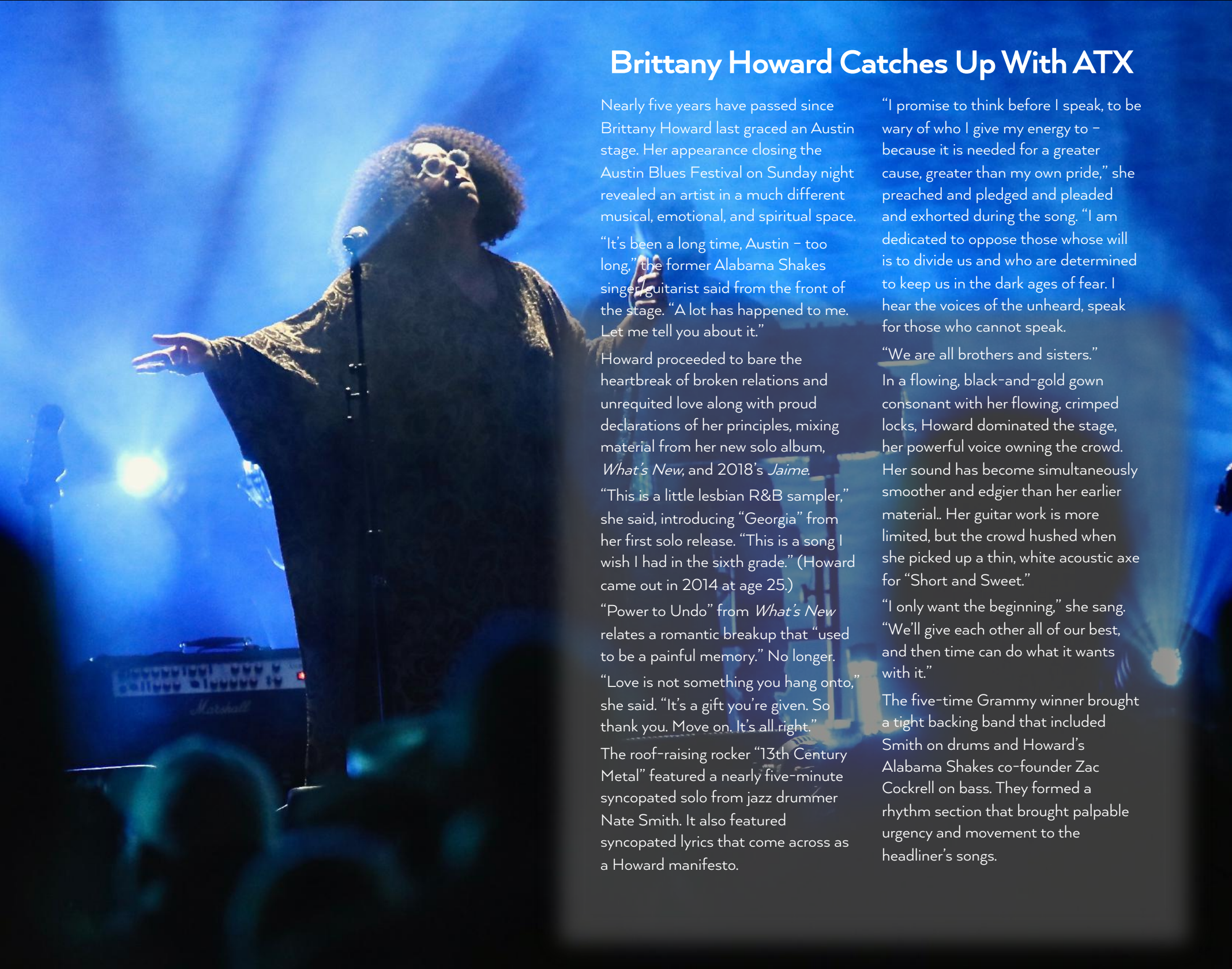


Brittany Howard

Brittany Howard



Brittany Howard Catches Up With ATX

A photograph of Brittany Howard performing on stage. She is wearing a dark, patterned, long-sleeved top and has her arms outstretched. She is wearing glasses and has her hair styled in a large afro. The stage is lit with blue and purple lights, and there is a Marshall amplifier visible in the background.

Nearly five years have passed since Brittany Howard last graced an Austin stage. Her appearance closing the Austin Blues Festival on Sunday night revealed an artist in a much different musical, emotional, and spiritual space. “It’s been a long time, Austin – too long,” the former Alabama Shakes singer/guitarist said from the front of the stage. “A lot has happened to me. Let me tell you about it.”

Howard proceeded to bare the heartbreak of broken relations and unrequited love along with proud declarations of her principles, mixing material from her new solo album, *What’s New*, and 2018’s *Jaime*. “This is a little lesbian R&B sampler,” she said, introducing “Georgia” from her first solo release. “This is a song I wish I had in the sixth grade.” (Howard came out in 2014 at age 25.)

“Power to Undo” from *What’s New* relates a romantic breakup that “used to be a painful memory.” No longer. “Love is not something you hang onto,” she said. “It’s a gift you’re given. So thank you. Move on. It’s all right.”

The roof-raising rocker “13th Century Metal” featured a nearly five-minute syncopated solo from jazz drummer Nate Smith. It also featured syncopated lyrics that come across as a Howard manifesto.

“I promise to think before I speak, to be wary of who I give my energy to – because it is needed for a greater cause, greater than my own pride,” she preached and pledged and pleaded and exhorted during the song. “I am dedicated to oppose those whose will is to divide us and who are determined to keep us in the dark ages of fear. I hear the voices of the unheard, speak for those who cannot speak.

“We are all brothers and sisters.”

In a flowing, black-and-gold gown consonant with her flowing, crimped locks, Howard dominated the stage, her powerful voice owning the crowd. Her sound has become simultaneously smoother and edgier than her earlier material. Her guitar work is more limited, but the crowd hushed when she picked up a thin, white acoustic axe for “Short and Sweet.”

“I only want the beginning,” she sang. “We’ll give each other all of our best, and then time can do what it wants with it.”

The five-time Grammy winner brought a tight backing band that included Smith on drums and Howard’s Alabama Shakes co-founder Zac Cockrell on bass. They formed a rhythm section that brought palpable urgency and movement to the headliner’s songs.





Bobby Rush





Nathan & the Zydeco Cha Chas



Nathan & the Zydeco Cha Chas



Blind Boys of Alabama

Blind Boys of Alabama



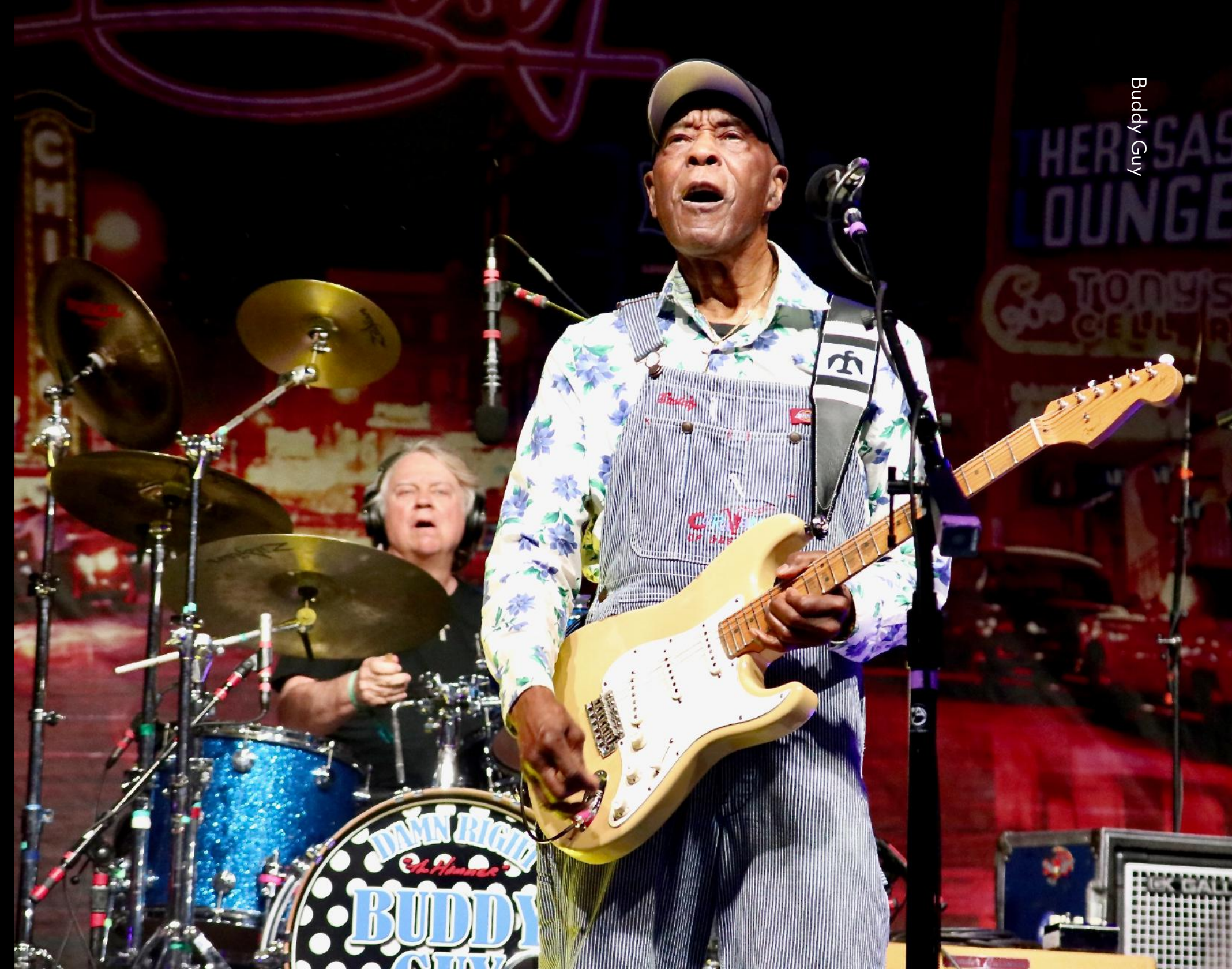


Blind Boys of Alabama



The Blind Boys of Alabama have been spreading their joyous gospel since 1939. They found a new and much larger audience when they appeared in *The Gospel at Colonus*, an African-American musical based on the Oedipus tragedy. They've won 5 Grammy Awards and a Lifetime Achievement Award in 2009.

Their Blues Festival set included "People Get Ready," "Amazing Grace" coupled with "House of the Rising Sun," and a rowdy version of Steve Wonder's "Higher Ground."



Buddy Guy

WANN RIGHI
Ch. Haines
BUDDY
GUY

HER SAS
LOUNGE

TONY'S
CELTIC

UK GALL

Buddy Guy



Damn right, Buddy Guy's still got it

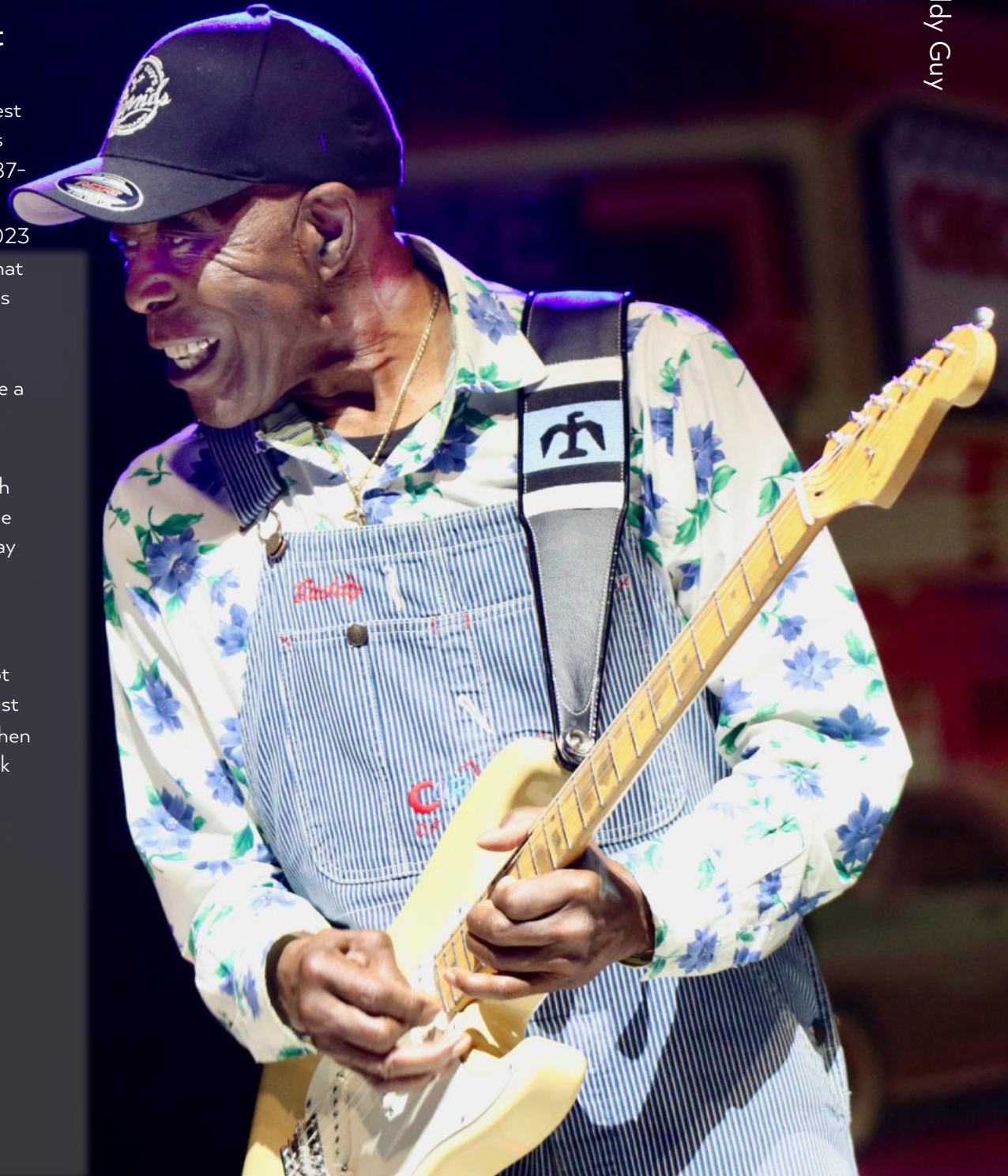
Fully half of the festival's 14 acts hailed from Louisiana, including Saturday night's headliner, Buddy Guy. The oldest living king of Chicago blues – on stage, he exaggerated his age by three months, but who's going to quibble with an 87-year-old who can play guitar like that?

The string-bending Muddy Waters protégé played the 2023 Austin Blues Festival. But he postponed 13 dates later that year because of a “standard medical issue.” A review of his show in Savannah, Ga., after he'd returned to the road in 2024, though, showed him back in good form. *The Savannahian* reported Guy “stalked the outdoor stage like a predatory cat, flinging out filthy blues licks like a machine gunner, and telling time-tested stories.”

And he kept the Austin crowd whooping and laughing with his musical pyrotechnics, stage banter, and a guitar solo he brought into the crowd. While a stagehand pointed the way with a flashlight, Guy wove his way through the fans, eventually helping a young lady produce her own licks by rubbing her sweater against his guitar pickups.

Guy's set list included his signature “Damn Right, I've Got the Blues” and Waters' “Hoochie Coochie Man” and “I Just Want to Make Love to You.” He stopped cracking jokes when he introduced “Skin Deep,” a song he co-wrote with Derek Trucks.

“Just like you can't judge a book by the cover, we all gotta be careful how we treat one another. Skin deep. Skin deep. Underneath we're all the same.”





Cimafunk brought the funk to the Blues Festival. He brought the Afro-Cuban funk. He brought the Afro-Caribbean funk. He brought the African-American funk. And he brought it hard. Backed by La Tribu, his 8-piece Havana band, Cimafunk brought the funk of Prince and George Clinton and the sensuality of Otis Redding and the stage presence of James Brown.

Cimafunk adopted that stage name in honor of the cimarróns, escaped slaves who forged free lives in the mountains of eastern Cuba during the colonial era. The Grammy-nominated singer/songwriter/producer says his music also celebrates freedom from shackles: It “aims to subvert classical Cuban rhythms with innovative mixes of funk, afrobeat, and hip hop.”



Cimafunk



That's a Lot of Hardware

Fans know good music is good music. At their best, b-list acts can move your soul and your feet just like the stars. But when storied musicians come with awards and recognition, the expectations are justifiably high. The 2024 Austin Blues Festival lineup arrived with, well, a helluva lot of awards and recognition. And they left with expectations met.

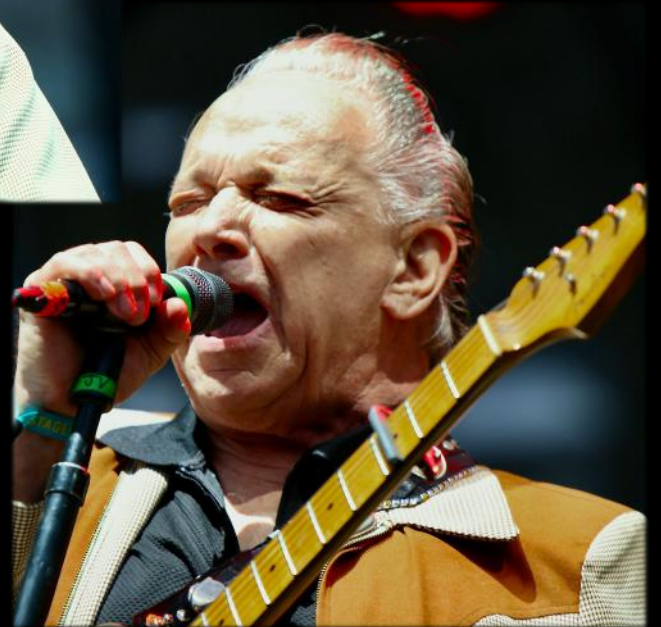
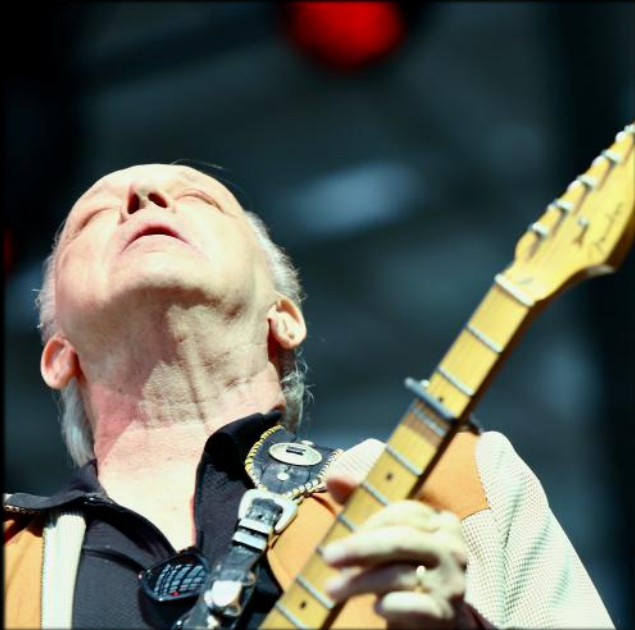
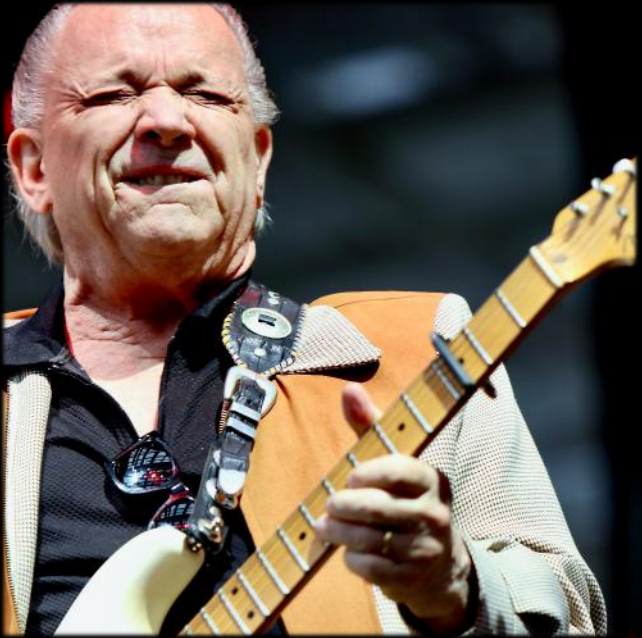
Buddy Guy was the most decorated musician at the festival. He was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 2005, earned a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 2015, and has won eight Grammy Awards and 39 – 39! – Blues Music Awards. But the blues legend isn't satisfied being a legend. Just last year, his *The Blues Don't Lie* picked up Album of the Year and Contemporary Blues Album honors at the 44th annual Blues Music Awards.

Many of the other Austin Blues Festival artists boast hefty musical trophy cases:

- Blind Boys of Alabama: Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 2009 and five Grammy Awards – their latest just this February
- Brittany Howard: five Grammy Awards
- Robert Glasper: five Grammy Awards
- Jimmie Vaughan: four Grammy Awards and four Blues Music Awards
- Bubby Rush: three Grammy Awards and 15 Blues Music Awards
- Sue Foley: four Blues Music Awards
- Nathan Williams: Zydeco Music Association Lifetime Achievement Award in 2012



Jimmie Vaughan



Austin's own Jimmie Vaughan & the Tilt-A-Whirl Band warmed up – no, heated up – the crowd for Buddy Guy with a mix of Vaughan standards. He shared the spotlight with hometowners Soulman Sam and the self-proclaimed Ice Queen, Sue Foley. Audience members joined in the one-word chorus of “The Crawl” from Vaughan’s days with the Fabulous Thunderbirds. And they listened wistfully as he played his version of “Texas Flood,” one of the songs that launched his late brother, Stevie Ray, into stardom.



Jimmie Vaughan

Soulman Sam





Robert Glasper, feat. Isaiah Sharkey

Robert Glasper, feat. Isaiah Sharkey



Robert Glasper, feat. Isaiah Sharkey



Robert Glasper, feat. Isaiah Sharkey

Multi-Grammy winner Robert Glasper of Houston infused his sweet jazz and soul and funk sound into an intense set that preceded Brittany Howard on the bill. Glasper brought some serious spice for his so-so-SO-cool show via the blistering guitar work of Isaiah Sharkey (who has recorded with both Glasper and Howard as well as on D'Angelo's Grammy-winning album *Black Messiah*).



Don Bryant & the Bo-Keys



Don Bryant & the Bo-Keys



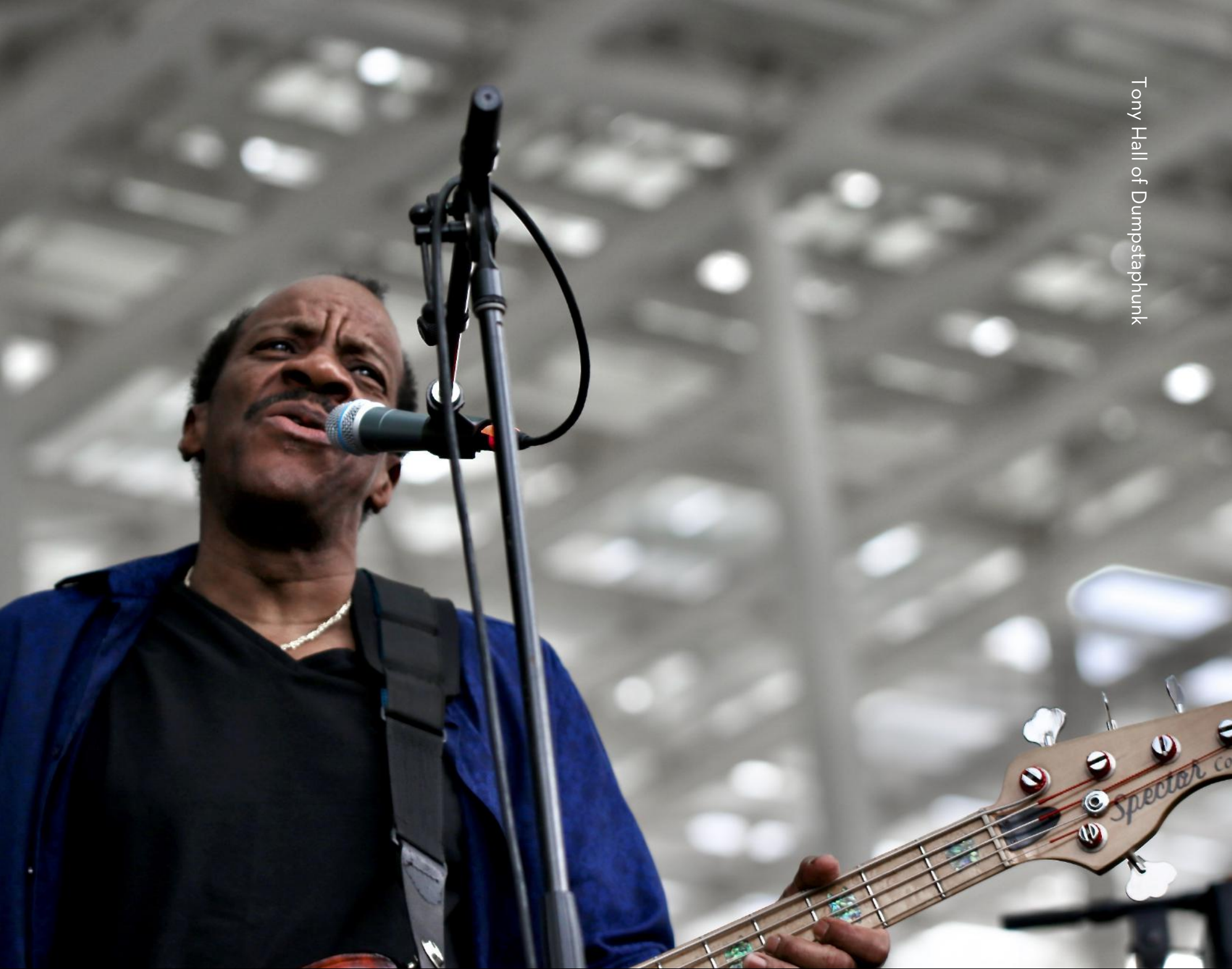


Ivan Neville of Dumpstaphunk



Dumpstaphunk took a “break” from a grueling New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival schedule to travel to Austin for their one-hour Saturday afternoon set. Along with their musical chops, the band brought their grief over the previous day’s death of founding member Nick Daniels III, one-half of the two-headed bass guitar that gave ‘phunk its distinctive sound.

“We will continue to honor his legacy the best way we know how,” bandleader Ivan Neville said in announcing the sad news, “by playing our hearts out even as our hearts are breaking, because Nick was born to make people happy, and he will always be with us in spirit.”



Tony Hall of Dumpstaphunk

Big Freedia





Big Freedia



From the Author

I am a concert photographer/reporter who is lucky enough to practice my art in Austin, Texas, the “Live Music Capital of the World.” Music is this city’s pulse. So many wonderful musicians live here and perform daily in our great clubs and venues. So many wonderful out-of-town musicians love to come here to play because of our savvy fans and excellent performance spaces. Most of the best venues here freely allow me to shoot and share their acts.

I’ve had a camera in my hand for as long as I can remember. And music, especially live music, has brought me joy and inspiration throughout my 67 years. Concert photography unites my twin passions.

Dozens of wonderful musicians, including some of Austin’s best, came together in a downtown amphitheater and park for the 2024 Austin Blues Festival. Listening to their music, watching their performances, and making pictures of it all gave me a weekend of joy and inspiration. (Except, that is, when a rain-soaked ivy trellis broke free of its moorings and cascaded 30 feet down a wall and onto my shoulders early Sunday afternoon!)

Some acknowledgements. Thank you to the security guards who watched over my gear when I ran to the restroom or food trailers. Thank you to all the photographers in the pit for their camaraderie and patience. Thank you to my friend and cover designer Erin Behncke. Thank you to my friend and editor Joey Berlin at www.eartrafficATX.com. Thank you to

all the friendly Blues Festival staff and volunteers. Thank you to Cheyenne Doerr, who handled PR for the festival. And thank you to the musicians – for everything.

I hope the photos in this book help you see and feel what these great artists were feeling. Maybe you can even imagine the actual notes and melodies that accompanied the moment my shutter opened and closed.

If you’re enjoying this book, check out my first volume of concert photographs, *Beauty is in the Eye of the Musician*, available on Amazon.

See the beauty.

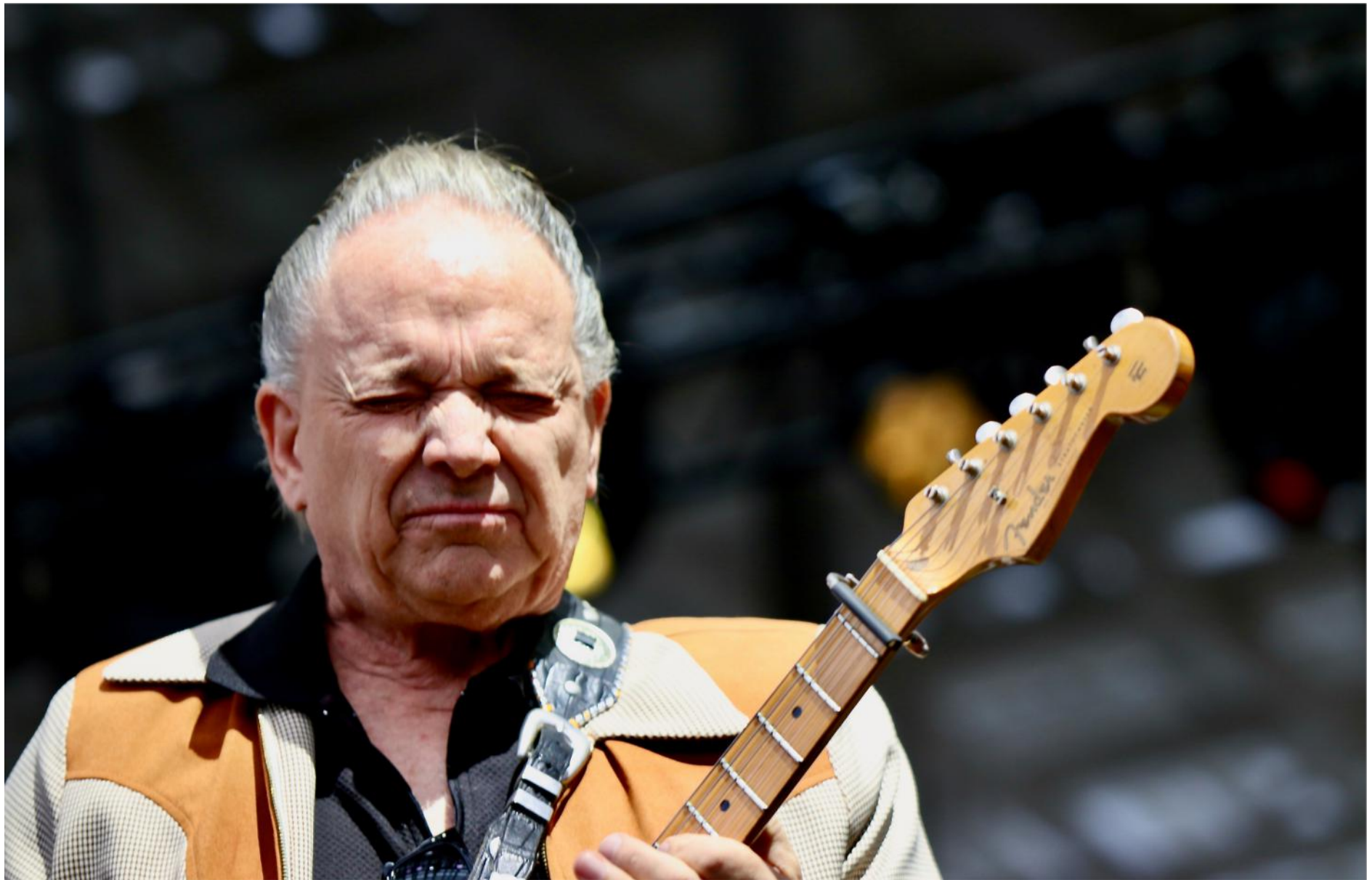


Steve Levine
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Austin, Texas



“The question is not what you look at, but what you see.”
Henry David Thoreau...



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