

August 10, 2007

AHEAD

Singing the Blues All Over

By EMILY S. RUEB

EVERYONE loves the blues. Some people just don't know it yet. Much like its followers, the blues has hitchhiked from one part of the country to another, evolving into new genres like R&B, soul and rock.

As Willie Dixon said, "The blues is the roots; the rest is the fruits." Because the blues is the backbone of so much of the [music](#) heard today — even bluegrass and hip-hop — its rhythm and its message appeal to a wide audience.

"I didn't know I liked the blues" is a common refrain of new fans, said Nancy Edwards, director of marketing for the Blues Festival Guide. She estimates that there will be more than 530 blues festivals this year, giving blues lovers multiple opportunities to come together somewhere other than in a dark bar with a two-drink minimum.

"Everyone's had the blues, and if you haven't, then you really haven't lived yet," said Heidi Knochenhauer, who is about to attend her ninth Arkansas Blues and Heritage Festival and has been volunteering there for five years.

Commonly known as the Biscuit, the festival, in Helena, Ark., was originally named after "The King Biscuit Time Radio Show," the first radio show for live blues, which has been broadcasting from Helena since 1941.

As many as 80,000 people, from many states and countries, typically attend the festival, which takes place over three days on a levee where the Mississippi River stretches half a mile wide. This year's mostly Delta blues lineup will include more than 60 acts on three stages as well as buskers on the town's streets. The festival will also pay tribute to the late Robert Lockwood Jr., who was born nearby in 1915.

The Biscuit's fans are loyal: couples have returned to be married on its stage, and one man's ashes were scattered on the grounds. The festival is free, and some fans set up camp in a tent city.

At 8,750 feet above sea level in [Telluride](#), Colo., about 25,000 revelers over three days will set up lawn chairs and picnic blankets to see blues-inspired acts like Los Lonely Boys, Keb' Mo' and the Black Crowes at the Telluride Blues and Brews Festival. While the musicians play, the booths of 55 microbreweries will dispense 160 kinds of beer for a three-hour all-you-can-taste event on Saturday. After hours, hearty fans can purchase "the juke joint pass" for admittance to any of the town's five clubs to unite with musicians and fans into the wee hours.

This year's San Francisco Blues Festival, held on the Great Meadow at Fort Mason, overlooking San Francisco Bay, will feature the sacred steel guitar music of Robert Randolph & the Family Band and a blues bash with Allen Toussaint, John Hammond and the Charlie Musselwhite Band playing together for the first time in a show.

The Roots 'N Blues 'N BBQ Festival in Columbia, Mo., extends blues tradition to include roots music, which by definition includes the blues as well as gospel, country and other American traditional music, said Richard King, owner of the Blue Note Club in Columbia and programmer of the festival. Headliners will include Taj Mahal and Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars. Cooks will compete in a barbecue competition.

Far north of the birthplace of blues, the [Edmonton](#)'s Labatt Blues Festival in Alberta runs on "a real blues mandate," said Cam Hayden, one of its producers. "It's all blues and nothing but the blues," he said. The festival takes place in a 1,200-seat amphitheater that was built primarily for outdoor theater — including [Shakespeare](#) in the park — and provides blues performers like Watermelon Slim and the Workers, EG Kight and Los Lobos with the gift of near-perfect acoustics.

Also at the Edmonton festival will be Elvin Bishop, who says he has been playing blues "since the Dead Sea was sick." Blues lovers seem to have a desire to understand the music on a deeper level, Mr. Bishop added. "For some people it's just a surface thing, a trapping, like clothes or hairstyles," he said. "For blues people, it has to do with life."

MORE INFORMATION

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

What: Blues festival, www.bluesinternationalltd.com; 35 to 90 Canadian dollars (about \$37 to \$96 at 1.06 Canadian dollars to the U.S. dollar).

When: Aug. 24 to 26.

COLUMBIA, MO.

What: Blues, roots and barbecue festival, www.rootsnbluesnbbq.com; free.

When: Sept 7 and 8.

TELLURIDE, COLO.

What: Blues and beer fest; www.tellurideblues.com; \$55 to \$150.

When: Sept. 14 to 16

SAN FRANCISCO

What: Blues festival, www.sfblues.com; tickets free to \$80.

When: Sept. 28 to 30

HELENA, ARK.

What: Blues festival, www.bluesandheritage.com; free.

When: Oct. 4 to 6

[Copyright 2007 The New York Times Company](#)

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [First Look](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)

-