

The music was kicked off with a couple of regional bands, both from Louisville. **Stompbox** filled the air with their interpretations of songs ranging from Stevie Ray Vaughan to Albert King. The band brought their fans with them much to their delight. **Hellfish**, also from Louisville, was a real trip. Armed with all vintage equipment and a wicked sense of humor, they didn't just play music; they entertained the crowd with songs from all genres. What other all male band would play *These Boots Are Made for Walking* as an encore.



From the land of lakes, Wisconsin, comes the right honorable **Reverend Raven and the Chain Smoking Alter Boys**. Geez, ya just gotta love that name. Rev and crew, featuring Big Al Groth on saxophone, P.T. Pederson on bass and Bobby Sellers Jr. on drums, laid down some hot jump blues on which the Rev and Big Al traded leads back and forth. The Rev's songwriting skills were evident on songs like *Bee Hive Baby*, *Slow Burn* and *They Call Me the Reverend*. After breaking a string on the very first song, the Rev cautioned the crowd not to buy their strings at Wal-Mart. Taking this in stride, he just

switched guitars and blasted into *Steppin Out*.



The name **Ronnie Baker Brooks** has become synonymous with excellent high energy music. He always makes the crowd feel like they are a part of his performance. This show was no exception. Egging the crowd on with a call and response, Brooks launched into *Born in Chicago* and they were off and running. Ronnie's band is one of the tightest around and can take all of the twists and turns that Ronnie throws at them. Bassist Carlton Armstrong (the man with the scowl), keyboardist Steve Nixon and drummer C.J. Tucker can move from one song to the next with the fluidity only time playing

together can bring. After strolling through the crowd, Brooks was brought back to the stage for an encore and I'm sure, if time had permitted, the crowd would have brought him back many more times.

**Watermelon Slim's** newest release is one he's had in the back of his mind for some time. A country CD that has been embraced by the blues critics, Slim is waiting to hear from the country critics before he considers it a success. Time will tell. But tonight he was reunited with his band, The Workers, for a rousing set of music only Slim can provide. With bassist Cliff Belcher, guitarist Ronnie McMullen Jr. and drummer Chris Stovall Brown laying down the foundation, Slim's hot slide guitar and harp built the house as only Slim can do. Add to that his vocal and songwriting skills and you have a great evening of entertainment. You can't confuse Slim with anybody else. He has a way with the crowd that invites them into his world of truck driving and life stories that are unparalleled by anybody. He is always a treat.



I had to admit, I never thought I'd see this band without going to the West Coast. **The Hollywood Blue Flames** have earned their stripes in the blues business but don't do very much touring. Together since 1975, they were the band behind the legendary Michael "Hollywood Fats" Mann until his untimely death in 1986. The band went their separate ways until a reunion in 2005. Renaming the band the Hollywood Blue Flames, they added Kirk Fletcher as guitarist and the rest is history. For this tour, for which Fletcher was unavailable, the band picked another legendary guitarist, Junior Watson, to fill in on guitar and added

ex-Mighty Flyer bassist Bill Stuve to cover for Larry Taylor. With the rich history of music between them, it was like an all-star jam. Pulling hits from both their Delta Groove releases "Soul Sanctuary" and "Road to Rio" and songs from the days of Hollywood Fats, the band laid down 90 minutes of out of this world jump blues. The rock steady drumming of Richard Innes and smooth bass line from Bill Stuve provided a perfect platform for the keyboard work of Fred Kaplan, guitar and vocals from Junior, and vocals and harp of Al Blake. Believe me, it was worth the wait.

As with all good things, the festival had to end. But honestly, if I could only go back to one festival again, it would be this one. What a bargain; two days of great music for \$20.00. And it wasn't just this year. Past performers include Bettye LaVette, Roomful of Blues, Roy Rogers, Tommy Castro, Janiva Magness, Johnny Winter, Charlie Musselwhite and many other top names in the blues entertainment business. But I have to admit that the nicest part of the festival was the way in which the people opened up to my wife and me, making sure that we had everything we needed. It's their lifestyle and genuine hospitality, and it's a pleasant change from any other festival that we've been to.

Thank you to all the staff and organizers and the people of Madison. I'm already looking forward to next year's event.

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The Hollywood Blue Flames

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