

TRAVIS HADDIX

Talks To Mike Stephenson



Travis 'Moonchild' Haddix in the U.K. 2008. Photo: Mike Stephenson

First of all I'm from a large family – it's ten of us but as we get older some have died off. We are five girls and five boys and I'm sorta in the middle as far as age is concerned. I was born in a small cabin in Hatchie Bottom, Mississippi, the closest big city to there is Memphis, it is right on the Tennessee line. During my father's life time he took some of the kids back to the old house where we were born and my sister commented that the house was still standing and all that was missing was the floor and my dad told her that the place never had a floor. It was a rural place and then we moved to Walnut which is just a few miles away and that's where I grew up and later on my family migrated to Milwaukee.

My father was a bluesman and I learnt my guitar playing from him. He played several instruments and he played them all very well. He played guitar, piano, drums and the fiddle. He and his brother would play at weekends as when he planted the seeds in the fields from that time until harvest time there is no money coming in so you have to depend on what is produced from your crops. So they had to have some way of earning some money with all the children they had so they played at weekends to earn some money to see them through to harvest time.

My father's name was Chalmus but everybody called him Rooster. This was in the mid 1940s and I was born in 1938. The type of blues my father played was more the Robert Johnson type and he taught me the fundamentals of the guitar and then B.B. King, Lowell Fulson, Buddy Guy, Little Milton and T-Bone Walker and I added what I learnt from them to what I had learnt from my dad and that created my own sound. My father also sang gospel and inspirational tunes; he had a great voice when he was

younger. My older brother Al was a fantastic jazz guitarist and he played with Brother Jack McDuff. He didn't get any recognition for it though. My younger brother he was a great drummer but unfortunately he drowned in the Milwaukee River. When my family moved to Milwaukee I didn't particularly like the area and coming from Mississippi it was cold so I moved to Cleveland which is out of the frying pan into the fire as it's near Lake Erie which is just as cold.

I came to Cleveland with my brother on a Harley Davidson motorcycle when I was sixteen. I was still learning music back then and my brother, Alvie, he bought me a guitar, as my dad would not let us play his instruments. I was probably nine years old at that time. My brother bought me a Stella guitar and one day my dad sat on it and that was the end of that. Then Al bought me a harmony and I kept that until I got the one I have now which is a 1965 Guild Star Fire, which has a beautiful tone to it. I was practicing music more than playing when I was in Mississippi and I got serious when my brother took me to Memphis to see B.B. King who had a fifteen minute radio station slot on WDIA so then I really wanted to get serious about music.

Memphis back then was very hot music wise. One of my favourites in Memphis was Rufus Thomas who was also a DJ there and Joe Hill Louis – the one-man band. I saw and listened to these guys and when I was a kid I was able to listen to two radio stations WLAC in Nashville and WDIA in Memphis. We had to take the wire from the radio outside to pick up the signal from the Nashville station which played blues at night.

When I came to Cleveland I joined up with the D.L. Rocko band a local band Chuck And The Tremblers and we recorded a 45 called 'Stop Cheating Woman' on the Del Nita label. The label still exists and John B. Hicks is the president and we are still good friends. The flip side of that 45 was 'Diana' which was an instrumental. We recorded that in 1965 and it was released in 1968.

We then recorded quite often after that. With Ernest and the El Rocco's we recorded 'I Dig In My Gig' also on the Del Nita label and we recorded one more called 'Moonchild' around 1984 - that's how I got my name that was under the Del Nita label. The leader was Ernest Good a bass player.

I played with both of those bands back then. Those records did absolutely nothing for us sales wise. Those records helped us get some jobs. Back then those clubs were all in African/American neighbourhoods but now it's

a complete flip. Where I play in Cleveland now is predominantly in the white clubs. The band I played with back then was mainly black and the band I play with now is nearly all white. It's not that there's not a number of African/American players but they have developed their own bands.

We graduated from playing the small blues clubs to playing bigger places and I opened shows for Johnny Taylor and Little Johnny Taylor, he was a very good friend of mine before he passed away.

We opened the show at The Plush Entertainment Centre in Cleveland and Johnny Taylor needed our band to go on the road with him at the time but my kids were small so I couldn't go. I wanted to make sure that my girls had the opportunity to do whatever it was they wanted to do so Johnny took the rest of the band and they were with him for several years.

When Little Johnny Taylor came to North East Ohio my band played for him for the whole tour and it was the most lucrative thing I have ever done so it was great for us. This was the first time we met and after that I got to know him very well. Me and my band would open shows for artists like Bobby Bland, Joe Simon, Denise LaSalle, Clarence Carter, Tyrone Davis, the list goes on and on. This was at The Plush Entertainment Centre, which was the mecca of blues in Cleveland; we were the city house band. This was in the early 1980s onwards.

I opened for Clarence Carter and he liked my sound and he asked what label I was on which I wasn't at that time. Clarence was with Ichiban then and so was Artie 'Blues Boy' White. I had been writing songs for them both and Clarence told me that I should talk to Ichiban and I asked them to put a good word in for me. I didn't think they would as I had heard all this before and about a week later I got a call from Gary B.B. Coleman who was with Ichiban and he asked me if I wanted to get with Ichiban and after that I was floating on cloud nine.

So we went to Atlanta with the band and I recorded the CD 'Wrong Side Out' that was the very first one I did for them which was I think in 1988, that was my first album that I did in my career. B.B. Coleman produced that and he is the guy who I signed the contract with him as he was the main man at Ichiban.

As a matter of fact he's playing guitar on some of that CD. B.B. Coleman, Clarence Carter and Chick Willis, who were all with Ichiban, we used to sit around and see who could write the dirtiest or risqué songs. So Clarence had 'Stroking' I had 'Two Heads Are Better Than One' and B.B. Coleman had 'Uncle Bud' and of course Chick Willis had 'Stoop Down'. My mission was to beat those guys with risqué lyrics. I also had 'Jaw Breaker', 'The Bag Lady' and several others and on each of my records there's a song that's sorta risqué. In total I did five albums for Ichiban, 'Wrong Side Out', 'Winners Never Quit', 'Big Old Goodun', 'What I Know Right Now' and 'I've Got A Sure Thing'.

They sent me to Switzerland on tour with other label mates like Trudy Lynn, Theodis Ealey, Vernon Garret, Kip Anderson, Chicago Bob, the harmonica player, and others. We did the same circuit and when one artist would go in a place and play for a couple of weeks and then move on another artist would come in and play for another two weeks. At the end of the tour, which was for twelve weeks, all the artists got together in Zurich for an Ichiban festival. For my recordings for Ichiban we put the music together in Cleveland and then send the label a tape and then I would go down to their studio and they would put musicians with me and record it.

For the last album, 'Big Old Goodun', they brought my band down to the studio and let them play with me. I still had a day job with my years with Ichiban delivering the mail. What I would do is I would take leave without pay but after awhile the Post Office started complaining about it as I would go to Atlanta to cut the albums and then I would go on to Switzerland.

One year when I got back from Switzerland the Post Office gave me a letter of removal but I had a good record and they just suspended me for a short while. In the blues field the money is just not great enough to pay the family bills so I had to maintain a day job especially when my girls went to college, as tuition was really expensive. Ichiban went belly up and I had made connections when I was in Switzerland and they kept bringing me back to that country after Ichiban went down.

I recorded the album 'Knee Deep In The Blues' in 1998 that was with The Harlem Ramblers in Switzerland so I've been going back to that country since then. I developed my own label in 1989 before Ichiban went down. I had heard they were in a tailspin so I created my own label Wann-Sonn

that is the name of my two daughters. My oldest daughter is named Wanda and my youngest daughter is named Sonya so thus I created Wann-Sonn records and I've gone onto record fourteen albums on that label. I have 26 albums in total with fourteen on my own label.

My songs have been covered by a lot of artists. The late Son Seals, Artie 'Blues Boy' White has covered a lot of my songs, Dickie Williams, Charles Wilson, Michael Burks, he's one of the latest ones to cover my material.

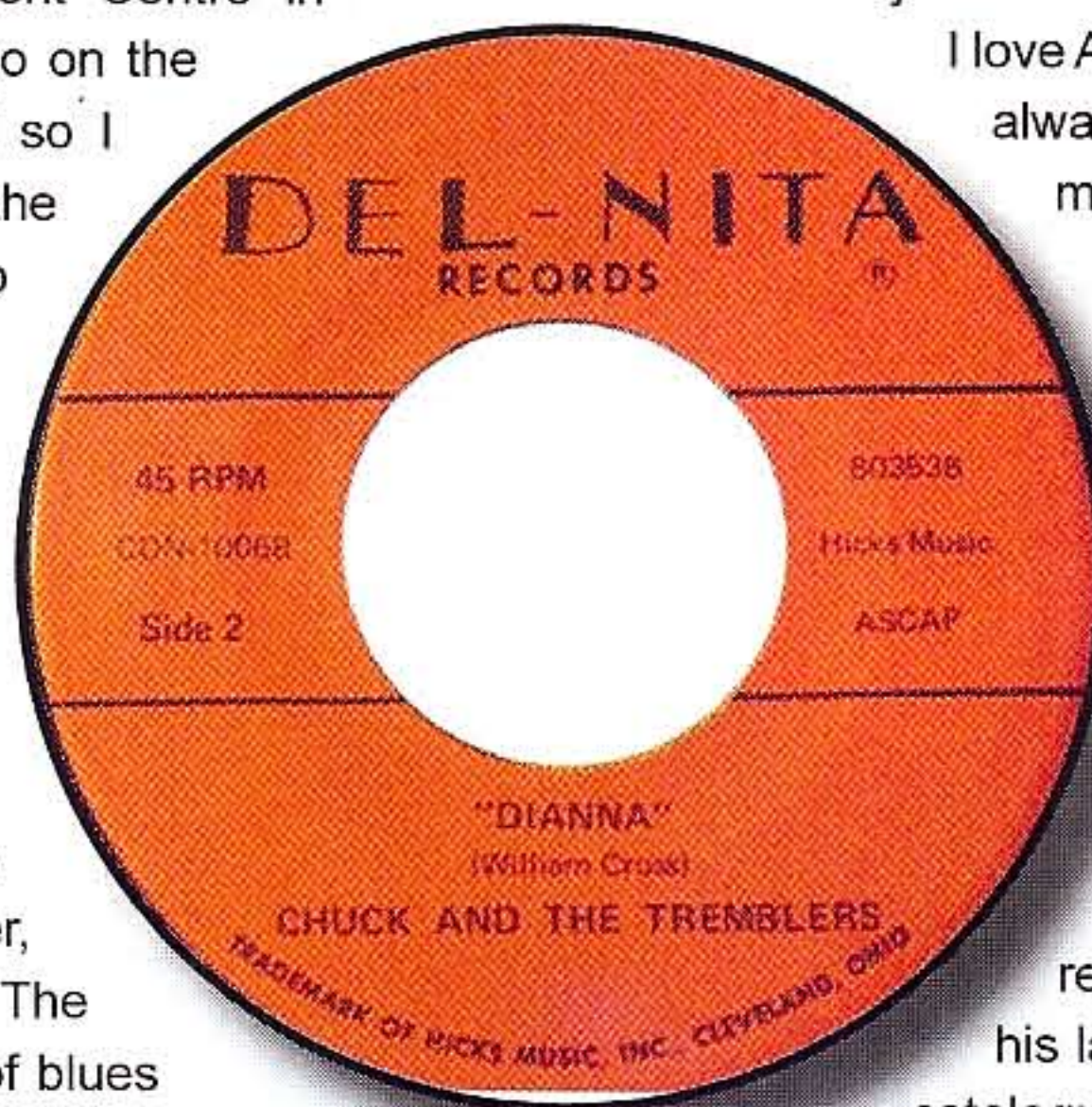
Jimmy Dawkins and Lee Shot Williams have also covered my songs.

I love Artie White covering my songs, he has a great voice and always has a great band and I really like what he does with my songs, me and him were at Ichiban together. Artie has covered more of my material than any other artist. I get a royalty cheque once in awhile for my songs. I don't write specifically for others artists, it's stuff I've done and they have heard it and they cover it although I do write for Artie specifically. I've recently made connections with Michael Frank of Earwig Records. I was playing in Finland and it's daylight all the time and that was very strange to me so I wrote a song about it called 'Daylight At Midnight'.

Michael Frank heard that song and he wanted to remaster the CD so we signed the necessary papers and his label is now distributing that CD and he has gone back catalogue with my Wann-Sonn label and he is now distributing those CDs. I now get cheques in my mailbox from Chicago and everywhere and that is good for me.

Interview conducted by Mike in September 2008 in the UK. Many thanks go to Gerard Homan for helping to arrange the interview.

Label shot courtesy of Steve Gronda.



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Blues & Rhythm has a pair of weekend passes to the Burton Agnes Jazz & Blues Festival to be won in this simple competition. To win the pair of passes just answer these three simple questions. You'll find the answers in the pages of *Blues & Rhythm* number 249.

1. Where was Reginald Cooper born?
2. Who played in Stockholm on 13th March?
3. Who was Jimmy Rushing teasing?

**Send your answers to arrive no later than July 21st, to:
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