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Blues great Buddy Guy humbled by music success, his amazing journey (with AUDIO INTERVIEW)

He will perform in concert Saturday night at Fort Wayne's Foellinger Outdoor Theatre

By James Grant of The News-Sentinel
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Blues legend Buddy Guy, who will appear Saturday night at Foellinger Outdoor Theatre, has been playing the blues longer than many of his admirers have been alive.

His latest CD, entitled "Rhythm and Blues," features collaborations with such varied performers as rocker Steven Tyler of Aerosmith, rapper/rocker Kid Rock, country star Keith Urban and guitarist Gary Clark Jr., most of whom weren't born when Guy began playing the blues in Chicago nearly 56 years ago.

"I knew all those guys before they were famous," Guy said in a telephone interview of working with the performers on his latest CD.

"I even knew the Rolling Stones before they got famous," Guy continued. "In 1964, I was at Chess Studios (on 2120 S. Michigan Ave. in Chicago, which was immortalized in a song by the same name by the Rolling Stones). ... I had never seen a white man with long hair before, and I'm right in the middle of cutting a record called 'My Time After Awhile,' and Leonard Chess (founder of Chess Records) brought them in the studio."

Guy's career has been based in Chicago since the late 1950s, when he made his way to the Windy City looking for a recording contract with Chess Records, a record label famous for releasing some of the most esteemed blues recordings of the 20th century.

Guy was eventually signed to Chess Records and became a session musician for the label, playing on many famous recordings by blues legends, such as Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf, as well as releasing his own recordings.

While not a big star to the general public, Guy did manage to make a major impression on other guitarists, specifically greats such as Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck and Stevie Ray Vaughan, who appreciated his style of blues playing and emulated it.

Guy experienced a career resurgence in the early 1990s when he joined Clapton on stage at London's Royal Albert Hall, recordings of which were featured on Clapton's live album "24 Nights," which brought Guy's playing to a wider audience.

By 2013, Guy's impressive career includes being a member of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, six Grammy Awards, 28 Blues Music Awards, Billboard magazine Century Award for distinguished artistic achievement and his own Blues club, called Buddy Guy's Legends, which he opened in Chicago in 1989.

Guy has also received two other notable honors — the National Medal of Arts in 2003, which was awarded by President George W. Bush, and the Kennedy Center Honors for lifetime contribution to American culture in 2012, where he was received by President Barack and Michelle Obama.

Meeting President Obama at the White House in 2012 highlighted for Guy the journey from his humble beginnings in Louisiana to his stature today.

"Well, I told him the same thing I'm telling you," Guy said. "I told him as soon as I walked in the White House and shook hands with him. I said, 'It's a long way from picking cotton.'"

"We didn't have machinery," Guy continued. "We had a mule and a horse and a plow. ... I picked cotton, and I picked myself all the way to the White House."

Guy's style of playing the blues is so revered that Rolling Stone magazine ranked him among the top 25 in its "100 Greatest Guitarists of All Time" list in 2011.

While Guy was thrilled with the honor, he remains humble about his impact on music.

"It is great to be mentioned among some of the greatest guitar players I've ever seen because I don't consider myself as a guitar player of (like) a B.B. King," Guy said of the Roll Stone ranking.



More Information

Audio interview with Buddy Guy

Blues great

What: Legendary blues artist Buddy Guy performs in concert.

When: 8 p.m. Saturday

Where: Foellinger Outdoor Theatre, 3411 Sherman Blvd. in Franke Park

Cost: \$30, \$40 and \$50. Tickets are available in person or at 427-6000, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays at the Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation Department main office, 705 E. State Blvd.; and after 4 p.m. Saturday at the Foellinger box office at 427-6715.

"I don't think nobody should because he (King) invented that squeezing the strings. ... A lot of these kids like Quinn (Sullivan, his 14-year-old protege), Jonny Lang, you know, of course, Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck Buddy Guy ain't got no business being in that company, but they got me in there, so I'm blessed to be in company like that."

Guy's main joy is performing, and fans here in Fort Wayne can expect to hear him play a good selection of blues from his whole career, played only the way Buddy Guy can play them.

"When I come there, I got a new double album out. I'm going to give you a taste of that, but I've still got to give you a taste of where I came from," Guy said of his concert here. "So I'll go back and hit some of that old blues. ... I'm going to give you 110 or 120 percent of Buddy Guy."