



JAZZ & BLUES
FLORIDA
FLORIDA'S ONLINE GUIDE TO LIVE JAZZ & BLUES

JUNE 2013



FEATURED ARTIST

Catherine Russell

**BOB JAMES & DAVID SANBORN • RICK ESTRIN & THE NIGHTCATS
KURT ELLING • TAJ MAHAL & TRIO BAND • ALFREDO CHACÓN QUINTET
TONY O with LITTLE MIKE & THE TORNADOES • KEVIN EUBANKS
CLAY SWAFFORD • JOE McPHEE with PETER BRÖTZMANN • SUPER CHIKAN**

CATHERINE RUSSELL

by Bob Weinberg



CHILDHOOD PHOTOS OF CATHERINE

Russell depict the singer as a chubby-cheeked toddler, looking more than a little apprehensive as Louis Armstrong lifts her into his arms. Although Pops does his best to win over the barrette-wearing cherub in her blue party dress, she's having none of it. The daughter of jazz musicians Luis Russell and Carline Ray, Catherine Russell — Cat to her friends — recalls that visit to the Armstrong home in Corona, Queens, more than 50 years ago.

"[Armstrong] was a very big presence, and what's actually documented is me not wanting him to be picking me up at that moment," she says by phone from her native New York City. "But he was very nice to me. He loved his friends, and he loved to entertain and laugh and eat and just be silly and cut up. He and my dad were very good friends."

A foremost interpreter of 20th-century African-American song, Russell, 56, continues the legacies of Armstrong and jazz greats such as Duke Ellington, Fats Waller, Hoagy Carmichael, Mary Lou Williams, and, of course, her parents. Russell and her bandmates — guitarist Matt Munisteri, pianist Mark Shane and upright

bassist Lee Hudson, who will join her for her June concert in Miami—put a new gleam on often-obscure songbook gems. Tunes such as Ellington and Mack David's "Long, Strong & Consecutive," from Russell's 2010 release *Inside This Heart of Mine*, and Ellington and Billy Strayhorn's "I'm Checkin' Out Goom'bye," from last year's *Strictly Romancin'*, reveal great humor and joy, as well as the singer's hipness in selecting material.

"I'm continually listening to different things, and continually looking for new tunes," she says. "I start from the story, the lyric."

One particular song in Russell's songbook has an intriguing narrative of its own. About a year and half ago, the singer and her mom, now 88, returned to the Armstrong home, in which currently resides the Armstrong House Museum.

They were greeted by archivist Ricky Riccardi, who played for them a 1961 demo tape of Russell's mom singing three tunes written by Russell's dad.

"My dad had written these tunes and submitted them to Louis Armstrong with a letter," Russell says. " 'Hey Pops, if you record these things, we'll both be doing well in our old age.' " While the men's history dated back to the 1930s, and Luis Russell had served as Armstrong's musical director, their fortunes diverged. Satchmo became an international jazz icon, while Russell sought employment off the bandstand in later years. He died in 1963, when Cat was just 7.

Among the tunes Luis Russell had written for Armstrong was the charming "Lucille," titled for Armstrong's wife. The original recording of the song appears as a bonus track on Carline Ray's new CD, *Vocal Sides*, remarkably her first solo album. Cat Russell produced the disc and sings a couple of duets with Mom, whose river-deep contralto is as expressive as ever. Russell has also added "Lucille" to her own repertoire.

Certainly, Russell was raised on her parents' music. But she was also a product of her times. She developed a passion for the Grateful Dead

CATHERINE RUSSELL

in her early teens, and her mom even took her to a Janis Joplin concert. "My mother let me listen to any kind of music I wanted to listen to," she says. "She never said, 'Don't listen to rock.' She let me grow up with *American Bandstand* and *Soul Train* and listen to everything."

Russell's vast scope and terrific pipes led to backup-vocal gigs with rock greats Paul Simon, David Bowie and Steely Dan. She's sung with the latter group, off and on, for 20 years. She also treasures the opportunity she had to tour and record with The Band's Levon Helm, who died last year.

Another opportunity arose when Russell was invited to record Mamie Smith's classic "Crazy Blues" for the soundtrack album to the HBO series *Boardwalk Empire*. The album won a Grammy. The original version, recorded in 1920, is credited as the first blues-vocal hit, selling a million copies in six months. "Oh, man! The history is just phenomenal," exclaims Russell, an ardent student of the vintage-jazz era. "You never finish ... I'll spend the rest of my life reading about that period."



Catherine Russell will perform 8PM June 13 at the Coral Gables Congregational Church. Tickets are \$30-\$45. Call 305-448-7421 or visit Communityartsprogram.org.

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TAJ MAHAL TRIO
PONTE VEDRA CONCERT HALL/JUNE 4
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COLLEGE/JUNE 5

Taj Mahal released his self-titled debut album 45 years ago, putting a keen modern edge on traditional blues. At 71, he's masterfully interpreted Delta and Chicago blues, jukebox soul and R&B and African and Hawaiian music. His voice, one of the most identifiable in all of roots music, hollers, bellows and caresses, sometimes all in one tune. He's also a deft picker, easily conjuring Robert Johnson, Mississippi John Hurt or Elmore James. Taj-o-philes, or those who'd like to be, can pick up the recently released *Complete Columbia Albums Collection*, a box set of material from 1965 to 1976, dating back to



his Rising Sons band, as well as the 2012 two-disc collection, *Hidden Treasures*. Also dig his typically expert contributions to *True Blues*, a new CD featuring Corey Harris, Alvin Youngblood Hart, Guy Davis, Phil Wiggins and Shemekia Copeland. For his Florida shows, Taj will bring longtime bassist Bill Rich along with Kester Smith on drums. **BW**

CLAY SWAFFORD
BRADFORDVILLE BLUES, TALLAHASSEE/JUNE 7

"I first heard Otis Spann on a Muddy Waters album when I was about 15 years old, and my life was forever changed," boogie-piano king Clay Swafford writes in the liner notes to *Rooster*, his excellent debut disc. Swafford, 29, is in good company; Spann's work with Muddy has hooked generations of ivory-trippers. Swafford's shared stages with other Muddy band alumni, including Hubert Sumlin, Carey Bell and Bob Margolin. And producers thought enough of his skills to include him in a documentary with piano greats Pinetop Perkins, Henry Gray, Jerry Lee Lewis and Marcia Ball. On *Rooster*, Swafford beats hell out of a vintage upright piano, calling up images of sawdust-floored juke joints



with his muscular barrelhousing. He's joined on a handful of tunes by blues-shouter Diunna Greenleaf, the pair conjuring the ghosts of Jimmy and Mama Yancey or Otis and Lucille Spann. As for the album title, apparently, Swafford was born with a shock of bright red hair. His granddad called him "Rooster," and it stuck. **BW**

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S P O T L I G H T

RICK ESTRIN & THE NIGHTCATS BAYTOWNE WHARF PLAZA, MIRAMAR/JUNE 19

Whoever said there are no second acts in show biz wasn't hip to Rick Estrin. After 30 years and nine albums as frontman for Little Charlie & the Nightcats, the rascally vocalist and harmonica wizard had to change his game plan after guitarist Charlie Baty retired in 2008. While complete reinvention was unnecessary — Estrin wrote, sang and played harp on most tunes — he rebooted the band by recruiting axman Kid Andersen. Although he's fully capable of swinging, jazzy riffage, Andersen is no Little Charlie clone, his tone and taste leaning toward an edgier, more-modern conception. The retooled Nightcats — with bassist/keyboardist Lorenzo Farrell and drummer J. Hansen — came howling back with



2009's first-rate *Twisted*. The followup, last year's superb *One Wrong Turn*, pushes the Cats even further, as Andersen's ringing, reverb-laden leads add surf, rock and West Side Chicago textures to Estrin's classic jukebox blues. Also nominated for B.B. King Entertainer of the Year, Estrin snagged the Blues Music Award for harmonica in May. **BW**

LITTLE MIKE & THE TORNADOES featuring TONY O ARTS GARAGE, DELRAY/JUNE 22

As blues-obsessed teens growing up in New York, Mike Markowitz and Tony Melio — a.k.a. harmonica blower Little Mike and guitarist Tony O — learned from the best. Muddy Waters, Hubert Sumlin, James Cotton and Paul Butterfield were among the blues giants in whose orbits they were pulled. Melio played in Markowitz's band, Little Mike & the Tornadoes, his textured, fiery leads fueling the group's first two discs. Little Mike also played on Melio's first solo CD, *Top of the Blues*. And both men backed blues-piano great Pinetop Perkins, on-stage and in the studio. Along with Pinetop, Melio was a member of The Legendary Blues Band, a group made up of Muddy Waters band alumni. The pianist



also featured Tony O on six of his albums. Melio includes a few cuts with Perkins and drummer Willie "Big Eyes" Smith on his razor-sharp new collection *Life of Blues*. Both Tony O and Little Mike played behind Perkins on an excellent rendition of the Pinetop classic "Ida B," included on the posthumous 2012 release *Heaven*. **BW**



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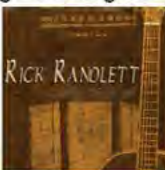

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June 6	Broken Arrow Blues Band	
June 7	Clay Swafford	
June 8	Victor Wainwright & the Wildroots	
June 14	Cassie Taylor	
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S P O T L I G H T

SUPER CHIKAN

BRADFORDVILLE BLUES, TALLAHASSEE/JUNE 29

James "Super Chikan" Johnson is among the most entertaining and idiosyncratic figures in blues today. The Mississippi guitarist developed his style and perspective while working on his family's farms in the Delta, talking to chickens and mastering a one-string diddley bow before graduating to a secondhand two-string acoustic. Johnson honed his songwriting skills while working as a truck driver, making use of long hours on the road. The results can be heard on his 1997 debut CD, *Blues Come Home to Roost*, which is filled with autobiographical, often humorous details, and the highly personal albums that followed. Among his best, 2010's *Welcome to Sunny Bluesville* reveals Super



Chikan's deep affection for home and family, as well as his deft picking on acoustic and electric blues. On-stage, Chikan works grooves on guitars he's constructed from gas cans or ceiling fans and adorned with rhinestones or scenes of Delta life. While he often tours with his band, The Fighting Cocks, he's flying solo for this show. **BW**

JOE MCPHEE with PETER BROTZMANN

TIMUCUA WHITE HOUSE, ORLANDO/JUNE 3

Multi-instrumentalists Joe McPhee and Peter Brötzmann have much in common. Miami native McPhee, 73, started out playing trumpet and has since added alto, tenor and soprano sax; clarinet; valve trombone and piano to his arsenal. His 44-year recording career spans post-Coltrane instrumentals, avant-garde and electronic music. Similarly, the German-born Brötzmann, 72, plays alto, tenor and baritone saxes; clarinet and bass clarinet. His raw improvisational style has graced solo releases, sessions with pianist Cecil Taylor, and a stint with bassist Bill Laswell's raucous electric band Last Exit. The two veteran improvisers gained wider audiences during the 1990s, thanks in part to their



combined Chicago connection, reed player Ken Vandermark. This, in turn, led to McPhee's appearing on the Peter Brötzmann Chicago Octet/Tentet's ambitious three-CD box set in 1998. Audiences should expect the unexpected. Improvisers of this magnitude often don't even know what they'll play before they play it. Visit Timucua.com. **BM**

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KURT ELLING

ST. PETERSBURG COLLEGE/JUNE 7

MINIACI CENTER, FORT LAUDERDALE/JUNE 8

Kurt Elling stands apart in the crowded field of modern jazz vocalists. Possessing a sonorous baritone that spans four octaves, the classically trained singer studied vocalese masters like Jon Hendricks and Eddie Jefferson. He can likewise improvise words or syllables over chord changes, rivaling the solos of Charlie Parker or John Coltrane. Elling also hails from Chicago, a city that produces sounds different from New York or Los Angeles. The Windy City is where the singer met pianist Laurence Hobgood, who's been a creative, integral part of Elling's band from his 1995 debut album *Close Your Eyes* through his latest, the thematic

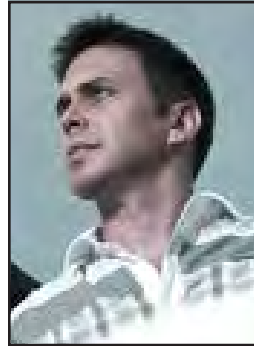


1619 Broadway — The Brill Building Project. On the latter, Elling puts his stamp on pop tunes from The Drifters to Carole King. For these shows, he and Hobgood will be joined by John McLean, a Second City guitarist who's second to none, and the ace rhythm section of bassist Clark Sommers and drummer Ulysses Owens Jr. **BM**

ALFREDO CHACON QUINTET

WDNA-FM JAZZ GALLERY, MIAMI/JUNE 15

Like many prominent musicians based in Miami, vibraphonist, percussionist and wind instrumentalist Alfredo Chacón emerged from the rich culture of Havana. Yet the 43-year-old multi-instrumentalist's career path is truly an international one. Chacón relocated to Sweden at age 21, after completing his musical education in Cuba. He then toured Europe while also teaching at the Royal Academy of Music in Stockholm. At age 33, he moved to Madrid, where he honed his percussive, compositional and production skills. Chacón's new *Magic Place* CD, not surprisingly, is a worldly blend of styles from Afro-Cuban, bossa nova and classical to funk, soul and bebop. The vibes are a product of Chacón's studies at the Conservatory Amadeo Roldan in Cuba, but he also plays hand percussion and EWI (electronic wind instrument) in a band that includes pianist Mauricio Quiros, trumpeter Carlos Puig, bassist Nestor del Prado and drummer Reinier Guerra. **BM**



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KEVIN EUBANKS

JAZZIZ NIGHTLIFE, BOCA RATON/JUNE 26-27

Serving as the leader of a late-night TV show band, as guitarist Kevin Eubanks did on *The Tonight Show With Jay Leno* from 1995 to 2010, will create a broad range of stylistic capabilities. In the case of the 55-year-old Philly native, the gig widened an already vast palette. Eubanks' older brother Robin is one of the leading trombonists in modern jazz; younger brother Duane is an accomplished trumpeter; and all three perform in various combinations on the guitarist's expansive new release, *The Messenger*. The brothers pool their talents on "JB," a groove salute to the late James Brown showcasing the guitarist's funk and Motown influences. Meanwhile, "Ghost Dog Blues" reveals the effects of



sitting in with blues king Buddy Guy at his Chicago club. Covers include John Coltrane's spiritual "Resolution," from the classic LP *A Love Supreme*, and the fusion epic "Led Boots," from guitarist Jeff Beck's *Wired*. Eubanks performs with multi-reed player Billy Pierce, bassist Rene Camacho and iconic drummer Marvin "Smitty" Smith. **BM**

BOB JAMES AND DAVID SANBORN

JAZZIZ NIGHTLIFE, BOCA RATON/JUNE 20

RUTH ECKERD HALL, CLEARWATER/JUNE 22

The pairing of keyboardist Bob James and saxophonist David Sanborn certainly qualifies as a super-duo. Each won one of their multiple Grammys for their 1986 duo album *Double Vision*, and their current tour supports their long-awaited follow-up, *Quartette Humaine*. An all-acoustic project with bassist James Genus and drummer Steve Gadd, the album pays homage to Dave Brubeck and Paul Desmond. Missouri native James, 73, was Sarah Vaughan's pianist in the 1960s; became a crossover star in the 1970s (partly because of his theme for the sitcom *Taxi*); and leads contemporary supergroup Fourplay. An acolyte of Hank Crawford



and Fathead Newman, Tampa native Sanborn, 67, grew up in St. Louis. He helped define the modern alto-sax sound via solo recordings and sessions with George Benson, Al Jarreau, Jaco Pastorius, James Brown, David Bowie and Eric Clapton. He also performed at Woodstock with the Paul Butterfield Blues Band. **BM**

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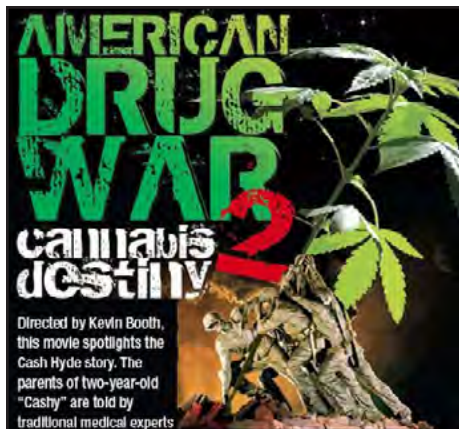
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