



**JAZZ &**  
**BLUES**  
**F L O R I D A**

FLORIDA'S ONLINE GUIDE TO LIVE JAZZ & BLUES



**FEATURED ARTIST**

**RANDY  
BERNSEN**

**PLUS...**

**JOYCE MORENO**

**JOHN NEMETH**

**CLAYTON BROTHERS QUINTET**

**BETTY FOX BAND**

**KARL BERGER & INGRID SERTSO**

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# Randy Bernsen

by Bob Weinberg

## On the tiny stage at Q-Bar in

Fort Lauderdale, The Randy Bernsen Trio launches into a slinky read of Benny Golson's cool-jazz classic "Killer Joe." Guitarist Bernsen snakes his way through grooves laid down by upright bassist Brad Adam Miller and drummer Pete Lavezzoli, his tone recalling the bluesy, late-night ambiance of Wes Montgomery or Grant Green. Suddenly, a piano joins in, causing a few audience members to crane their necks to look for the cat on the keyboards. Longtime Bernsen listeners know better; for decades, the guitarist has been conjuring additional instruments from an array of foot pedals, a particular

plus when the bandstand is just a raised platform behind the bar.



Bernsen doesn't use such mimicry on his new album, *Grace Notes*, although he does apply synthesized sounds and a few samples — the buzzing of a sitar, the twang of a jaw harp. For the most part, he luxuriates in the tones and textures he deftly pulls from his instrument, occasionally working his whammy bar for added tremolo. A masterful player, he doesn't need to prove his bona fides with face-melting solos, although his barbed licks and bent notes generate as much heat as color. And, certainly, he's surrounded himself with topshelf talent. Former Yellowjackets bassist Jimmy Haslip shares a production credit with Bernsen and provides funky bottom notes throughout. Haslip also recruited fellow California allstars such as saxophonist Steve Tavaglione and drummer Peter Erskine, the latter a longtime Bernsen colleague.

Haslip also suggested that Bernsen hire South Florida players, including percussionist Robert Thomas Jr., of Weather Report fame; steel-pan virtuoso Othello Molineaux; and drummer Julius Pastorius. "I thought I was gonna do a complete session out of town," Bernsen relates. "But Haslip really spearheaded the idea: 'Man, you gotta get Othello, you gotta get Bobby Thomas, you gotta get Julius.' I would never say no to that." Thomas and Molineaux are old pals, and Pastorius, who sometimes gigs with Bernsen, is the son of the guitarist's close friend and mentor, fretless-bass innovator Jaco Pastorius.

Bernsen was 17 when he met Jaco, who was two years his senior. Both were active on the South Florida music scene, and they became fast friends. When Bernsen began studying at the University of Miami, Pastorius was teaching there, as was guitar phenom Pat Metheny. Before long, Pastorius' career skyrocketed as he toured and recorded with Metheny, Weather Report and Joni Mitchell and released his own game-changing album. He later played on Bernsen's 1985 debut album, *Music for People, Planets and Washing Machines*, and brought Erskine along, as well. Through his own tenacity, Bernsen landed keyboard giant Herbie Hancock, who was in town for a concert. Bernsen sent him a cassette of the music and Hancock agreed to play on the album. "He made a point of pulling me off to the side during the session,"



# Grace Notes

Bernsen says. "And he went, 'Listen, I'm not here because of Jaco. I'm here because I really like the music.' "

Pastorius' tragic death in 1987 jolted Bernsen, who cherishes his friend's memory and helps keep his legacy alive. In fact, he played on and edited two posthumous Jaco Pastorius Big Band recordings, revisiting Pastorius' indelible compositions with allstar ensembles including Haslip, Erskine and A-list bassists such as Gerald Veasley and Richard Bona. Currently, he's laying down tracks for a third.

But *Grace Notes* is Bernsen's top priority. Last month, he launched a Kickstarter campaign to help finance the project. He's also in the process of releasing a second volume of music he recorded live at Fort Lauderdale's Tavern 213 and a followup to his *AppTeaser* EP with his organ trio. This flurry of activity has literally kept Bernsen up in the air — he's also a contract pilot, and lately, the flying gigs have been plentiful. But his plan was never to allow flying to put his playing on hold; in fact, quite the opposite. Obtaining his pilot's license in 1993, after he'd gotten off the road with Weather Report's Joe Zawinul, Bernsen received an offer to fly Lear jets on a contract basis. "Bro, I just stumbled into it," he says. "I did two steady gigs with flying. But I fight it, because time is the most valuable thing you have, and I want to be playing music on the last day."

**RANDY  
BERNSEN**

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# John Németh

John Németh has always been hard to label: Is he a blues artist who sings soul music, or a soul singer who also plays the blues? With talent like his, why even choose? In 2012, the harmonica maestro and power-lunged vocalist simultaneously released a disc titled *Blues Live* and another titled *Soul Live*. And damned if he didn't do justice to both genres, as he and his band brought fresh energy and intensity to original songs and classics. On his 2014 followup, *Memphis Grease*, Németh

**JOHN NEMETH**

JUNE 5  
BRADFORDVILLE BLUES  
TALLAHASSEE

once again masterfully splits the difference, dipping into funky grooves and textures that powered Memphis artists such as Al Green and Rufus Thomas. It's also a celebration of the

town the Idaho native now calls home. Wisely, Németh linked up with Memphis producer Scott Bomar, who lends his excellent backing group The Bo-Keys to the effort. Bright horn charts and thick organ chords from these veteran musicians expertly conjure the city's signature sound, and Németh's tenor vocals and cutting harmonica are a natural fit. A multi-Blues Music Award winner, Németh collected yet another this year, as *Memphis Grease* took Soul Blues Album of the Year honors. **BW**



PHOTO BY AUDREY EDWARDS

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# Karl Berger & Ingrid Sertso

German vibraphonist and pianist Karl Berger, 80, and German vocalist Ingrid Sertso, 61, are all about spontaneity. So any ensemble they perform with practically becomes an improvising orchestra, regardless of size. The couple co-founded the Creative Music Studio in Woodstock, N.Y., with equally freethinking saxophonist Ornette Coleman in 1971. Although they closed the facility in 1984, the 2013 establishment of the nonprofit Creative Music Foundation has allowed for continuing all-star workshops (with Joe Lovano, Vijay

Iyer, Henry Threadgill, Dave Douglas and John Medeski), plus archival recordings by the

founders as well as the likes of Don Cherry, Ed Blackwell and Roscoe Mitchell. Berger's latest recordings, like last year's excellent *Reveries* duo CD with Brazilian saxophonist Ivo Perelman, feature his noted improvisational skills on piano rather than on vibes, the instrument for which he's better known. He also produced Sertso's 2011 CD *What Do I Know*, which features her as much as a poet

as a vocalist. With these two, anything isn't just possible but probable. BM



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# Betty Fox Band

As Florida blueswoman Cathy Cotton once sang, "Gospel is the flipside of the blues." Certainly, that's true for Tampa vocalist Betty Fox. She may have learned her expressive craft by harmonizing on hymns, but Fox developed into a powerhouse blues singer who's concerned with more earthly pursuits. On the title track to her new CD, *Slow Burn*, Fox sings of raw desire, starting out somewhat restrained but finishing in howling torment that conjures the ghost of Janis Joplin. Joplin's Southern Comfort-fueled rasp certainly informs Fox's craft, as does Etta James' sexy purr, all filtered through the singer's own soulful sensibilities. And the woman knows how to put on a show; pull up any of her YouTube entries to witness her on-stage dynamism. One such video captures Fox and her excellent band competing at the IBC semifinals in January in Memphis. Representing the Suncoast Blues Society, they advanced to the finals, and no wonder. With the superb Kid Royal on guitar, Barry Williams on bass and Sam Farmer on drums,

## BETTY FOX BAND

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# Clayton Brothers Quintet

This quintet may be named for veteran bassist John Clayton and his younger, saxophone-playing brother Jeff Clayton — and feature the bassist's son, pianist Gerald Clayton — but two non-family members with Florida ties factor heavily into the ensemble's creativity and success. Veteran drummer Obed Calvaire's versatile playing



has been the quintet's long-standing foundation, and the frontline is rounded out by Miami-born trumpeter Terell Stafford. Stafford, 48, has recorded a handful of albums under his name over the past decade (including the new Lee Morgan tribute *BrotherLee Love*), enjoyed a busy session career and been called "one of the great players of our time" from no less an authority than revered pianist McCoy Tyner.

Stafford's work on the Clayton Brothers' latest CD, *The Gathering*, includes lockstep playing with Jeff Clayton on bluesy numbers ("This Ain't Nothin' but a Party") and evocative ballads ("Touch the Fog"). His powerful solos also punctuate Calvaire's steady drumming, Gerald's mercurial piano playing, and the sophisticated contributions of the band-leading brothers. The group will close out the season for the South Florida JAZZ concert series. **BM**

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# Shawn Holt & The Teardrops

Morris "Magic Slim" Holt was a giant of Chicago blues, his muscular sound as significant a landmark as Lake Michigan or the Art Institute. Holt died in 2013, but his band, The Teardrops, and his legacy of uncompromising electric blues lives on.

Shawn "Lil' Slim" Holt inherited the family business, leading the 'Drops on their 2013 release *Daddy Told Me*.

Shawn was 16 when he started messing around with a guitar and amp that his dad had left behind while touring. Holt Sr. was impressed with his son's progress, showed him a trick or two, and brought him on-stage when he thought he was ready. Before long, Lil' Slim was a bona fide Teardrop. After his dad's passing, Holt Jr. stepped out front, maintaining a charismatic presence on vocals and guitar and keeping the emphasis on brass-knuckle Chicago blues. And that's just what you get on *Daddy Told Me*, as the band crunch through classics such as Buster Brown's "Fannie Mae," Jimmy Reed's "Down in Virginia" and Bo Diddley's "Before You Accuse Me."

## SHAWN HOLT & THE TEARDROPS

JUNE 6  
SKIPPER'S SMOKEHOUSE  
TAMPA

JUNE 7  
EARL'S HIDEAWAY  
SEBASTIAN

Holt also pens tunes in the style and covers a couple from his dad's book. The album won Best New Artist Debut honors from the Blues Music Awards and Blues Blast Awards. Look for a followup soon. **BW**



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# Joyce Moreno

At age 67, Rio de Janeiro-born singer and guitarist Joyce Moreno has outlasted most contemporaries who also benefited from the bossa-nova expansion into the U.S. in the 1960s. The Brazilian singer-songwriter's sonorous, expressive voice can be heard in contrasting forms from different eras on recent releases. Her 2009 CD *Visions of Dawn* was actually recorded in Paris in 1976 with musicians such as percussionist Nana Vasconcelos and bassist and producer Mauricio Maestro, and displays the soaring delivery that Moreno was still molding in her 20s. On her latest effort, *Rio de Janeiro* from 2012, the Carioca pays purposeful homage to her roots, which flourished through her upbringing and musical education in and around her hometown. Having attended elementary school in Ipanema, Moreno taught herself to play guitar and started developing vocal phrasing to frame her now-obvious gifts as a singer. This led to her 1968 debut LP *Joyce*, the single name Moreno went by until adding her last name in 2009. BM

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# Midnite Johnny

Midnite Johnny Morana was a longtime fixture on the South Florida blues scene. Morana, whose family ran The Blue Midnite Blues Bar in Fort Lauderdale, developed a strong following with his acetylene-torch guitar and powerful vocals, both of which owe a debt to West Side Chicago blues kings such as Otis Rush and Magic Sam. About five years ago, Morana relocated to England. On his latest CD, *So Complicated*, Morana salutes his influences with a program of deeply rooted original material, as well as a couple of blues classics and an outstanding read of his old pal Graham Wood Drout's "Spy Boy," from the Iko-Iko songbook. His excellent British

band supplies whatever grooves he needs, from Chicago blues shuffles to Bo Diddley beats to swampy Louisiana textures. And Morana himself is in top form, his guitar full of fire, tone and color as he shapes exquisite solos that are at once sophisticated and emotionally true. His vibrato-tinged vocals, too, have never sounded better. Cue up the sweat-raising title track for a primer in slow-burn. For his South Florida homecoming, Morana will bring along U.K. drummer Paul Burgess of 10 CC fame, who's also on the new CD. **BW**



## MIDNITE JOHNNY

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# Araya/Orta Latin Jazz Quartet

Comprising two sets of A-list sibling musicians from Miami, the simpatico Araya/Orta Latin Jazz Quartet features drummer Carlomagno Araya and percussionist Ramses Araya, plus pianist Mike Orta and bassist Nicky Orta. A rhythmic juggernaut, the group provides Mike Orta with plenty of room to exercise his ample melodic and harmonic ideas. The quartet is joined by some very special guests on its self-titled 2013 CD, *Live at Teatro Nacional de Costa Rica*. Recorded in the island nation in 2010 — Mike and Carlomagno also performed and recorded with the Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional while there — the album features special guests Paquito D'Rivera on saxophone and clarinet and Diego

Urcola on trumpet and trombone. Tracks like "I Remember Dizzy" and the standard "A Night in Tunisia" burn, but make no mistake, the core quartet still has plenty of fire without the allstar guests. The playing of the Araya brothers shows years of percussive chemistry. Nicky Orta's supple bass work provides the glue that binds rhythm to melody and harmony, while Mike Orta effortlessly shifts between soloist and supporting player during his bandmates' instrumental forays. **BM**



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# Suitcase Full Of Blues

The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band might not be the first name to pop up in discussions of the blues. However, the '60-'70s roots-pop powerhouse was firmly grounded in the musical soil of the South, whether they were playing coal-mining ballads or Appalachian bluegrass. Dirt Band vocalist, drummer and harmonica man Jimmie Fadden has an obvious affinity for the blues. His high-lonesome croon is perfectly suited to the music, and he's a masterful harp blower. Fadden teamed up with Sarasota-based guitarist and vocalist Al Fuller and bassist J.P. Coley in the trio Suitcase Full of Blues, the group delving into a variety of traditional blues. Trading vocals on classics such as Robert Johnson's "Kind Hearted Woman Blues" and Professor Longhair's "Traveling Mood," Fuller and Fadden are equally compelling, Fuller's branchwater-clear vocals providing a contrast to Fadden's hickory-smoke singing. Fuller picks acoustic six string, but also plugs in a cigar-box guitar, displaying deft slide skills on Son House's "Walkin' Blues." The band name, also an Ishman Bracey tune, alludes to Fadden's drum set, which consists of a snare, hi-hat and kick drum fashioned from a vintage valise. **BW**

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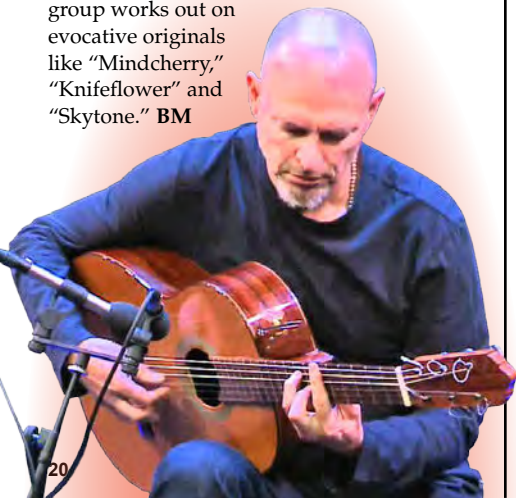
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# Ottmar Liebert & Luna Negra

If a German guitarist picking up a nylon-string instrument elicits expectations of the ancient

canon of that country's classical composers, then the listener has never experienced Ottmar Liebert. The 56-year-old German defies any stereotypes by presenting his modern update of traditional Spanish flamenco styles, and has used that sound of surprise to become an international sensation. Influenced by flamenco-guitar icon Paco De Lucia, Liebert's

variations on the style feature more melody, simplicity and space — to the point where several of his releases have been nominated for Best New Age Album Grammy Awards. Based in Santa Fe, N.M., for the past 30 years, Liebert started both his recording career and personnel-shifting Luna Negra band in 1989. His latest release, the 2014 disc *three-oh-five*, features bassist and keyboardist Jon Gagan, drummer Chris Steele, trumpeter JQ Whitcomb, and Liebert on flamenco and electric guitars, programming and hand claps. The group works out on evocative originals like "Mindcherry," "Knifeflower" and "Skytone." **BM**



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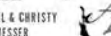
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