Blues Flavors of the Legendary Rhythm & Blues Cruise

Blues cruisers on deck of the Legendary Rhythm & Blues Cruise Photo by © Joseph A. Rosen

By Katie Martinelli, Ozcat Radio, Vallejo, CA

Some folks think that blues is one flavor. The musical gumbo served aboard January's Legendary Rhythm & Blues Cruise (LRBC) proved those folks wrong.

A veritable smorgasbord can be found on these twice-a-year cruises. "Blues" is often a catch-all term for music that has blues as the roots but has evolved and merged with other musical styles – and there are dozens of them.

You have African blues, blues-rock, boogie-woogie, British blues, Chicago blues, country blues, Delta blues, Detroit blues, electric blues, gospel blues, Hill Country blues, hokum blues, jump blues, Memphis blues, New Orleans blues, rhythm and blues (R&B), soul blues, swamp blues and many more.

LRBC's Roger Naber, blues industry veteran for more than 34 years, serves all flavors of blues: "a multitude of the most diverse and talented blues and rhythm and blues bands on the planet," he said. No wonder he's twice been voted Blues Promoter of the Year.

It's this broad interpretation of blues that keeps blues cruisers coming back each year and entices new cruisers – "virgins" – for the hand-picked lineup that embraces the many flavors of the blues.

Take Bobby Rush, for instance. His shows throughout the week of the January 2015 Caribbean cruise portrayed his musical journey from classic blues to funk to hip-hop.

Pianist Lucky Peterson and his wife, Tamara, performed some songs that were Sade-style smooth jazz that had us all grooving.

For his latest album, *Bluesamericana*, Keb' Mo' brought elements of American roots music styles such as rock, folk, bluegrass and R&B into his mix of home-country blues. With a roster of new original songs, he was well chosen to participate in the cruise's songwriter's workshop.

Taj Mahal incorporates elements of world music into his works. Taj has done much to reshape the definition and scope of blues music over the course of an almost 50-year career, by fusing it with nontraditional forms, including sounds from the Caribbean, Africa and the South Pacific. He told us that right after the January cruise, he would play with the Hula Blues Band, his Hawaiian project. Not surprising, as Taj lived many years on Kauai and almost always sports a Hawaiian shirt.

Tab Benoit took us on a trip through the Bayou swamps of Louisiana with his style of swamp-pop to gritty blues and rootsy jams.

"King of Accordion" Dwayne Dopsie and the Zydeco Hellraisers – well, the name says it all. Zydeco evolved in southwest Louisiana by French Creole speakers and blends blues, R&B and indigenous music from the Louisiana.

The Sunday Gospel Brunch provided a great opportunity for exploring the relationship between blues and gospel, the secular and sacred expression of everyday life. Many of the performers, such as Mr. Sipp and Shemekia Copeland,

Mister Sipp gets down Mississippi-style on the 2015 LBRC to Costa Maya, Roatan and Grand Cayman Photo by Kaati Gaffney

Bobby Rush dramatizes his musical journey which includes Motown, funk and hip-hop Photo by © Joseph A. Rosen

Tamara Peterson takes the stage with her soulful voice that mixes contemporary blues, R&B and jazz
Photo by © Joseph A. Rosen

"took us to church" as they allowed themselves to push the edge of the gospel side of things. A delicious soul food themed brunch provided just the right accompaniment with ribs, fried chicken, cornbread and black-eyed peas.

The stage play *The Devil's Music – The Life and Blues of Bessie Smith* featured a trio that often chilled into a jazz vein throughout the performance, and burst into full blues when Miche Braden belted out one of Bessie's classics.

Piano man Victor Wainwright managed to sound like four people playing at once as he held down the honky tonk and boogie-woogie side of the blues.

Some of the best musical gumbo was stirred up at the late night jams where jammers mixed up all the genres, and that is where the real magic happened. Maybe a new type of blues was founded: cruise blues?

Future cruises promise to be equally full of blues flavors. To find out how you can get a taste, visit bluescruise.com or call (816) 753-7979. ♫

Kate Martinelli is the co-founder of Vallejo's Ozcat Radio 89.5 FM of Vallejo, CA and the host of The Sunny Mix *radio program. She is a freelance writer, graphic and web designer, but most of all, devoted mother and grandmother. Find Ozcat Radio online at www.ozcatradio.com or tune in with a smartphone.*

Bluesamericana *is the name of Keb' Mo's new album and a perfect description of the music* Photo by © Joseph A. Rosen

Tullah Carter (lt) and Katie Martinelli (rt) of Ozcat Radio enjoy a moment with "Queen of the Blues" Shemekia Copeland at the Casino Bar of Holland America's Ms Nieuw Amsterdam (LRBC #24) Photo by Kaati Gaffney