



## REVEL IN THE HISTORY OF THE BLUES AT THE NATIONAL BLUES MUSEUM

At the museum's grand opening, (l to r) Jimbo Mathus, Vasti Jackson, Michael Battle, Gus Thornton and Alphonso Sanders unite for a memorable performance  
Photo courtesy National Blues Museum

When you walk into the National Blues Museum on any given day, one of the first things you hear is the familiar voice of Morgan Freeman proclaiming, "The blues is living history. Few forms of American music can claim a history as long, as tradition-rich and as complex as the blues. Since its origins in the Deep South long ago, the blues has been a bedrock for virtually all American popular music of the last hundred-plus years."

Taking that bedrock, and building a literal home for the blues upon it, St. Louis, MO, is proud to be the home of the National Blues Museum. After years of fundraising, planning and preparation, the National Blues Museum opened its doors to the public on April 2, 2016, with the mission to preserve, honor and celebrate the history of the blues as the foundation of all modern American music and its impact on world culture. Through artifacts, interactive technology, live performances and education programs, the museum allows blues aficionados to explore and revel in its history, and new audiences to engage in the genre.

Some may wonder why the National Blues Museum is based in St. Louis, but the roots of this project run deep – much like the blues itself. Home to one of the busiest train stations and two of the biggest rivers in America,

St. Louis was always a destination along the path of the Great Migration – the relocation of millions of African Americans from the rural South to the North, Midwest and West – and a stop along what would become the blues highway. The music scene of the region was thriving, and when the Delta blues found St. Louis, it also found the uptown urban piano sound known as ragtime. The blues incorporated this new piano sound when W. C. Handy released "St. Louis Blues" in 1914. As millions of travelers poured into St. Louis, many decided to stay and call it home, including early blues pioneers such as St. Louis Jimmy Oden, Peetie Wheatstraw, Walter Davis and Henry Townsend, who helped shape the beginnings of that St. Louis blues sound.

In 2010, a festival simply titled "Bluesweek" was launched to pay homage to this rich culture. Much like the name suggests, it was a week-long series of events of educational and instrument workshops, panel discussions, an awards ceremony and a blues pub crawl, all leading up to the Bluesweek festival to cap off the weekend. At that same time, unbeknownst to the festival organizers, a downtown development, known as the MX District, was looking for a cultural anchor. From civic leaders to local



Explore the National Blues Museum and revel in the history of the blues  
 Photo courtesy National Blues Museum

government, from downtown developers to the local music community, the National Blues Museum development took hold and the project began to grow roots.

The building blocks for the National Blues Museum began with the basics. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization was formed, and the inaugural board of directors developed. Robert Endicott, a law partner at Bryan Cave, joined the team as chairman of the board after learning of this project while playing trumpet at a gig with the award-winning Voodoo Blues band. The project also boasted the assistance of international museum designer Patrick Gallagher, president/founder of Gallagher & Associates, and Robert Santelli, executive director of the GRAMMY Museum in Los Angeles. The museum was fortunate to bring Dion Brown, former executive director of the B.B. King Museum, on board in mid-2015 to lead the organization to its long-awaited and very successful grand opening.

The National Blues Museum takes its mission statement seriously, and takes pride in telling the entire story of the blues from its early beginnings in West Africa all the way to today's music scene. In addition to the storyline of the blues and its rich history, the museum celebrates the blues of today with its newly launched "Howlin' Friday" concert series featuring local, regional and national acts. In April 2017, the museum also added "Soulful Sundays" concerts to its music line-up.

And speaking of line-ups, the museum has been fortunate to welcome some VIPs through its doors. Shemekia Copeland, Big George Brock and Bobby Rush kicked off the grand opening weekend. Since then, Bonnie Raitt toured through and saw the photo of herself and her mentor Sippie Wallace, and she excitedly shared that moment with the fans at her evening concert! The original Blues Brother Curtis Salgado also visited, and after reading every word and playing every interactive

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in the museum, joyfully said, "I'll be back!" Interactive experiences include "Become a Blues Legend," which allows visitors to make a blues song, mix it up and email it home, as well as an opportunity to join a jug band and see yourself performing in the band.

The museum also believes in educational opportunities and has been host to engaging programs with several community partners, such as the 'Take Me to the River' Education Initiative and most recently, "History in the First Person: Music Moved the Movement: Civil Rights and the Blues." This program, in partnership with HEC-TV, featured a panel discussion titled "A Conversation with Reena Evers-Everette and David (Dave) Dennis, Sr.: Inside the Civil Rights Movement," thanks to a grant from the Missouri Humanities Council. The museum has officially kicked off its own Blues in the Schools program, which has already been presented to 6,000 school students in the area.

In the museum's first year, the Scott and Diane McCuaig and Family Gallery has been home to several world-class traveling exhibits, including H.C. Porter's "Blues @ Home: Mississippi's Living Blues Legends," Sharon McConnell-Dickerson's "Cast of Blues," and "Women of the Blues - A Coast to Coast Collection" curated by Lynn Orman Weiss. Starting April 2017, the "Sepia Magazine Photo Archive: Blues in Review" will be in residence, and November will feature the work of photographer Kirk West and his extensive collection of blues icons.

Using artifact-driven exhibits, live performances and interactive galleries to perpetuate blues culture for future generations of artists, fans and historians, there's always something fun and exciting to experience at the National Blues Museum. For more information, visit [www.nationalbluesmuseum.org](http://www.nationalbluesmuseum.org). To stay connected, follow @NatBluesMuseum on Twitter, @NationalBluesMuseum on Instagram and like "National Blues Museum" on Facebook. 🎵



*Blues fan of the next generation checks out an interactive exhibit  
Photo courtesy National Blues Museum*