

Hip Linkchain Interview

June 22 1982, at his house, 2855 W. Wilcox, Chicago. 3pm.

Well, I started playing when I was eight years old. OK, I was in the cotton fields then - now I used to listen to people way back, like Fats Domino, and then, later years, Little Richard, and Muddy Waters, Jimmy Rogers, Little Walter, Chuck Berry - anybody came out with something good, you know. Then in 1952 BB King came out, and I used to listen to Bobby Blue Bland. Everything that came out good, I would listen to it.

It's interesting that you were listening to rock'n'roll. At the time they didn't call it rock'n'roll, they called it rhythm and blues, and it was the fast kick then. It was the press that named it rock n'roll. There was Big Maybelle Thornton, I listened to everybody, you know. Jimmy Reed, I forgot about him, and me and my brother would go back to the house and play it. We had acoustic guitars, would sit up on the front porch and play it. That easy. And then we left there and we came to Chicago to buy us electric guitars. We came here, and folks from down there already had a few cheap guitars waiting on us. And then we would go out and hear lots of people play, you know, people like Muddy Waters Elmore James, Howlin Wolf. We'd just go around from place to place listening to the guys play, and we put our style of what was them doing and go on the bandstand. Rockford Illinois, that was 1956. And I've been on the bandstand ever since. We went in a record studio in 1958 and cut behind Dusty Brown. I was twenty-two years old. That was my first record. I didn't go into the studio no more, I went up behind GL Crockett in 1959, and he cut a master, but never heard from it no more. And I didn't go back again until 1963, I tried to record myself, you know. And then in '63 about forty or fifty times, we started recording for Chess; we rehearsed down there for about six months and when we got ready to cut the tune they give it to Roy Higgs(?) - a white dude that sing? - and he cut the thing. So I started from there. And then I kept on and kept on until I got this guy to take me with a forty-five called Millionaire Blues. Lola Record Company. It came out in 1966. So I went into the studio myself in '63, cut this master, went back, recorded again, and then in 1966 the Lola Record Company, they took me. They recorded this thing, Millionaire Blues, and they put it on air. OK, 1969 I went to Sannom(?) Studio, came out with Fishin in my Pond and Porkchop. I went back in '71 and cut three albums, and they never did do nothing with them. They went out of business, you know. Then in 1976 I went out to the studio and recorded this West Side Blues, and the guy who was going to put it out for me ran out of money - he just put out Confusion Blues and Millionaire Blues, the same on one of the sides. So anyway, I went to Ma Bea's and recorded for Ma -(?), you know her? MCM Records out of France. I recorded for her in '76, and I

recorded this other album in '76, so the last album came out in '77, and the first album came out in '80. In '81 I went to Europe and when I came back I recorded this album, on Teardrop Records. So we just came out with that, and now I got this thing I did on Rumbles, Rumble Records. It's coming out July 10th. Now I gotta do another thing, an album, this year for Rumble records. Also Frank's coming out with the forty-five off the master, Change my Blues, Night Life-Whole Life, you know. See we only put eight tunes on the album, and we done twelve - so we're just going to take two of them and make a forty-five of them, you know, promo. So I've been playing the music all my life. I was on the bandstand in '56 - couldn't play too good, but I still went up there. Yeah, and I been on there ever since. I been everywhere. I've played more different places than most anybody. And I ain't made no money yet! I ain't made no money off no record. In the clubs that I used to play in, there wasn't no money. Not like that now, because I can go all over the East coast and Europe and the West coast - places like that I can go and play and make some money - but it didn't used to be like that. You could go all over Mississippi and everywhere, and wouldn't make nothing. Just wouldn't make enough money to get gas to go down there.

But the money's good now, in these east coast places?
Yeah, it's good money, Fess's and stuff like that. It's good money. You can make a living, after you get enough of them. So far I've worked in different factories, all these years, because I was afraid to go on out there, I couldn't get the break I wanted, just go out there and just do it, you know, I couldn't get nobody standing up front of me - I couldn't get nobody to do that. So then I decided I'm going to stay in these factories until I get the break I want. And then I got this break in Europe, a tour - a nine weeks tour. So I ain't worked since. I've been playing different places, you know. I liked Europe. I like to play anywhere! To me it sounds good to hear me play or anybody else that squeeze a string. See I'm not the type of person that says 'That guy can't play, that guy can't play' - I just like to hear somebody play it, get on down. I don't care, it don't have to be BB King, don't have to be Albert King, just as long as they're getting on down. I like that. That's what I've been enjoying all my life - blues music, you know. And this what Chuck Berry and them was playing, Little Richard and them, they wasn't calling it rock then - they called it rhythm and blues. It just go a little bit faster than blues - but it was good. Yeah, it was real good. Back in the fifties, you know.

Does your music owe more to the records you've listened to,
or does it owe more to the Chicago Blues?

I think it owes more to the records that I've listened to. The records that I used to listen to, I think they was good. All them guys, I think that they was real good. Then I produced a style of my own by listening to so many of them like Magic Sam - we all came up together - Otis Rush, we're all here

on the West Side, you know. Luther Allison, Jimmy Dawkins, Willie James Lyons, Guitar Junior. We were all about eighteen at the same time. So everybody developed a style by listening to somebody else. You listen at this guy, and you listen at that guy, and all the time you're playing what you think is right. So it just develops into a style of your own.

How does WestSide blues differ from South Side?

There ain't no difference. They keep on saying that it's a different music on the South Side - that's a lie. We're all playing the same thing. To my idea, we're all playing the same thing, because a lot of folks live on the South Side now that used to live on the West Side, such as Otis Rush, he used to live over here, Guitar Junior, he used to live over here; Buddy Guy, when he came to Chicago he used to live over here, on 16th and Homer over there. Now it don't make you play no different, because you've moved from one side of town to the other. I can't see where it's no different - them guys in the South pull a string, over here we pull a string. They devised that themselves, saying the West Side and the South Side are different, but I don't see where there's no difference. Only thing I know is that two guitar players never sound the same way - you play the blues, I'll play the blues, somebody else play the blues, it's all different, like the fingerprints on your hands - it's all different in there somewhere. So now I wouldn't say that the South Side are so much different from the West Side. To me there ain't no difference, because I'll go out there and play 'You got me running, you got me hiding' and them guys will play the same way. I used to play with Junior Wells out there, me and John Primer, who's playing for Muddy Waters now - not too long ago, either; last of '79, first of '80 - so I don't see that there's no difference. Louis Myers, you know, we was all playing together out there.

What about Jackson in the fifties?

Same thing that we had in the cottonfield, but a little East. Just like this noise that you hear now, you can't hear nothing nobody's saying - well, that music wasn't out then. It was all blues. Yeah. Blues and - you call it rock n'roll, I call it rhythm and blues - stuff like that, whatever was up there, Muddy Waters, Chuck Berry. Up in the Delta you'd have them, in Jackson, Little Walter, Fats Domino, Little Richard - same folks you hear up here, you could hear them down there. Same when I came to Chicago. Music didn't really change until 1964, when Big Bill Hill went off the air. Then they was putting this noise type of stuff in, you know, stuff that couldn't nobody understand, from James Brown to everybody. Big Bill Hill, the number one disc jockey of Chicago, white or black, he's the number one. Yeah, he made them guys like Bobby Bland, and Magic Sam and Otis Rush - he made them. Because he was the one pushing their records daily. They come on all day long, then; go on at twelve o'clock at night and go on until four in the morning, just blues over and over, over and over. Any station you turn to, you listen till you hear some blues. But now it ain't like that. Steve Cushing,

yeah, but he plays roaring twenties blues, you know. What do you call it? delta blues, something like that. With one guitar, a slide guitar, either that or somebody playing a piano, stuff like that, that type of blues. That's what my Dad used to play. Robert Johnson, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Blind Lemon David, whatever his name is. He played Peetie Wheatstraw, Sleepy John, he used to play that kind of stuff. It was OK then, yeah. But music done changed so now, you know. All the words, the words still going around, see. So now, you got to get the folks more to tap their foot, to dance off nowadays, than sat there all night long, listening to that, it gets boring to you. But in them days I used to play for them there, they called it a frolic, a country fish-fry ball, that's what they used to call it. It would mostly be at a house. Well it was good then because they had dances for that, black bottom and charleston and everything. It was good then, you know. But as the years was changing, and I got onto the bandstand, music was different. They call that real blues, but the same thing they was singing then they're singing now, only they're putting more to it. They put drums, bass, piano, they put two guitars, whatever, horns - make the folk listen to it, see, more now than they used to. We're still saying the same thing. Ain't no different. There's a difference in the music sound, because you've got more pieces now, you've got five or six pieces or whatever. Then you only had one. And you could really hear, but who's going to sit there now listening to this one song they play all the time? Man, you'd get bored, you know. That's like opening a nightclub and having a talkshow! Won't be nobody there but who's talking!

I've got an album over in England, and one in France on MCM. That album with Dusty Brown is on JSP too. And I'm on an album with Jimmy Rogers and Left-Hand Frank.

How are they doing, these albums?

I don't know. You don't hear too much from JSP. If you cut it over here, and it comes out over here, like my last album, well, you know what's happened, but over there you can never tell. I know when I was over there, in 1980, I signed over five hundred. Because everywhere you go they're holding them up through the crowd. But you never can get you a sheet on 'This album sold this many. They never give you nothing. Last time they stole another album, by cutting tapes here, cutting tapes there, put it all together when you leave. So they got another album coming out on me over there, this year.

What can you do about that?

Nothing. No contract, these lawyers don't work over there. But it's all original stuff, you know - Junior Parker, something like that, Muddy Waters, Howlin Wolf, somebody like that's song - it's nothing of my own. So I don't really care. It's just helping me get more jobs over there.

But it would be nice if they paid you for it.

Yeah, it would, because they're sure as hell going to make some money off

it.

There's a lot of white musicians playing the blues now, in Chicago.

Hooo, more than ever. They started along about '67. I know one white guy who used to play with Otis Rush, started about '68. Bob Koester, of the Delmark record company, he was starting recording albums - Magic Sam, Shakey Jake, Jimmy Dawkins and JB Hutto and all them. And then this is when the white really starts playing with the black, and they been getting more and more ever since. Now every band you see has got white in it.

What do you think of that?

I think it's nice. Specially for over here, you know, because some places that you play, they don't want to see just an all-black band, they want to see some white in it. But over in Europe they want to see an all-black band. So now, I've been around, I knows what's happening, you know. The average place that you play here, you're mostly best to have somebody white in the band. This is the most prejudiced country in the world, the United States. So now what happens, we can sing something, and be real good, but they won't open the door for us. They let somebody white record that thing, and imitate you, and open the door for them, pay them a lot of money to let them in. That's what they do here. But over there, it's different, you know. They can half sing it, and still get by with it, you know. They got so much support behind it. See, ninety percent of the United States is white, the other ten percent are black, so you got ninety percent of the world out there pushing him, helping him out, when you only got ten percent black, and only one percent will help you, sometimes. Yeah, it's just a wall you're going to have to climb. It's a tough life out there, boy - once you get going, it's OK. Some places won't hire you because of your colour, some places will. But them places that don't hire you because of your colour, don't play there! Go somewhere else to play, see?

But most people who listen to blues now are white.

Yeah, like it is. Not most of them, just about all of them. If you put a blues record on a black station and just keep it there, older blacks like myself will buy him. But there ain't no young black gonna buy it. But if you put some black blues a white station, many many people will buy it. Every day it gets a little bit different, a little bit different.

Don't you think it's odd that blacks don't listen to this black music any more?

You only know Chicago by hearing talk of it, Right? That's how you come here, because you know Chicago is here. OK, if you didn't know Chicago was here, you wouldn't be here, see? This is the way with these young black kids, they never heard of it. Since they've been coming up, they've been playing the other stuff, this different stuff, this stuff where you walk around with things in your ears and nobody knows nothing anybody's saying. This is what

they've heard, see? They've never heard of Muddy Waters, and Albert King, they've never heard of that. All they've heard of is this stuff. They can't buy it because they ain't never heard of it.

People call it sad music, but it's not really sad music; it can be happy and it can be sad. It's a thing that's brought up in you, see. You've got to feel it to play it. People call it sad, but it's not really sad because you got the jump blues and some slow low down, and barrelhouse blues. Foot-moving blues.

Oh yeah, you got to feel it. We don't have to read no book to tell us how to put our finger on the string. You knows where to put your hand, it's a God-given thing, you know where to put your hand so to make it sound good to the folks out there, see, you know what to sing to them to make it sound good to them. You ain't got to read no book because you feel it all the time. You can tell when the folks in the audience like you and when they don't like you. When you write a song, you're going to play it like this, and if it don't sound right to you, you're going to change that song around, till it sounds good. If it sounds good to you, then it's going to sound good to somebody out there. See, it's just all feeling that comes from your heart, because hell, I can't read no music, never could. Never tried, either! Every song I play and every song I write comes from my head, and my heart. I feel this should be like this, and this should be good too, and just go on from there, and write the song, you know. It's a heck of a thing, but you have to be black to know how it is. It's the type of thing that's just born in you, long, many many years ago, it was born in you. Somehow it's going to come out of you, see what I'm talking about? You're not going to get out there and say, 'I got a million dollars and you ain't got but a dollar in your pocket,' see what I'm talking about? It's just a thing that's born in you. I love blues, and most older black folk love blues. It's what they was raised up on, you know. Now as far as the young blacks buying blues, they don't know nothing about it. In the first place they ain't got no money, and in the second place they can't go where they have them in there, because they go there and they're going to start a fight and be put outside. Best for them to stay out!

There were many more clubs, ten or twenty years ago, weren't there?

Hoo, South Side, West Side, there'd be a band on every corner. Every corner, middle of the block, nothing but blues. I remember when there was a band on every corner, from way down 1200 West Madison Street all the way up, same way down on Roosevelt Road, all down on Pulaski, back up on Roosevelt Road, everywhere you can look there was a band there, a blues band. This was back in '56 to 1961, something like that. Bands was everywhere, then all of a sudden - boom. No bands. Everybody went to DJ. Because a disc jockey used to go in there and spin the record for ten dollars, you know, and play it

loud. People then wanted it played loud, dancing stuff, stuff they hear on the air, you know. Folks would go crazy about that. Then they found that they could get a disc jockey much cheaper than they could get a live band, so they started hiring DJs, so it just went on out. Years later Bob Koester started recording albums on the black musicians, and selling them to the young whites around the world. The blues thing will never die, it's the root of all music - break it down here, and it'll break out over there somewhere. So this is what happened, they tore it down among the black, and the root broke out among the white. Kept going, you know.

So you reckon there was a time when the blues was dying? Yeah, it had died. Blues didn't come back until Bob Koester went to recording albums, and then book companies, like what you're doing, was writing about it, up in '69 and '70 and then on. Then whites would read different papers and stuff like that. Black folk don't know how to read nothing but the headline of a newspaper where somebody hit a home run. So it went to getting big from there, and then they went to putting it on these different stations, around the world, and it was just born back out from there. Now the blues is all among the young whites. Every once in a while somebody cuts a blues album and pays the black stations a lot of money to play it on the air, and they keep on playing it on the South Side, something like that, and somebody go out, they'll hear it, but sooner or later it'll just die back down. Somebody else will come out with something, but it'll just die back down, you know. But among the whites it's still jumping. So it's never going to die, it's the root of all music. Unless you pull up all the roots and all the black folks dead, then blues will die. I don't think it'll ever go over, because there's so many young blacks now, forced into playing the blues, that's all they ever get a job. They get out there among the whites and play, because if they keep playing this stuff what they playing, it ain't paying in the first place, so they're starving to death. So they've been forced into the blues in order to make a living, see?

Some of these young guys are very good.

Oh yeah. There's nothing bad about them, it's just in them like I said, the root. It's going to come out sooner or later, it's going to come out of you.

There are white guys of the same age, with the same musical background, who can play just as well - but if a white person is going to go and listen to blues, it's got to be a black musician. Which is odd.

Right. Now this has been going on for a long time, because I was looking at this TV show, Saturday night, and this guy had these rock'n'roll stars on, Commodores and all of them. This white guy, he said he was fifty-eight years old, he said back in the thirties he was listening to folk like Count Basie, and Louis Armstrong and all of them, the big bands, and the white bands was coming right along behind them, and listen to them, and go cut their style

of music. This was back in the thirties. He started recording these young guys like the Commodores and the Temptations, people like that, and right behind that, there come two guys who had their own show - the Isley Brothers - they came along and done the same thing, see the Jackson five do it and then make it from there. So he said it's been like that all the time. I used go to an old guy who used to fix my amplifier, and he said he would listen to Robert Johnson, and Robert Nighthawk and them back in the early thirties. He was white - old, sixty-five, something like that, he said he used to go to the South Side of Chicago and listen to Muddy Waters and Robert Nighthawk and all them. Well I was born in '36 anyway, I was in the South then. The black folks' music has been popular all the time, but just sometimes it just die out among the blacks, you know. They don't really know what they want.

One thing I want to write about is why blacks don't listen to the blues any more.

Well, I wouldn't say the blacks don't listen to the blues no more, it's the young blacks who don't listen to the blues. Well they can't listen to the blues, they never hear it. The radio stations won't play the blues. If you put the blues on, people pushing the blues - they like BB King, some things he plays, they like that because they hear him so much, see. So now if they would put me on the air, or whoever, Jimmy Dawkins, on the air all the time, they'd like me too, see what I'm talking about? But they never hear, so they can't like it, you know.

Did you play much in Mississippi?

No, I done most of my playing up here. We used to go out and play for a few parties, back when I was sixteen years old, all-night fish fries, stuff like that. But we'd mostly play at the house. And then we came to Chicago, and we were in Chicago about three days, and we were on the bandstand. Somebody came by and heard us. I'll tell you who put me on the bandstand, a guy by the name of Arthur Donkin. He's playing at the B.L.U.E.S Thursday night. He blow a harp. He was on the air. He was on WXRT. I had my own cheap guitar somebody had bought me, some friend, he dead now. They liked to hear us play. They was grown people, you know, they'd come to Chicago a long time before, heard we was coming, went out and bought us cheap guitars. So he come by the house and heard us play, over there on Roosevelt Road, he was already playing out there in Robins Illinois, so he came by there and heard us play and just took us right on there and put us on the bandstand, and I've been on there ever since. We used to play Friday, Saturday, Sunday evening - on Sunday evening jam we'd have Mighty Joe Young, Jimmy Rogers and Magic Sam, all them out there in Sunday. Yeah, we'd jam on Sunday until two o'clock Sunday night. We'd have a darn good time.

I was talking to John Littlejohn the other day. He was in Jackson.

I knowed him in Jackson. He was a grown man. though. I was about fifteen or

sixteen years old, and my sister and brother-in-law moved down to Jackson. They had kids, so they moved out of the cotton fields. I used to go down to Jackson and stay four or five months, and I'd go round and hear Johnny Littlejohn, Simpson and the Houserockers, Joe Dyson, Duke Hudderson. In them days you was allowed anywhere you want, there weren't no such thing that you got to be twenty-one. You could walk on in there, buy whisky at five years old, bottle of beer, anything.

What was John Littlejohn like then?

He was playing about the same thing. He play a little bit better now. He had an electric guitar, and another cat playing guitar, there wasn't no basses then, and somebody beating drums, and they sounded good. Simpson and the Houserockers, they had two guys playing guitar, and drums, and a guy playing harp. They was good, too, they could play all the Little Walter and Jimmy Rogers and Muddy Waters, and them songs. They was good. But all these was grown people over me, you know, so I was surprised to go back down there and play, take my band down there in '58. We draw a lot of crowds there - we were charging a dollar at the door, man, we made almost 400 bucks at a little place. We were hanging around the small places. We made some darn good money down there. I went down there in '61 and played too, me and my brother, we was on a show with Elmore James at a little bar. We'd go on at four in the evening, he'd come on at nine at night - we had it packed before he'd get there. Folks buying corn whisky, beer.

I would like to have seen Elmore James.

Yeah, we was living on the same plantation. He left in 1950. He was living on that side of the highway, we was living on this side. He was a tractor driver. Yeah, he and my daddy looked just alike - real tall, skinny and black. Yep, I know Elmore for a long, long time. I knowed him back in '46 because him and my elder brother used to play together. You know, acoustic guitar.

... if you're a true blues player, you're never going to stop playing. Even if you don't make no money, you're still going to play. That's why I tell you, it's the root. But these white guys, they'll go out there one night and play the blues, and if they can make five dollars more over there, they'll start playing rock. They don't give a shit about each one of them. Just like you got this car here and you know you can buy another car, then you go out and buy you a new car. But now if you can't do no better, and you like this car, you'll stick to it, because this is what you like. It's the same thing. I know one thing, if you're born a blues player you'll die a blues player. John Lee Hooker made an album a long time ago saying 'I'll never get out of these blues alive' and he ain't lying, you'll never get out of them alive. Yeah, he was born in them and raised in them, way back from the whole family playing blues, so this stuff was born in me, and I could never change. I have tried, but it didn't work - I wound up coming right back to the blues!

What did you try?

Oh, mostly R&B, when the blues went down, and soul stuff. It just wouldn't work. It gets just too boring, because they ain't saying nothing. So then I kept on, kept on, kept on, and then quit playing for a couple of years, and then I go back and pick up the guitar, and somebody called for me to play, then I'd go play at night and wouldn't play no more the next couple of months or so, and then go back and pick up the guitar and say 'Hell, well I'm going to get going back to start playing.' It's just in you, you know, there ain't no way to get around it.

When was it when you stopped playing?

Along about '69 to '70. Then I quit again the last of '71 and didn't play no more till the end of '72. See, I had a wife then, and I was working days, and then when I get off work I'd go to sleep, and people would call for me to play, and my ^{wife} would tell them that I didn't want to play. So then two or three weeks later you'd meet this person, they'd tell you they called, and nobody told me nothing. So that just disgusted me, so then me and my wife separated, first of '73, and I went back to playing steady, and I've been playing steady ever since. And then I got laid off in '74 until '76. That's when I started on the North Side. So then I got more and more interested, back in the roots like I was, you know. And I'll go anywhere now, any time. Shit, I'll leave at three o' clock in the morning, it don't make me no difference, all I know is I'm going to play. There's not too much money in it unless you get a big hit record out there, like BB King. ZZ Hill, he's got a hit, a golden - Downhome Blues, Boppin Ground. Playing it at all these clubs. He's living in Louisiana, but he's from Mississippi, but he's on all these black stations. See, he got all these black DJs to continue to play it, day and night, so that thing's golden, he's got a golden album out there. He's making darn good money now. Muddy Waters, he makes good money, he makes ten thousand a night over in Europe, and over here his cheapest price is something like forty-five hundred a night. So that's good money, man. He can play as many nights as he want to. He's been off the last two or three months, sick, and just because he don't want to play, hell, he's got enough money to lay up as long as he wants. So if I can get ten thousand dollars a night, hell - two nights a week! I'd buy me a mansion.

What kind of money is there playing at B.L.U.E.S, for example?

Up here on the North Side? About two fifty a night. That's a small place. That's about the top price up there. And even if he don't make the money, he'll still pay you. He's mostly keeping the blues alive up there. He's done a good job, too, the place stay full, all the time. So now you got the Kingston Mines done the same thing. Kingston Mines pay more. Guitar Junior was in there the other week, he was making four fifty a night. When you're from out of town, you make more money. You can never make no money around your town. You always got to go somewhere else. If you a local musician you don't make

much money money playing there, but you go to Detroit or somewhere, you make ten times as much money. But if you move over to Detroit, you can come back here and make a lot of money. Yeah, it's backward like that. Sunnyland Slim, he played in Milwaukee Friday and Saturday, he made sixteen hundred bucks. Two nights.

What about the South Side clubs?

Nothing. Twenty-five dollars. Twenty-five dollars for a side man, and somebody big like Junior Wells, they're paying him forty dollars to stop by and do a show. They don't pay no money. Junior Wells can go up to Biddy Mulligan's on the North Side, and make \$700 a night. That's why when you go to Theresa's he won't go up and play, he ain't making no money. When you ain't making no money and you been doing it as long as we been doing it, you get uninterested in playing, it gets boring to you. As long as you're making some money, you're going to play your ass off, you're going to try and suit everybody. Yeah, you figure you're supposed to have a chance too with what you do, when you been with this shit long as we have, I should probably be making a million dollars a year, as long as I've been out there, crawling, making folks happy, all over the world - hell, I'd be a darn millionaire by now, and I ain't made nothing.

People seem to enjoy playing at B.L.U.E.S.

Yeah, because people treat you nice there, you know. All your whisky, free, place is crowded all the time, there's nobody up there with no sound system telling you nothing, when to go up and when to come down, nothing like that, so you can have fun like that, you know. Like being on the road, you know - nobody bothering you. They set the stuff up there, and you go on and play, and people be happy. Now if they was to have more places like this in every town, the blues would be real, real big. All the places in the little towns, that like the blues, they be full. Like the Soup Kitchen in Detroit, Tramps up in New York, the Mud Club up in New York, Dobs up in Philadelphia, them places be packed full. The Zoo Bar up in Lincoln Nebraska, the Blue something up in Omaha. Them places are packed full every night, because they have blues all the time. But now if you go to places like they have blues tonight, tomorrow they have rock, next night R&B, they don't be too many blues nights, there ain't going to be too many folks, it gets all mixed up. Wise Fools used to be real popular, then they started running jazz on Mondays, reggae, and the crowds started falling off.

I saw Son Seals there the other night. Terrible place. He looked bored.

The only way that guy made it, is he's with Alligator, who really push. That's the only way he made it, because he ain't talking about nothing, to my idea. Everything he play sounds the same way, he do the same thing on every song. It makes you boring to sit there. I won't sit and listen to him. When he's playing somewhere, I go the other way!

Now you're playing to mainly white audiences - how is it different?

I like it much better. Because when you were playing at a West Side club years ago, there was always a fight, somebody shooting, fighting, and once you get older, like I am, you don't want that, you go somewhere to have fun, make your money, and go home. But there, every time somebody put up a gun you got to put your guitar down and fall on the floor, and you get sick of that. You get scared, see. Every night, Terrible place, man, they throw chairs at each other. So it just got that I didn't want to play for black people. And still I ain't going to play for no black people. Because the older you get, you're going to move where it's quieter, see. When you're young, you stay where there's a lot of noise going on, they're playing records, that's good. Once you get older you're going to get away from there, and when you play, you're going to play for nicer people. You don't want to see nobody fighting all the time. It's much better now, I quit playing for black people the last of '75. I've been playing steady round the North Side and around the world ever since then, and never for black people. There be more black people in B.L.U.E.S than in any club across the world we play. And Sunday night, there was more black there than I ever saw there. It was a special party for Smokey Smothers. But everywhere else we go, you see about one percent black, and 99 percent white, and some places no black. I like that much better, never no fight, never no argument. It just comes a time for you to enjoy life.

Do you think the whites enjoy the music as much?

They like it better. I'll tell you something. If you're playing for blacks, if you can't play too good, they'll come to hear you so they have something to talk about you tomorrow. 'I went down there to see old soanso play, that nigger can't play nothing. That drummer they got, he can't play,' or 'That bass player they got, he can't play too good.' They come back tomorrow night and do the same thing. 'That whole band can't play. If they could play, they'd be on the road somewhere.' But once you get good, you play everything real good, then they ain't coming back to see you, because they ain't got nothing to talk about. But when you're playing amongst whites, everybody's going to come up and tell you you sounds good, and that's going to make you feel more like playing, makes you play better than you already been playing. This is the difference. I'm glad I got away from it, I ain't never going back there! Yeah, I ain't going back to that shit. I had a hard time, man. In '61 we went all the way from Chicago to Clarksdale Mississippi, to play. When we got there the guy that hired us, he had quit. So we made ten bucks for the whole night, that's for the whole band. We didn't have enough gas to bring us back to Chicago, so then we had to go on down to Jackson, to my sisters, and stay with her. The guy who booked us down there, he called up, he went out and found a job down there. We made sixty bucks, took that gas, and come back to St Louis, found a job, fifty cents on the door, this was

way back, we made 25 bucks, took that money, and come on home. So it was tough.

So now if a blues band can get on the white circuit, things are better.

Oh, yeah. If you got enough publicity and an album out there, if you got a good booker, you know. I have saw some folk go without an album, because when Luther started going to all these white clubs, he didn't have no album. Johnny Dollar, he going to all these white clubs, he ain't got no album. He's just now got one out from France, but you can't buy it over here, so it's just like no album, see. It's all who you get to front you, you know, put you in these places. I got these two albums, one from England and one from France; that one from England, it sells here, JSP, but that's the only one. But that didn't really put me into going like I am, this album here (Teardrop) was the one got me booked into different places, because you can buy it anywhere. Of course I got at least two more coming out this year, and I got a forty-five, over here. And if you get big over here, you can automatically go over to Europe and play. But there was this lady on the TV yesterday, a white lady that sing, she said she got four albums in Europe and she can play anywhere she wants. She live in England, somewhere there, she's from the United States. She says she can play anywhere over there, but the folks over here ain't never heard of her.

That's happened to several people.

Well, Jimi Hendrix got big over in Europe. I didn't hear about Jimi Hendrix until after he died. And this other girl, Janis Joplin, I didn't hear about her until after she died. He was good in his way, I like him, you know, but I never bought none of his records, if I was going to buy something like that I'd buy Chuck Berry, That kind of rock. I heard one blues thing of his, about red house over yonder? Something like that, I've heard that on tape. It sounded good. They say everywhere he go, he'd cut a tape and put it in his briefcase, carry it with him, and when he died the folks stole them tapes, millions of dollars worth of tapes, put them on albums. One thing about it, when you're alive, people talk against you; when you're dead, they talk for you. This makes you get bigger when you're dead, but that don't help you worth a shit! You ain't coming back. You just leaving the foundations for somebody else, that's all. I want to be heard when I'm alive, so I can see!

You were saying about the black audiences being very critical, but in a white club people would say that you sound good - don't you think the music in the black clubs was therefore better, because they were trying harder?

No, I wouldn't say it was better, you know why? If you come up and tell me I sound good, somebody else come up and tell me I sound good, somebody else's friend come up, I'm trying to play better. But if you're in a black club, ain't nobody going to tell you you sound good, even when you sound real good. But they will come up and tell you you sound bad. Opposite way around. So

now, if people come up to you and say you sound good, it's going to encourage you, like a boxer, you know. If they say you winning every round, you're going to go out and try to win more, so it's the same thing. If people tell you you sound good, you're going to try the best you can, sound better. But if people keep downing you, then you just feel like, what the hell, I don't even want to play. And you just get up there and play anything. It's just a feeling you get. You don't want someone coming up and tell you 'You're ugly,' every time you look round. That wouldn't make you feel too good, right? But if somebody come up and tell you you're nice looking, you're going to comb your hair! So it's the same way in music, you know. So I think these guys play better in the white clubs, they got more soul to theyselves, you know, do more talking, and reach out to the peoples. They do more of that when they play in the white clubs. At least I do, I know, and I see a lot more guys do that too. Do their best to make the people happy, and that makes you sound good, see. I know I do enjoy it, I'll be glad when it's time for me to go somewhere, up on the East coast, Milwaukee, or wherever, Kansas City, Lincoln - because I know what I'm going to do when I get there, I'm going to have fun, and make them people happy. I've made people happy all over the world, man, over and over and over again. And this makes you feel good.