

Lurrie Bell Interview.

At his house, 6249 S. Elizabeth, Chicago.

August 27, 1982, 5pm.

Yes, the importance of getting the young black guys interested, which you reckon you're doing, to some extent.

Well, not just black guys, the black race, general. I feel like, you know - I love the blues, I really do love the blues. And when I play the blues, I figure that if you doing what you doing, to the max, really doing what you doing, and if you really love it, then it's going to come out, and it's going to reflect on somebody - somebody else going to love it. So in my generation, [I'm playing the blues that to me is my generation. Because what I'm playing, I'm not trying to sound like nobody else. I learnt a lot from BB King, and Albert King, and Muddy Waters, you know, they really inspired me, but when I play the blues, I usually put my own feel into it.] And I figure if I'm playing for black clubs and black people, if I'm doing it, and I love what I'm doing, and I'm satisfied with what I'm doing, hopefully somebody gonna like it. And lately that's what we've been doing, me and Billy, we've been playing for these black clubs, and it seem like the people have been into it, basically, more than the average person would think. They're not just listening to it, and pat their feet every now and then, and all of a sudden a few claps - they get off into it, like you're supposed to.

You get a full enough house each time, do you?

Yeah. It's getting better.

Most people are complaining about the young people not being into the blues these days.

I was one of them. [I used to complain about how they're not into it. But it seem like the more we play the blues, and the more we get off into these clubs that we're playing in - like I say, we're working at these clubs fournights a week, black clubs, at least four or five nights a week, sometimes more - and the crowd, every night, seem to be getting off into it real tough.]

How old are these clubs? Have they always been having blues?

No, I think a couple of these clubs, well the clubs that we're playing at, I think this is their first time having blues bands. They usually have jazz.

That's a good sign. Do you prefer playing these places than, say, the Kingston Mines?

Well - kinda hard to answer that, because I love playing for anybody, period. But I've been playing for white audiences, professionally, since I've been out here, really. [I'm just beginning to really play more for black audiences, and it's like it brings you almost back home, you know, makes you feel like, hey - you're getting back with your groove again, you know, and the young people are relating to what you're doing. Finally.]

That's pretty interesting, because most musicians I talk to, your father's age, played for black people first, and then there was this change, and now they're playing for whites. But

with you, it's the other way round. Very weird.

Most of them would say I'd rather play on the North Side than the South Side.

Most of them do say that. I suppose the money is better...

Yeah, well the money is good, the money is better, plus you can easily get further on in your career, so to speak, if you play more on the North Side than more on the black side.

What do you mean?

I figure that the audience on the North Side, you get more people, I would guess, more businesslike people, or people with money, or people that's got some kind of upper level in life, that will most likely do something for you, better. But it could happen either way, it could happen on the South Side too, in some of the clubs that we're playing in, anybody could just - because these clubs are nice. You know, I would guess to young people they are everyday modern, hip clubs.

That's probably pretty important, isn't it? To attract young people. Red carpets and whatever.

Yeah, plush.

You heard of a place called Taste?

We played there. We played there for about 18 or 19 weeks. The crowd that we did get was responding very good. It wasn't like a good crowd, a packed crowd, you know, it wasn't a good enough crowd for us to continue playing there. But we played there for about, I don't know, 19 weeks, every Monday night, and the crowd that was there, they really dug it.

The crowd there now is fairly middle-class. Is that the same sort you get at House of J?

Yeah, about that. You get young people, though, my age. Sort of when you look at them you figure they're on the disco level. But I'm looking at it like, I might have to change the one-two-three blues, the one-two-three pattern. And I don't know what I would call it, rock or whatever. It'd be blues to me, but... it would have to be in order for me to play it. The feel of it, you know what I'm saying.

Luther Allison puts in reggae numbers, and some rock, but he says it's still blues, because of the feeling, the words. Which is fair enough. After all, you can't have one-two-three blues all the time...

[If you do have one-two-three blues, put something in it, to make it stand out more than the average one-two blues would stand out. I mean if you can do that, if you can put something in it to make the one-two-three blues stand out, it's cool. (You might do a certain solo, a twelve-bar solo, and somebody might - God damn - not just your regular basic blues lovers, everybody would listen at that and say - you know. I'm talking about that feel which just hits you. I think I can do that.)]

Yes, I've heard you. You and your father, exchanging solos - very impressive.

Thank you. Trying to get that energy level to the point, trying to take it = 'Hey, y'all, let's do something with this one-two-three!' You know, like me and the old

man trying to communicate on that level - 'OK, we did that, let's try this!'

The blues is an old music. It's becoming more and more difficult to do something new within it.

Yeah. It just makes me try more harder. It makes me get off into it more. It's like a challenge to me.

That's good. If it wasn't you'd be lost, you'd play BB King all the time.

I play a lot of BB King licks.

It's difficult to avoid them.

Yeah, it's hard. That's what we're working on, too, me and Eli was talking about that. That's a challenge, to play the blues, and play it to the audience that recognise it and understand it. You know, most audience, when it comes to blues, they would recognise BB King's sound, they would think of his sound more than any other sound, or, next to that, Muddy Waters. But if you can get a sound of your own, and get away from that BB King sound, a sound of your own, the same groove that BB King put, and make people know that's your sound. That's what I want to learn, that's what I'm working, that's what I want to do. It's a challenge. It might be difficult, but I think it'll be my groove. I think I can do it, and I'm gonna keep on trying, man. It's my living.]

On those Alligator cuts, 1978, playing with your father on volume two of the series, I was amazed at what you were doing, when I read you were nineteen. And now you sound different.

You're still young, you can develop.

Well, a lot of it got to do with experience, you know. I guess I've been moving pretty fast, lately, since I've been playing, into the blues. I've advanced. I've had the chance to go overseas about four times, I toured the 1980/81 Folk Blues Festival, which I was headlined as a single artist. I've worked with Little Milton, Little Milton Campbell. You know, most black peoples like BB King, Little Milton, Bobby Blue Bland, Tyrone Davis, he's in that category, I had the chance to work with him. It makes me feel good, it makes me feel like, 'Well, if you want to do what you setting out to do, Lurrie, you can do it, because look what you had, look where you been, look where you going. Look how fast you're moving.' I got plans of like, recording with horns, and keyboards, you know, I've got that feel of playing behind a big orchestra. Really blues, but everybody getting off, you know what I mean?

Sort of like BB King's orchestra?

I guess so, yeah. I want to know that feel, you know. That feel of the big sound. That Big Sound, you know what I mean? And I'm standing up there, and I'm the magic of it, creating it, trying to put the fire to it, or whatever you want to call it.

BB King is pretty good at that. I saw him in London not long ago. Wonderful.

That cat, man, he's been around, he's experienced. I never saw him, but I know he's loving every minute. I would think that he is, I don't know, they say he work like, three hundred and some days out of a year.

I don't know how he does it. I saw him on one of those days,
and he was incredible, so presumably he's like that every night.
Can you imagine that energy every night? I'd like to go so much.

You must. Just that sound he gets.

His sound. His own sound. he's got that reputation, the king of the blues, you know.
He is a king, too. But today, something gotta break. I'm hoping, anyway. If it
don't break, I'm still gonna be doing what I'm doing.