

# BenefitBugs to bring out the best

Bugs Henderson's friends and musicians gather for an all-star benefit March 4 at the Palladium Ballroom

by Tom Geddie

**B**UGS HENDERSON AND HIS “STARVATION box” guitar have wandered for years through good times and bad — mostly good — making some of the best electric blues-rock on stages across the world.

He also has liver cancer — serious business — and the recovery time from treatments has slowed his performance schedule considerably. Doctors apparently found the cancer fairly early; when doctors work, medical bills grow fast.

On Sunday, March 4, there will be a Dallas Benefit Bugs gathering at the Palladium Ballroom in Dallas to help with the mounting medical expenses. A lot of people, including organizer Jimmy Wallace, have come together to help a friend, including Mouse & the Traps, Jimmy Wallace & the Stratoblasters, The Forever Fabulous Chicken Hawks, Smokin’ Joe Kubek, David Grissom, Andy Timmons, Ray Wylie Hubbard, and many others. For a full list of performers, see the italics section at the bottom of this article.

Wallace also established *benefitbugs.com* and the Facebook link after the December benefit at Bass Hall in Fort Worth. The website also includes information on online auctions and how to make donations. Doors open at noon; tickets range from \$25-\$75. For tickets, call 888-929-7849.

## His way

BUGS HAS DONE LIFE HIS way all the way. A few years ago, he slowed down just enough to walk through the literal and figurative gardens of Northeast Texas and to stop just long enough — not too often — to smell the roses.

Along the way, he’s picked up his share of well-earned accolades.

Guitar One called him “The world’s greatest unknown guitar player,” commenting, “He can flat out blow most pickers away. Bugs will fry the skin off your butt with his monster chops and fatback tone.”

Guitar Player Magazine wrote, “Bugs Henderson should be declared a national treasure.”

Blues News in Germany called him “the prototype of the brutal Texan guitarist who takes no prisoners.”

Then, there’s Bugs’ personal favorite, from *Living Blues*, “struggling to reach basic musical competence.”

He’s played with and influenced the likes of good friend Freddie King, B.B. King, Eric Clapton, Ted Nugent, Roy

Buchanan, James Burton, and many others.

Bugs is 69 years old now. Some people say that’s too old for rock ‘n’ roll, but that’s nonsense; a little more than a year ago he was still doing 150 shows a year. He’s just seasoned well enough for the blues, which are at the heart of much of our best music, and his live performances still blaze.

Driving along Interstate 20 to a doctor’s appointment in Dallas in late January, Bugs talked on his cell phone about some of his realities.

Among his realities is being

tagged with all those expectations, 19 albums, countless shows with his Shuffle Kings band, and surviving heart surgery and early substance abuse. He lost his first, beloved wife, Duchess, after 30 years, to cancer. He has four older children — Shawn, Buddy, Cody, and Rose — who have sat in with him on stage from time to time; Buddy played guitar with him for quite a few years.

In 2000, Bugs married again and moved to Jefferson from the Dallas area. He and Patty have a daughter, Zoey, and family comes first now, followed by making music and then career.

“Oh, yeah, you’re supposed to stop and smell the roses,” he said. “I’d been visiting Jefferson for years, but didn’t know if I could make a living in a small town. It was hard to adjust at

first; now I wish I’d been here a long time. I couldn’t have the life I have now and be a major star. I couldn’t go to my kid’s ball games. I wouldn’t give up that for anything.”

Bugs is glad for friends and fans who care, but was reluctant about this kind of attention.

“I was against it when Jimmy called me and said he was going to do this benefit. I didn’t know if I could handle something like that,” Bugs said. “He said they were going to do it whether I came or not.”

Eventually, reality took over and he acquiesced.

“The way things are going now with so little work — a gig or two a month — and all these treatments, I’m probably going to need it,” he said.

Last year, Bugs put together a successful benefit show in Lin-

*“I just want to get back to playing. That’s what’s killing me the most. I love being home with the family, but I need to be on the stage.”*

—BUGS HENDERSON

den to help his early bandmate and longtime friend Ronnie “Mouse” Weiss from Tyler — Mouse and the Traps — get through some major health issues of his own, including a liver transplant.

“After doing the Mouse benefit, I know how much work goes into it. What Jimmy is doing is on a much bigger scale. It’s going to be a nice deal.

“I appreciate everything everybody’s doing, although it’s embarrassing to be on the receiving end. I did it with Mouse. He didn’t want it done, but I knew he needed it done. He’s had his transplant and is all right now.”

“The table is turned on me,” he said. “I wish it didn’t have to be this way.”

A few weeks after the benefit for Mouse, doctors found Bugs’ cancer during a regularly scheduled follow-up for his heart surgery.

“That’s how we caught this: my annual heart treatment with stress test and blood work. They found something funny in the blood work, sent me for more tests, and found some malignant tissue. I didn’t have any symptoms. That was the worst part: feeling great when I went in to the doctor and having him tell me I’m sick.”

The treatments themselves are draining.

“I’ve got great doctors at Baylor, some of the tops in the country,” he said. “I hope I end up on

one of those cancer-free billboards. If this next treatment works — I have to have three — I might be out of the woods. I know they want me back in Europe for festival season in March 2013.

“The main tumor that started it all is already shrunk to where it’s almost gone after two treatments. The final goal is to get two more tumors down to a certain size where you can make the liver transplant list.”

That treatment — scheduled for February 2 — involves lying in bed for four nights while the doctors saturate his liver.

“The worst one was the first one. I was miserable for weeks,” he said.

“The second one went much better. I was back on my feet after a week. They say the rest is easier. The hard part is lying on your back for four days propped up and watching TV.”

Bugs misses being on stage regularly.

“I just want to get back to playing. That’s what’s killing me the most. I love being home with the family, but I need to be on the stage. I can sit around the house and pick, but it’s not the same at all. It’s driving me crazy not playing and being on the road.” ■

The February 4 benefit at the Palladium’s performance list presently includes: Davy Knowles, The Forever Fabulous Chicken Hawks, Marc Benno, Ray Wylie Hubbard, Smokin’ Joe Kubek, Jimmy Wallace & The Stratoblasters, Jim Suhler, Jr & the Journeyman featuring Kirby Kelly, Buddy Whittington, Rocky Athas, Dave Millsap, Bill Ham, David Grissom, Quinten Hope, Anson Funderburgh, Maylee Thomas, Lance Lopez, Point Blank, Mouse & The Traps, Brady Mosher, Van Wilks, Red Volkhardt, Danny Sanchez, Andy Timmons, Bo & Jim with Frontal Lobotomy, Boogie Band, Paul Reed Smith, Jamie Oldecker, Mike Rhyner. Other special guests are expected to be added. Please check *benefitbugs.com* and/or facebook for updates.



He was named one *Buddy’s* first inductees as a Texas Tornado in 1978: Bugs Henderson