

His heart is in Texas

Bnois King is a true "Guitar Man" and Texas treasure who just happens to hail from the state of Louisiana.
By Kenny Chavez

OCTOBER 11 2015 WAS A TRAGIC DAY for Texas Blues and a day that forever changed the life of Bnois King. After a hearty breakfast in a North Carolina hotel, Smokin' Joe Kubek, his longtime bandmate and brother, said, "I am going to lie down for a bit and I will meet you in the hotel lobby one hour before show time."

It was 30 minutes before show time and Bnois knew when Joe was one minute late that something was wrong. He knocked on Joe's door repeatedly, but no answer. He notified hotel management and they rushed to open Joe's hotel room door. Behind the door was Joe, just lying on the bed peacefully. He had passed away in his sleep of a heart attack.

Leaving Joe behind and flying home with Joe's guitar was "the longest plane ride of my life," Bnois said. It was heartache like nothing he had ever experienced before and he thought the feeling was sure to last forever.

"Joe wasn't my bandmate; he was my brother. We did everything together for nearly 30 years."

Bnois King, born in Delhi, Louisiana on January 21 1943, was the oldest child in a family with seven boys and two girls. He began playing guitar by ear at the age of 8.

Early Years

WHEN HE WAS 15, HE AND his girlfriend moved into an apartment above a juke joint that her father owned. Soon, he was delivering milk early mornings for \$15 a week. "Sometimes I would be chased around by dogs at 4 in the morning" he remembered.

Bnois owned a guitar and when he was invited to join

George Moody and the New Sounds Band, earning \$15 a night that changed his path. That was when he realized he could make some money doing something he loved.

During the summers from 1963-1969, he traveled from Amarillo to Colorado to Oklahoma, playing in bands the likes of the Bill Haymes Traveling Show.

He and what was known as a *jig band*, would play as six dancing girls and two tap dancers performed well-choreographed routines. Throughout the '70s, Bnois performed all over the South -Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas, playing with recording artists Ivory Joe Hunter, O.C. Smith, David "Fathead" Newman and Al "TNT" Braggs, just to name a few.

"Guitar Man"

IN 1979, BNOIS DROVE INTO Dallas in a Pontiac station wagon with the words "GUITAR MAN" painted on the side. A band by the name of "Just Us" had called and said they had room in the budget for a guitarist. Bnois pulled into the Arandis Club, and went immediately to the stage. It wasn't long before he was playing with local jazz bands, like Big Joe Williams.

In the early 1980s, Bnois met his future musical partner, Smokin' Joe Kubek at Poor David's Pub on Greenville Av-



In 1979 he drove to Dallas in a Pontiac station wagon with "GUITAR MAN" painted on the side and inducted as a Buddy Texas Tornado in 1988: Bnois King

enue. As Bnois tells it, their sound melded together like a train going down the tracks. Bnois' classic jazz stylings and crisp vocalizations were a smooth fit with Joe's blistering guitar. *The Joe Kubek Band featuring Bnois King* went on to record over 16 albums for the Alligator, Rounder/Bullseye, Delta Groove and Blind Pig record labels.

In 1991, they recorded *Steppin' out Texas Style*, and in 1993, the music world tuned its ear to Joe and Bnois' first hit, "Texas Cadillac." The last album recorded by the duo was recorded in 2015, a tasty album titled *Fat Man's Shine Parlor*.

King's reputation grew to be one that legends are made of. I once told Bnois that I saw a video of him playing with Tommy Shannon, and Bnois responded with a very humble "You did? How did it sound?" If you know Bnois, you can hear his voice saying those words and see the modest grin on his face. Before our set at the Bedford Blues Fest in 2017, Bnois was asked to sing a song on the Main Stage with the great Ronnie Earl. After the set, Bnois casually strolled off the stage and said, "That sure was fun, but how did it sound?" The sound was soul stirring.

At blues clubs across the country, the mention of Bnois'

name brings huge smiles and opens doors that are usually closed or locked tight. After almost every show, fans approach Bnois and tell him how much his music means to them and that they love him. He always seems to remember their name and always responds with a heartfelt "I love you too." His sincerity and charm can melt your heart a little.

We were scheduled to play a Breast Cancer Awareness Benefit in late October 2015 at Poor David's Pub, just two weeks after Joe's death. Bnois was unsure if he would have the energy to make it. On the day of the show he called and told us he was ready to play, but wanted to stay away from the Smokin' Joe and Bnois playlist.

He just wasn't ready to play Joe's songs - it hurt too much. We were glad that he was ready to be back on stage. When Bnois came out of the dressing room to perform that night, the crowd went crazy. He received a full house standing ovation... before he played a single note or uttered a word. The whole D/FW Blues scene was there for him, the legend that he had become. They love him for his music and his kind, gentle spirit. Bnois King felt their love in his heart.

Since then, Bnois has been making music with a band of his

own, "The Bnois King Band." We still play some of his and Joe's music, but also cover many blues classics from King's long list of friends in the blues world.

Recently, over lunch at one of his favorite local cafeterias Bnois told me, "I'm not trying to prove anything. I know who I am and I have nothing to prove," then politely smiles. "I've seen things I thought I'd never see, and gone to places I never dreamed of going. Ever since my fifties it's all been gravy."

One thing everyone can count on when coming out to see the one and only Bnois King is that you need to be ready for a blues guitar experience and some true heartfelt songs and vocals. And when the show is over, Bnois will be right there to meet every

single person who wants to talk or take a photo with one of the nicest gentlemen to ever put on a guitar.

The memory of Joe can be felt in many of the performances and his legend lives on through the love of music that can be felt from the very moment Bnois picks up his instrument until the last patron leaves the venue. Bnois King is a true Texas treasure that just happens to hail from the state of Louisiana. We are so glad his heart is in Texas.

Bnois King was recognized as a Texas Tornado by Buddy magazine in 1988.

Kenny Chavez is a close friend and Smokin' Joe Kubek and Bnois King bass player for from December 2012 to October 2015 and they are still a great team.

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