WE ARE THE MUSIC MAKERS!

PRESERVING THE SOUL OF AMERICA'S MUSIC

PICTURES & STORIES BY TIMOTHY & DENISE DUFFY
“Through the efforts of the Music Makers Relief Foundation, these amazing people and artists have been able to live dignified lives. In many cases, they were rediscovered during their golden years by Tim and Denise Duffy, then given the joy of new recognition by their families, peers and fans world-over! - Taj Mahal
america tells its stories through song. consolation to the lovelorn, courage to the oppressed, warning to the naive or a ticket to the promised land, a great song can deliver the wisdom of ages directly to our souls.

deeply personal and implausibly universal, the blues, jazz, gospel and old time music of the american south form a deep aquifer that contemporary musicians all around the world drink from daily. the music is constantly expanding and morphing into country, rock, rap and soul, but trace the origins and you will find yourself standing squarely in the south.

we romanticize the bluesman as the lone wolf and rambler, bringing his song into our dreary workaday world, but the taproot of american song has always survived on the sweat of working class brows. it is the offspring of the tenant farmer, factory worker and domestic servant born during the precious few leisure hours.

we are the music makers,
and we are the dreamers of dreams,
wandering by lone sea-breakers,
and sitting by desolate streams;-
world-losers and world-forsakers,
on whom the pale moon gleams:
yet we are the movers and shakers
of the world for ever, it seems.”

-arthur oshaughnessy, 1874

introduction

america tells its stories through song. consolation to the lovelorn, courage to the oppressed, warning to the naive or a ticket to the promised land, a great song can deliver the wisdom of ages directly to our souls.

deepl personal and implausibly universal, the blues, jazz, gospel and old time music of the american south form a deep aquifer that contemporary musicians all around the world drink from daily. the music is constantly expanding and morphing into country, rock, rap and soul, but trace the origins and you will find yourself standing squarely in the south.

we romanticize the bluesman as the lone wolf and rambler, bringing his song into our dreary workaday world, but the taproot of american song has always survived on the sweat of working class brows. it is the offspring of the tenant farmer, factory worker and domestic servant born during the precious few leisure hours
they shared with their communities at a Friday night fish fry, Saturday afternoon on the back porch, or on Sunday morning in their church clothes. In the days when openly expressing rage at injustice could cost a black man his life, gospel and blues developed a language known only to its initiates, a code that mocked the oppressors and fortified the common man with camaraderie and resolve to keep his eyes on the prize. While individual experiences with race, relationships, poverty, and work vary, the feelings of being subject to injustice or finding love at last are universal.

In the following pages, we present portraits of these artists: fathers and mothers, uncles and aunts, daughters and sons, grandparents and neighbors, who continue to lovingly stir the South's musical stew and feed American culture. You probably won't recognize their names or faces, for few have found fame. Most of them weren't easy to find.

My husband, Tim Duffy, has traveled the world with a guitar, tape recorder and camera since he was a college freshman in 1981. He started by documenting old time mountain musicians at weekly "pickin' parties" in western North Carolina. He finished his college degree studying the Swahili and their Tarabu music on the Kenyan coast. When he returned to America, he enrolled in a Masters program in the Curriculum of Folklore at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. One of his last assignments was an oral history of James "Guitar Slim" Stephens, an African American blues artist from Greensboro, NC who was dying of cancer. Slim encouraged Tim to seek out Guitar Gabriel in Winston-Salem, NC. Tim began his search in the drink houses of East Winston where he discovered musical geniuses; he has continued to seek talent in dozens of housing projects, small towns, and farming communities from the Virginia Tidewater to east Texas.

To hear and record the most authentic, archaic musical forms, Tim always seeks out the oldest guy that learned from the oldest guy who came before. He has found that you can't just turn up on someone's doorstep one afternoon and expect them to bare their soul to your camera and recorder. Tim acknowledges a deep obligation to these artists, "It is no small thing to ask a musician for their song and their story. The only way we can hope to make an equal exchange is if the documentarian and the artist have a genuine relationship; they must share more than just the moment the photo is taken or the song is captured."

Tim took these photographs over the past twenty years and insists, "I know who I am looking at through the lens." He knows them because of the countless hours spent with each artist over months and years. Days spent sharing songs, food, laughter and far too many miles in vans and airplanes have built the bridges of trust that allow these artists to give their wisdom and art so generously. These artists share their life lessons with us because we are dedicated to presenting their music to the world with reverence and to be partners in their struggle for a better life.

Whether in Appalachia or Africa, the other constant companion to roots music is grinding, relentless poverty. On some visits the artist couldn't play for us because their guitar was in the pawnshop, or they weren't up to it because they had a splitting headache from not being able to buy blood pressure medication. Whenever we meet new artists, they never ask for a handout, but always, "Do you know where I can get a gig? I need more work."

We concluded that our nation's musical traditions were suffering from starvation and underemployment. We founded the Music Maker Relief Foundation as a nonprofit in 1994 to preserve America's music by directly supporting the people who make the music. We get gigs for those that want to perform, guitars for those who want to play, and feed the hungry. Our initial grassroots effort to meet the needs of a handful of blues musicians in Winston-Salem, NC, has grown to assist hundreds through the generosity and passion of our supporters, employees and volunteers.

We, in turn, have come to rely on the wisdom and knowledge of these elders in our personal and professional lives. We see the rebellions, loves, sorrows and joys those cultural treasures express in their stories, songs and pictures as reflections of our identity as the American people.

This book is filled with photographs of individuals we greatly respect and admire. Although an enthusiastic student of photography, Tim is a visual artist of necessity. He documents his surroundings because he is keenly aware that time is fleeting and these moments with elderly artists are too precious to be lost.

He focuses his lens entirely on Music Maker artists and our family. He does not guard these artists jealously, and often invites accomplished professionals to photograph these musicians. He asks the photographers to share their images with the artists, so they can be used to further their careers.

Tim shares his work with you here in hopes you will look more closely at the unrecognized greatness that surrounds you. He asks that you seek out the everyday heroic acts of art that will enrich your life.

-Denise Duffy
We would like to thank the artists of Music Maker Relief Foundation (Music Maker) for their love, kindness, and friendship, and for filling our lives with song.

Dear Rick, Kathleen, Nathaniel, JP, Dave and Betty, your faith and support are the cornerstones on which our foundation has been built. Please know we are grateful to all of you each day for the opportunity to do this work we love so well.

We are very grateful to the dedicated professionals who have volunteered their time and expertise to serve on our Board of Directors, including Mark Levinson, Lucy DeVries Duffy, Kay Hill, Spike Barkin, Glenn Hinson, Lightnin Wells, Mudcat, Bill Lucado, Bill Puckett, John Price, Taj Mahal, Henry Skyler, Ryan Costello, Blaine Wright, Eric Ashman, Ann Pitts, Bart Farrell, Tom Meyer, Rhiannon Giddens, Dom Flemons, Justin Robinson, Rich Henneberry, Rick Teller, Catherine Elkins, Saramel Evans, Jon Porter, Tom Wallack and Mark Chatinsky.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to recognize our Advisory Board members for the support and wisdom they have generously shared, and give sincere thanks to Dickey Betts, Jackson Browne, Eric Clapton, Pura Fè Cressioni, Ardie Dean, Lutz Engelhart, Sue Foley, Ruthie Foster, Colonel Bruce Hampton, Jerry Harrison, Jimmy Herring, B B King, Bill Krasilovsky, Mark Levinson, Tift Merritt, Jean-Hervé Michel, Bonnie Raitt, Tom Rankin, Kenny Wayne Shepherd, Ken Shepherd, Susan Tedeschi, Dr. David Thurber, Peta Townshend, Derek Trucks, and Don Was.

Bringing musicians and music lovers together to experience and celebrate live performance is the most rewarding part of our work. We thank the many festivals, venues and corporate sponsors that have made those experiences possible including Cathead Vodka, Clydes Restaurant Group, RJ Reynolds, Volkswagen of America, Legendary Rhythm and Blues Cruise, Lugano Blues to Bop, Roots N Blues N BBQ Festival, New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, Byron Bay Blues Festival, Lincoln Center Out of Doors Series, NC Museum of History, Mississippi Valley Blues Festival, The Hamilton and The Crescent City Blues Festival.
We offer our deepest appreciation to the thousands of music lovers who have joined us on this journey and supported Music Maker with their contributions. We are humbled and grateful for the support given by the National Endowment for the Arts, NC Arts Council, NC Humanities Council, Mid-Atlantic Arts Council, Stroud Rose Foundation, Blues Music Foundation, Orange Arts Commission, Mary Duke Biddle Foundation, George Shelden Foundation, and the many generous family foundations that have contributed to the growth of this mission over the past twenty years.

Many people have joined us on this journey including family members who have embraced this mission from the outset: Lucy, Dan and Paul Duffy and Diane and Lou Durocher. John Evans of Jackson, MS, Axel Küstner who dedicated his life to documenting American blues musicians and inspired Tim to take photography seriously. We acknowledge the southern folk/culture fieldworkers Paul Clayton, Alan Lomax, George Mitchell, Bill Ferris, Bruce Bastin, Peter R. Lowery, Glenn Hinson, David Evans, and Kip Lornell, whose work led us to many great artists. Photographer Mark Austin has been our dedicated artistic and technical advisor. Musical director Ardie Dean has dedicated his career to supporting our artists in performing and recording since 1991! Our thanks go to Katharine Walton for telling us to write this book together.

We thank Ken Toda of Huemax for supplying cameras, equipment and instruction on all aspects of photography and to Bill Meesta of Pro Camera for his expert advice on many aspects of photography. There are several phrases like this – not really a sentence – but maybe that’s just a stylistic quirk.

Simon Archache, our Photo Editor, scanned 1200 negatives and reviewed thousands of digital images for our final review. Raphael Everard put together all the sound recordings of our 20th Anniversary compilation CD, which is a companion to this book. Christine Shiu transcribed Tims recorded reflections. Our interns, Thomas Ciaburri, Swathi Mohan, Thomas Hauser, Emilie Urazhahat and Margot Pien all spent months helping us develop this book. We thank Polly Beere for her invaluable help editing, Dom Flemons for his advice, Bruno Bourdais for designing this book and Elena Rott for retouching the photographs.

We depend on the passion, dedication and talents of Music Maker staff daily to keep our organization moving forward. Communications and Development Coordinator Corinne Everett Belche dedication and organizational skills keep us all on track. Aaron Greenhood, Artist Services Coordinator, has led the effort to organize our photographic archives and partnered in creating the Tintype images of Major Handy, Cary Morin, Pat Wilder and Dom Flemons. Margot Pien researched the biographical information on the artists. Cornelius Lewis dons whichever hat we need him to and Janet Askew keeps the bills paid so we can keep creating.

We are grateful to the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill and Steve Weiss for creating the Timothy Duffy Collection at the Southern Folklife Collection at Wilson Library, where the master tapes and photographic collection are archived in perpetuity.
In 1991, when I was 28 years old, I dedicated myself to locating “undiscovered” blues artists that lived in and around Winston-Salem, NC. When I knocked on Guitar Gabriels door, he hobbled out, hugged me and said, “Boy, I know where you want to go. I have been there before. I will take you there but my time aint long. I want you to promise me that when I die, youll bury me with my guitar.”

I began to book gigs and to record his music. At the same time I brought Gabe to the doctor and he introduced me to his musician friends. Every month on check day, I drove him and these elder musicians around town to pay their bills. I saw firsthand how their money always ran out before the last bill was paid or the groceries were bought.

Poverty’s continual assault on these musicians ability to create and share their art inspired the creation of the Music Maker Relief Foundation.

“Blues is a legend, it is something that will be with us out through the generations. It explains your up-haps and misfortunes, good-haps, the people you have been around, the people you associate with and the things that happened to you in your life.
You can go to university, school, college, but if you do not learn it in the street, walking through life, you will never really learn it. That is what blues is all about, it is a feeling, you don’t find it on notes and paper, it comes from the heart.” —Guitar Gabriel

Tim Duffy & Guitar Gabriel
Utrecht, Holland 1991
Captain Luke has a voice like honey dripping on hot chocolate. He was Guitar Gabriels best friend and companion. They were the kings of the Drink House circuit in Winston-Salem, NC for decades.

Their favorite hang was Ezelle’s which was open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and it’s where I met many musicians including Captain Luke, Willa Mae Buckner, Mr. Q and Macavine Hayes. Ezelle ran this place for 40 years and since he would grant credit to working folks, his joint was a center of community life.

When I first knocked on Drink House doors they would be shut in my face; being young and white, folks assumed that I must be the police. When I met Captain Luke in 1991 he took me around for a year until I was welcomed at all the local establishments with big smiles.
Part court jester, part gut-bucket blues master, Macavine Hayes was nobody’s fool. The witty wisdom imparted through his gravely spoken parables and poetry confounded many, and kept the rest of us in stitches. Always the last one to go to bed and the first one up in the morning, Mac’s zest for life on the road and hauntingly primitive guitar style were the personification of blues in its rawest form.
In 1936, Willa Mae Buckner ran away from her home in Decatur, GA at age 14 and joined an all black carnival. Over the years, she painted her body gold and posed, was a contortionist, laid on a bed of nails, danced in the chorus line, sang with the band, and later was a burlesque dancer at the Midnight Rambles. In the early 60s she launched her traveling snake show with 26 snakes and a chimpanzee. She drove her show around in a panel truck with the snakes in cages in the back and her chimp up front, riding shotgun. She would often stop on a country road and let all the snakes out for a walk. When she wanted to get them back in the truck, she would hide behind a bush. The snakes would look for “Mama” and not seeing her would quickly slither back into their cages. When I met her in 1991 she lived with two 18-foot pythons that roamed her house freely. Willa communicated with them by tapping her foot: they would come to her when she “called” and she would feed them frozen rats directly from her hand.

One day when I visited her, she called me into her bedroom to see something special. She lifted up her bed pillow and there were 10 baby pythons coiled around her Smith & Wesson. She cackled, “Do you think anyone is going to mess with me?” Willa was one of our first artists and we made her lifelong dream come true when she performed her hilarious risqué songs in a Circus Blues show at Carnegie Hall in 1993.
Mr. Q’s father wore a suit and tie when he plowed the fields walking behind his mule. While Mr. Q followed his Daddy’s lead and was always impeccably dressed, as a teenager he ran away from his home in Winston-Salem, NC to join Blanche Calloway’s big band.

In the 1940s, he landed in New York City and immersed himself in the jazz scene of the Harlem Renaissance. He played harmonica with the Savoy Sultans, was a prize winning Lindy Hop dancer and became a professional entertainer singing and playing the piano.

He bought this hat during the 70s, and every spring he would give it a fresh coat of paint. Red one year, green the next; by the time I met up with him, it weighed more than an Army helmet.