

Luther Allison interview.

In the office at the Kingston Mines, 2548 N Halsted, Chicago.

Saturday July 10, 1982.

What's happened to the blues? Why don't you hear it on the radio any more?

Well, I just think everything's so commercialised. It's money and everything, and there's never going to be money in black blues for black artists. Never going to be there.

But there was a time in the fifties and sixties when it was very popular.

Oh, it was very popular, but there was still no money. You see, today, how many record companies is interested in recording any black blues artist? Maybe two. That's maybe, and he's got to be extraordinarily... with great potential. Although it doesn't mean nothing. I mean, he can say, 'I play the blues,' but it winds up that he ain't doing nothing original - because I feel that blues has been written. You can do more lyrics, you can revise certain tunes, as if you notice I've been doing, but that's just to keep you together. In other words, to say, 'I can do this, and I know I can do this,' and that's what we've got to deal with. And as far as some company come to you, or some promoter say, 'Well he doesn't do anything original.' But hey man, I don't buy that. Because I know every rock artist out there that's on top had to do somebody's old material. But that's the trip Luther Allison's gotten over the years, because I love certain people, and if I record certain people's material, it will go better than if I put something together myself - until I'm known enough. But I get criticised up the ass for it. But however I'm hanging in there. I'm glad I'm part of a family where he got some chance (his son) and he got some guidance to what he want to do. Like Lurrie Bell, Carey Bell's son, and I think Lonnie Brooks got a son that's on the way to playing blues or whatnot. But being in Chicago, you got to do it like I did it - you got to play everything, and this is important, to know everything, because you must work, and if you don't work, you can't go through it.

So what kind of future do you see for your son playing blues? Well I think that's a question that's kind of hard to ask. He got a great future as a musician. Now as blues, it depends on people like the Kingston Mines, say the Wise Fools, say Biddy Mulligan's. The places that have blues. Tonight I'm going to let him play a couple of songs, let the people be the judge. I don't want them to judge him because they're Luther Allison fans, or he can play a little bit, but we give him a hand because he's Luther Allison's son. We try to let him learn what it really means, how to present yourself. He respects me highly, when he's out there. He respects like, Aron Burton, as you notice he's wearing Aron's t-shirt. He loves what Aron is doing, and this is important. We did the Lincolnfest Saturday of last week, and to recognise Aron from the stage, in the audience with him, was fantastic. And I like that.

I didn't have to tell him to do that. But the future of a young blues artist I think is great. But it's still going to take the people like the Stones, or whoever comes in the bag, to keep the doors open. Because nobody wants to keep it open for a black, even a young black, in blues. Like Jimi Hendrix, man - the man played the blues - but he came up with a thing for Jimi Hendrix, alone, which sold to the immediate white audience, because the black audience didn't know him until he was just about gone. So you're still fighting the same battle. But it's all the same music.

Is that because you're black, or because you're playing the blues?

It's both. You notice the radio, man. Black station or white station, they play the top people. You get the late people late in the night, where the young person ain't got a shot. Unless he's some kid where the parents don't care where he's at, he's out on the streets all night, or whatever. Or he might be at a friend's house, or his parents might be into that. And that's the way that goes. But his chances is ninety-nine percent against him, because he don't know what he want to hear. Turn your radio on for the last three years, I've turned my radio on and I hear the same songs. No good.

Tastes change. The blues used to be a black music...

Well, it weren't a black music, they said it was a black music. Blues has been the root of all music for a long time in this country. But the blacks had to deal with it their way, because they couldn't be joining the white people anyway. Down in Arkansas and Mississippi, as far as the toilet is concerned, you got a white toilet and you got a black toilet. Where concerts are concerned, the black man played the black music to the white man, but he had to play behind a curtain. That ain't been that long ago. Let's go back in the first of the fifties, forties and stuff. You played behind a curtain, you didn't play out to the white audience. And at the same time, the blacks didn't have all these tape recorders and all these things, they didn't know nothing about all that stuff. So who gets it? The white man records it, he gives credit. But it's a school thing - we teach you how to play music. The average white can play good instruments. Sure you can teach that. There's many whites I love that play blues and feel blues. But they had to come out of that bag and into this other bag, take them chances, learn it, and know how to be part of a person. That's what made Johnny Winter so good, so popular, John Mayall, Mick Jagger, Butterfield, Bloomfield, Musselwhite - these people have to do the same kind of thing we have to do. When we want something we gotta go take that chance in the wrong neighbourhood. Because you don't get it just by learning it off the record. You notice the beginning of the Blues Brothers movie, the church trip, man, Aretha Franklin and stuff, this is what it's all about. And the young people today don't know how this stuff is cooked up. The blacks are really cut off, because they can't hear no blues on the black stations except BB, Bobby, Albert, Little Milton every now and then. Not the rural blues, you know what I mean, you hear Tyrone Davis, or Joe Simon, or Rufus Thomas - they're still doing

blues, but it's a classic blues, a young people's blues. Far as they concerned. So that's what it's all about.

White people started listening to the blues in, say, the early sixties...

They been listening a lot longer than that. Let's go back now. You know about the Beatles, right? Then go on back to Bill Haley, Fats Domino, Chuck Berry, Little Richard - keep going on back. John Lee Hooker for instance - blues, but they don't call John Lee Hooker a blues artist. Call him a boogie man. People don't understand the difference between all these names. Which there really is no difference.

But your first album, for Delmark, was aimed at a new young white blues audience. And everyone out there is white. So there's a change in taste. What's going to happen in the future?

Well, what's going to happen now, you still got some black clubs. Black people will go. Black people are going. Say the Checkerboard for instance, Theresa's for instance, Ma Bea's, the Aragon when BB King is there, or whatever. The black people still have them little trips going. They know they cannot come out for live music seven days a week. Number two, it's always that same little old thing in between - 'Well the white man done got everything, now he got my music.' Well, it's not true - because there's doors where the black people know who Luther Allison is, who Son Seals is, who Mighty Joe Young is, who Fenton Robinson is. Why don't you follow us like you follow BB King? If BB come here, they'll be here. Why don't you follow us here? BB's not going to be here for ever. He might outlive me, but he's not going to be here for ever. I got to make way, he got to make way - support us, but do it all together, what the hell? BB got a beautiful white audience, he got a beautiful black audience. So do we. They don't realise when they see Luther Allison. 'Who is Luther Allison? I thought he was BB.' Because I hit a couple of licks, which, in my head, that was my own song, but let's face it, I had to learn it from somebody, BB had to learn it from somebody, and somebody had to learn it from that somebody. But the fact is, the name didn't show up BB King, it showed up Luther Allison. See? And people just don't know. And young people say, 'I don't want to hear no blues, but my grandparents, my parents like it.' They don't know. Then you got a lot of youngsters say, 'I love it, but I didn't know I liked it until I heard Luther do it.' And a lot of white youngsters do that, because I try to create the real taste of blues. Robert Johnson, take Robert Johnson - every rock star in the business done done Robert Johnson, because there was a soul thing in the blues. So these kind of labels I'm going to get throughout my life, but the fact is, I'm for the blues, and I call my blues Luther's blues, and if I do a Chuck Berry-type tune, that 's blues - that's my kind of blues. And blues is like making love, it's a up and down trip, man, that's the way it is. Rock'n'roll is the same thing - you got slow rock, and you got fast rock. So what makes it not rock'n'roll because that one

song is slow?

At the end of your show last night you closed with two new songs - Slippin' Away, which sounded to me like English rock, and Cold as Ice, which was reggae. Is this what you mean, that it doesn't matter how it sounds?

Absolutely. It's the beat that throws a lot of people off. Because today, well not just today, it's trying to come back a little bit today where you can understand what people are saying in lyrics, the last ten years or so, after acid rock or whatnot, you didn't know what people was saying. You see, you got the big bash, heavy metal stuff going, nobody listening to the words. It's all beat. Disco is nothing but a soul-blues beat, just one devastating headache, that's all I see in it. It don't tell me nothing. I love the music in some of the disco stuff, but it just don't go noplase. Just one beat, I've heard disco records go, man, for thirty minutes. Same beat. And then I got to buy a book, to show me where to put my foot to dance to the disco song. It don't make sense. It don't help a youngster or a guy who been struggling trying to play a certain music, even rock'n'roll, or jazz or whatever, it doesn't help him none. It's big bucks for whoever's involved, but not the musician. Every night I work, I still got to pay my dues for working. I still have to pay my initiation fee when it's time for him to come. I got to dish out a bunch of bucks for him to have his union card. What good is it? But that's the way it is. But I do respect the disco places for a youngster that can't go to the bar. He's not in the streets. I respect that, I like that. But play it all. Let that youngster know there's a place now he can hear disco music, but you can also hear the stuff that's going on in the bars. So you don't have to crave to be twenty-one years old. You can relax now, because I'm going to play it for you right here in the discotheque. And they do that in Europe. I played discotheques in Europe. We played the blues, and the people loved it. When we took our break, they played a couple of blues, back to the disco, couple of blues... and people just enjoying it. The States won't do that.

What will it take before they do do that?

It'll take people that wants to know the truth, people to explain it. Not a better musician, but people with some bucks to say, 'I want blues played on that station, here's the bucks for it.' And also have a youngster, somebody with a name, to say, 'Can I get my group in here, can I get my favourite act in here?' that's not on a big scale, or is on a big scale, to play a live broadcast on prime-time radio. The prime magazines, there's Rolling Stone magazine, Performance magazine, Downbeat magazine, or whatever - these kind of books, we have to have guitar players, we have to have this. Otherwise we're just going to sit here and feed the rock'n'roll people, and they just keep a-getting rich. See? That's all that's going to happen. It's dirty for us to play it, but it's all right for them to play it in a rock'n'roll form, which if we cahanged it in Rock'n'roll, as a black entertainer, you can't



sell it.

Last night, just before you played these two new songs, you said that you tried to be original, and that in Chicago, our five dollars was worth more than in Montreal. What exactly did you mean by that?

We just did seven days in Montreal. In Montreal I have a beautiful audience, we play a nightclub called the Rising Sun, they're having a festival about now, if it ain't over already. Alright, we get there this year, the Montreal dollar was worth 76 cents, I believe it was. Last year in Europe, the US dollar was worth zero. So all these things change, right? So, I'm playing for guys, trying get five and six dollars a night, for six days, for Luther Allison. I don't like the idea. I told them I didn't like the idea. Because that's what you're doing, you're turning off my audience, as an up-coming artist, I say. You're not giving them a chance because you're overcharging them, number one - the Canadian dollar is worth nothing. So that's basically what I meant. If you're paying five dollars in Chicago for Luther Allison, your dollar is nice here. But five American dollars in Canada is how much? Seven, eight bucks. So you got it together here. That's what was on my head. I knew it would have to be explained, I knew curious people wouldn't know what I was talking about.

What I thought you meant was that by playing these new 'non-blues' songs, we were getting more for our money. But do you do them everywhere?

Everywhere. You see, it used to bother me when a critic come back and say - I mean he spreads it - Luther Allison don't play the blues no more. But when I hear everybody else out there, and they're playing a whole lot more other stuff than Luther Allison, I laugh. It worried me at first. Like I say, reggae, it's a big music, and the white people love it. And what I did on that other thing, Slippin Away, that's the blues. I mean, 'I got to go to work on time, I got bills to pay, and I come home, I feel my love is slippin away,' what's the reason for this? What's the use of my doing all these things? Once again, it's not the music, it's the lyric, you see? And I'm glad I can do this, because I'm not just the old Chicago blues, everything happens, it's Chicago blues. I'm not Chicago blues. I grew up in Chicago, but I'm from Arkansas. He will not be Chicago blues, he live in Peoria Illinois. I mean, Chicago blues was not created. All that came from Mississippi, Tennessee, Alabama, Arkansas. They brought it here. St Louis blues, yes. We can talk some more later, I'll try to keep her together...

... Jazz, I got lucky enough to play with a few people, Dizzy, and Miles Davis, you know, on the same bill, Count Basie, Roland Kirk before he died, and all these people, it's great, man, you run across a lot of people, especially when you get to Europe, in a lot of the festivals, like the North Sea Jazz Festival, everybody was in the same hotel and the same lobby, and across the hall from each other, it was great. Those guys are sweethearts, you believe it.

How do jazzmen differ from bluesmen?

Blues people are more like a good old gospel preacher, you belch it out, you let it go, you can speak it, voice it, or play it. And jazz is the same kind of trip, you kind of get all the way off a little deeper, and you play it a little bit softer in jazz. It's a certain kind of moan, you might say, but it's all wrapped up in the same ball. It's an easy step and it's areal rough-edged thing, you know. It's total meditation, really, when it come to jazz, it's like if you sit down and meditate, that's what it is, meditation. And blues is like, 'Man, I need somebody to talk to.' So you got somebody to talk to, you can let yourself go.

Do you ever play jazz?

I probably could. I've did a few tunes here and there, modern jazz, not of the real sophisticated stuff, and I can do a little bit of this that and the other, like Red Top, stuff like that.

I looked you up in the book, and I saw that you were working outside music from 1963. Does that mean it was a lean time for the blues?

When I was his age, I was a little older than he is, I spent a lot of time at Muddy Waters' house, because Muddy Waters have a son the same age I am, and we both went to the same high school, so I'd have to pass his house every day to go to school. And my brother had a band, from '52 I believe until '57, called the Rolling Stones, and we lived in the same apartment, and that's what really got me interested in playing music, that's my brother. And at last one day they were practising, and I said, 'Hey man, why don't you show me how to play this thing?' and he showed me a note or two, and eight or ten months later I thought about it, and went back, and I started to follow them around. I was too young to deal with the nightclubs, but they were doing a lot of social clubs - in other words, I could be there as long as I got somebody there that's not drinking or whatnot. That was good. I'd listen to Otis, Magic Sam and all of us, I finally moved to the West Side where I got really in touch with blues people, like Willie James Lyon, before he died, we kind of grew up together. It's just then, that kind of a step. I've been around very beautiful musicians, some that you don't even hear about, and I don't even know what happened to them, but the thing is, I know they're still in Chicago, or maybe back in Mississippi someplace, like Willie Johnson for instance, he dropped out, which was one of my idols as well, and I just kind of hung in there. And it was tough, because I didn't have anything, family was from down in the cottonfields, and my parents were very old, I was basically by myself except my brother, who just left a few minutes ago. He did the singing, and I didn't do no singing. Jimmy Dawkins, I got with him for a while, played bass, couple of other people, and then we got the Four Jivers and then the Three Jets after Freddie King made Hideaway, and that's where I got a step. But it's been a real tough uphill battle for Luther Allison. Whoever quoted that 'working outside of music', I used to work day jobs, I quit my last day

job in '67 I believe it was. When I went to California I got stranded out there helping Shakey Jake do his album, Sunnyland Slim with Big Mama Thornton. I had to do that. I mean there was no gigs, with no name, that you could do on any nightclub scale. You could catch little bars that don't have no bands, take your guys in there and just play, that was no money for you. And that's what we did, and when Freddie King made his move then I took over, the three of us got together, in other words the drummer and the bass player, Big Mojo Elem and TJ McNulty, and we worked that as the Three Jets for three years or so. And then I got together with Shakey Jake and moved out of Chicago, I think that's the best thing that could have happened to me. Because everybody in Chicago, even today, is still beating each others' head up against the wall. There's no work for enough musicians. I remember many times, people like BB King come to town, you got a Friday, Saturday and Sunday night audience, people are going to go to this particular bar anyway, you'd get a little reputation going, but when these people come to town, you got nobody. And that's still happening today. If the Stones were in town today, I'm going to be a little light, but I'm going to have some Luther Allison fans left. And BB King's the same thing, it used to be if BB King came to town, Luther Allison could forget it. Then I had more or less the meat of our black audience, because that's where our neighbourhood was, and certain bars I play now, like Biddy Mulligan's, I get quite a few blacks coming in. Up here on Lincoln Avenue, far as blacks are concerned in the Kingston Mines, it's a little different. You're getting more blacks across the street at B.L.U.E.S. I think it has something to do with who hangs out, where people can be themselves, like over at B.L.U.E.S they know, it's not so big that everybody's pulling at everybody's woman, or whatnot. And you're getting the hard-core older blues as well as the new blues, and they can relax more there. That's just like being in the West Side or the South Side, in a typical black bar. You're more at home there, there's more of the black blues talent, older blues, that couldn't project here. You see what I'm saying? They could project, but you couldn't draw enough people to keep the man's door open. We gotta go modern blues, as well as some of the old blues. And they're so close together, so ain't no point in the older guys coming here. But we can still go across the street, and they can come here, and we can get it on together. But the people don't look at it that way. It's like tonight, it's Saturday night, it's three o'clock. I'm surprised. I've got in three good hot sets with a good audience. I still got a good hot set left to go, now, with some late late people I hope. And it's following the fourth of July weekend, which is a tough weekend. And I just thought last night and tonight was very good. And I bring him up, I let him do a few things. I don't have both my amps, one out on the stage is so small, so I normally would play with him when I'm on the guitar, and him, then I can coach him. But if I'm not on the guitar with him, I can't coach him. You know, I don't want to stand and say, 'Do this, do that,' he got to learn too.

A lot of people don't understand Luther Allison. I hear these things from say

John Lee Hooker, say BB King, say Willie Dixon, Muddy Waters. Luther Allison is trying to do what has to be done. We have our set pattern. BB King is getting canned to death for the stuff he does. Why? I don't care what he does, ain't nobody else going to be able to do it. I mean without BB King, who would I be, who would Otis Rush be, who would Mick Jagger, Keith Richard, Johnny Winter, who would these people be? Clapton? I mean why criticise him, when Frank Sinatra can do anything he want? Mick Jagger can do anything he want, why criticise BB King?

People expect certain things. Up here on the North Side they expect blues, from a real black blues musician. You obviously don't feel constricted by this...

I am not going to be. I don't think it's fair. I don't see why people continue to categorise our relationship as human beings. It's like I know many poor white people, but the old folk is pointing white and black, why? What about the other nationalities? I know some great musicians, in every field, every nationality. I mean, we all suffer. You might have an accent I don't have, you might have the same problems, or you might be the richest man in the world, but that doesn't mean you don't got blues, or you can't express yourself. It's just people say, 'Oh, he's white, he can do what he wants.' Maybe. But at the same time, you can do what you want. Might take you a little longer, a little harder, but you can do what you want.

Things were a little different in the fifties - the blues was the pop music of the time. Did it ever occur to you to play anything different in the clubs, occasionally?

Well actually I didn't think I wanted to be professional, I didn't go at it that way. I decided to be professional when I went to California and got stranded. I went out there with Shakey Jake, the first time I ever went that far on the road, except one time, which was in Raver Louisiana. I didn't do this professionally, I did this because it was a talent, I guess, a gift, I liked it. We used to play more on the corners, on the front porch, never dreamed, never thought I would be professional, or have records or anything. I mean, it was something you loved, you'd say, 'I wish I had something on the radio,' but that was just a thing went across your mind. We all grew up, man, we loved it. We'd all go to each others' house on a Friday, Saturday night, we have a party, we play the music.

Was it always blues?

No, never. It's blues, whatever you could play, whatever you called it. It's like all these years after, they call rock'n'roll. OK, Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Fats Domino, Bill Haley - these was the rock'n'roll people. Anything outside of those people, they weren't rock'n'roll. So Elvis comes through and really makes rock'n'roll work. But what did Elvis do, to make rock'n'roll work? He got from Big Mama Thornton and Big Bo Crudup - You Ain't nothing but a hound dog, and stuff like that. This is blues! And people just did not



understand that. When Elvis stepped out on the stage, can you imagine how many mothers and fathers did not want their youngsters to go see this man? It's the same with the black blues. They think blues is dirty. It's black music. But the white boys love it, the white girls love it, look at Janis Joplin, her idol I'm sure was Tina Turner, Bessie Smith, and people like this. Her soul had to be Tina Turner. And that's the way it is. Boy, these people can do these things, but if Luther Allison did an Elvis tune, that's all wrong. It's hard, but also you got a lot of bitter blues musicians, really bitter about the fact that they didn't go any further - because they spent many years as sidemen, working with other people. other people drop them, go on to better things or whatever, and they're still working as sidemen, the next man come along. You got to say, 'Hey! I gotta make it for me. I worked as a sideman, but I remember - I'm going to go professional. And the only way I can depend on my profession is me. So I learned how to treat my musicians right, and I can guarantee you, there's not a musician who ever worked for me can tell you any bad things about me. At the time I done got rid of him, he probably thought I was the worst guy in the world, but he done come back and say, 'Now I understand what you was trying to say. ' When it's practise time, and you can't do this, or you can't do that, you got to tell them. And I teach him the unity of the situation - learn what you know. If you get your own band, when you tell a man he's wrong, show him where he's wrong. Can't tell a man he's wrong, and he don't know where he's wrong at. That way you'll get along, and treat him right. But don't let them walk over you, because they'll do that to you. If they don't show on the gig, man, they two hours late, or they just don't show, you got a problem.

What are the differences, playing black clubs and white clubs? Let me tell you, basically. In the black clubs, it's the old tradition. Especially Chicago. Like I say earlier, when we started out, we had to learn to play everything that came out, that means James Brown, Sam Cooke, Otis Redding, Nat King Cole, whatever came out and was hot on the box, we had to learn. Because you didn't have originality in your head at the time, you were just playing music.

They were expecting that in the clubs, were they? Right. And that's what they do today. If I play an all-black club, first thing I'm going to hear played is some Tyrone Davis, Joe Simon, Johnny Taylor, O-Jays, Temptations, Jacksons - all of the soul people, you're gonna hear that. You get a request for BB and Bobby, yes, but not very much

I've been in the Checkerboard when they've been playing the Rolling Stones.

Right. Absolutely. But Checkerboard, that's another breed, because that come off the white audience, because Buddy Guy and Junior Wells play for that audience, just like me, for many years. But they in the neighbourhood where I grew up at, and those people in that neighbourhood have nowhere else to go. Unless they follow some disco, or some big nightclub. And these are older people,

they ain't going to those discos. And what you're grabbing for now in blues, is a younger black audience. They just don't know.

How's that going to happen?

Got to have prime time radio.

How do you get that?

Somebody got some money, somebody going to say, 'We're gonna do it.' You got a few hard-working people right here in Chicago, trying to do that. Detroit, Cleveland, Minneapolis, on local levels.

What are the mechanics of getting a single on the air?

A single, that's no big deal. The fact is, who going to buy a single blues? Blues is album, so you take a single off the album, that's to get airplay, prime time. So it has to be such a commercial tune, like BB's Thrill is Gone, otherwise it don't make it, they won't play it. On prime time. At this time of night, you might turn your radio on and hear some Luther Allison, some real old blues from Memphis or wherever. Jimmy Johnson or whatever, right now. But how late is it? Where's the young people? And when you say young, you talking about from twelve years old all the way up to thirty.

A lot of changes have occurred in the way black people think, in the last twenty years. We've had King, Malcolm X, Black Power, Black Pride, Black Consciousness...

It's coming round now that a few blacks are beginning to go back and check out the roots. And it's very important. There's many workshops in little private schools in every big city now with blacks. Black culture. And black music is the main topic, basically

Blues?

Yes. They're getting it, little by little. And it's important. It's like him. I never dreamed that he was playing music. I didn't know. You know, you get off the road, you go home, you go to sleep, you take your guitar there, you wake up and he done put it away. By him starting so young now, he done turned on a lot of kids that never would have dreamed that they'd like blues.

There are some very hot young black musicians around.

Yes. Look at Lurrie Bell. The kid is great, but let's face it, Lurrie Bell is 22 years old - he's 16.

And do you think these young guys can pull it off, convert their generation to the blues?

If they get right management, yes. If they don't, they're going to go out there first of all and get too loaded, too drunk or whatever, too early.

Do you think the music is big enough to stand another generation of people playing it?

Oh yes. People are spellbound right now, waiting. They want to see something break out. And it's happening, right now it's happening. I'm 42 years old. All I need in the States is a record label. I'm free right now. We're trying to negotiate with Rounder Records. Rounder and Alligator are the only two that's

doing something, and I will not go with Alligator. I can't discuss it, but I just don't see nothing he could do for me.

I'm a guy that keeps a lot inside. Perhaps I'm going to get back started on my book. I got something in my head that I think in time people might want to read. But right now I'm concerned about where blues is going. Totally concerned. But I'm more concerned about his future. I would like to be in a position financially to be his manager. Play when it's necessary for me to play, not 300 days a year just to make my band's paycheck, just to make a living for myself, just to pay rent and buy food and go to the next gig. That's basically what it is. If I could be able to be his manager, and put him in the right direction to know who is right and who is wrong, then I could be more comfortable in what I've done - I wouldn't have to worry about it. But right now I'm afraid that so much of Luther Allison went unnoticed, it bothers me. It seem to me that people need to see Luther Allison, it's all a critic situation. People don't see me when I'm at my best, and every time I'm on stage, even when I'm criticised I'm at my best. They don't realise there's a musician can mess up everything, there's a nightclub, there's a promoter. There is just everything is wrong. But that's blues. But when they knock me down I just bounce right back. And I think that's what people are really waking up to, because this is a dog-eat-dog world. Musicians will knock you down as long as they can, and a lot of people believe what they read, and they don't bother to go and see you, though maybe they've never seen you before. But I know for a fact, I'm probably the most consistent up-comer out here.

You still see yourself as an up-comer?

Oh yes. I've got a lot to learn, I've got a lot of things to do yet.

When are you going to arrive?

When the time comes. I always feel, what's for me, I get it. Muddy Waters quoted: 'You can't spend something you ain't got, and you can't lose something you ain't never had.' I like that. So I ain't dreaming out there in no clear blue sky, 'Look at me, look what I done, I deserve so-and-so.' Sure man, maybe I do, but whoever would have dreamed I'd have gotten this far? Because like I say, I didn't start out as a professional. But I realised I couldn't work that day job, and put all the time I wanted to put into my music, all at the same time. Especially the older you get. Used to be, these were the kind of bars I was doing in Chicago - four and five o'clock - and I had to be on my job at six or seven o'clock in the morning. At a dollar an hour, dollar and a quarter an hour. And I was making three dollars a night if I'm lucky, or you could drink, and at that time I didn't drink anything. So I was just there for the music for at least ten years out of my career. And that's the way that goes, and I'm happy, and I still got energy, and I like that. If I was still in Chicago, I could be a big help to a lot of up-coming youngsters, but I'm not. And I will never move back to Chicago.

Muddy Waters is about 66 now. Do you think you'll still

be playing blues when you're 66?

Me? I'll still play if I'm alive. But I won't do it just the way BB and Muddy Waters is doing it. I'll be his third hand. I want him to enjoy it. I'll be pushing him. I want him to enjoy it, accomplish something. I won't retire professionally, I'll just cut back. Take care of myself, in other words. Take Willie Dixon for instance, he's got his manager sitting there on the side, and he's too in pain to go out and do these shows every day and every night. In all these years you ain't got enough money - OK, he got sons that's just as good, or daughters that's just as good, to go out there and, really, prove what to the world? You done proved it to the world. What else has Willie Dixon got to prove to the world? What else has BB got to prove to the world? Muddy? Why can't they now just take a nice little time off, and have a nice little school, play a concert once or twice a year, they going to get enough money to deal with it, and they going to get money coming through this school situation. That's what I want to do. These nightclubs, they eat you up, man. The concerts, they eat you up. Well hey, I'm enjoying myself, but what good am I when I've burned myself out, to myself or anybody else? If I'd known I was going to go professional, I'd have wrote a lot more tunes. But you're doing other peoples' tunes, what the hell, you're not going to make money. But one thing is, I'm going to have to make money to continue, because I still want a big band. Not a huge band, but a good horn section, and some percussions - I figure a ten piece band, that's what I want. I'm looking at him, at his age, I think he skould do a three piece trip. Like Hendrix. He's young, he got the energy, he can pull it off. But himself, not trying to be a Jimi Hendrix, but be himself. And when that time come, the youngsters going to be ready for it. Because right now, the musicians, the youngsters, the writers, and all these people, have run out of ideas, man. Look at your automobiles, where's the styles, man? Don't nothing look right. Running out of ideas. Except blues, you don't run out of ideas in blues, because you're gonna have blues. You got blues all over the world, now, because everybody, every country is suffering. I'm from a different country anyway, being from the South, so I always have suffered, so this ain't nothing new to me. I got two musicians out there, who ain't used to these time barriers. Four o'clock, five o'clock in Chicago ain't nothing. I grew up with this. We used to do a Sunday morning till four o'clock, go home, take a bath, and get ready for the blue Monday party, which starts right about seven in the morning. And that's what it takes. Look at Detroit Junior out there, for instance. We all used to do these things. Muddy used to do it. Wolf used to do it. Hubert Sumlin did it. And still we're doing it. And then you get these guys from Wisconsin, Minnesota, from these little places that have to close up at one o'clock, they can't do it. They be bitchin and bitchin and bitchin... but when paycheck come, no problem. They're spoilt. I had a guitar player, took him down to the Checkerboard. He was from Minneapolis, the guitar player from the <sup>Lamont</sup> Mike Cranston band. Went down to the Checkerboard, he got scared. 'Luther, I want you to know,



man, I'm just a suburban white boy.' 'But you told me you plays the blues. You wants to pay your dues. This is what we have to deal with. Ain't nobody bothering you.' He couldn't stand the environment. People were drinking, and drunk, acting the fool and having a good time. He couldn't understand that. If they had their three-piece suits on and tie, they had their three pieces on. If they was ragged and dirty, they was that way too. Nobody was introducing nobody on the stage - people was up, and doing their thing. He couldn't understand that. But he was a nice guitar star, he was a wonderful guitar player. I say, 'From now on, you shouldn't tell people you play the blues.' Because what you're doing, you're trying to learn to play blues, and not understanding or feeling it at all. 'Why are you afraid to go into my neighbourhood? Look around you, there's white people there, you don't see them uptight. Because they got out the damn rich neighbourhoods, man, they wanted to know. Clapton and them wanted to know. That's why you won't be nothing, see?'

Did you listen to Clapton much?

No. He's a wonderful writer. We got a jam together before Freddie King died, California. Clapton, Noel Redding, Buddy Miles, Freddie King and myself, few other people. It was just fantastic.

Was it recorded?

I don't think so. Same time as I had bad management. Clapton asked me through to tour with him, manager never did pull it off. Who is the manager of Cheap Trick, eh? But that's the way it goes. I'm still here, Clapton's still here, Freddie's gone. I might go tomorrow, but the fact is, shit, I've had a good time. And I've had some bad ones. But the fact is, I believe in him. He's going to be the same age in November as I was when I started. Except I was two months from being 18 when I first tried to really go at it. So he got a little jump going. It's a little tougher for him now - I hate to tell him, 'Hey man, you got to go out there and really stick with blues, otherwise you're going to be criticised.' But the kind of blues that the blues lovers - the handful that can't support you - want, he already got that. So now you turn that stuff around, and you make it Bernard's blues. And you go for it. If you want to play it upbeat, if you want to play a Chuck Berry beat, you play that beat. Because you can say Stormy Monday even on that. So I think what I'd like to do is continue to pattern myself, carry myself in a real good way, be able to go to Europe, be able to go to Mexico, where I ain't never been yet, Japan... be able to coach him a little, and help him when he needs it. Because he hasn't had no daddy, far as I'm concerned, in his growing up. You know, just off and on I'm home, two or three days, and I'm gone again. And I think he came out pretty smooth, and I'm proud of that. If he gets his high school diploma, he can always pick up a couple of years in college if necessary, later. But right now I want him to concentrate on music. Even music school, when the time right.

What do you think of that, Bernard?

B: I'm going to stick with it.