

Magic Slim interview.

At Florence's, 5443 S Shields, Chicago.

September 19, 1982. c. 5pm.

Hound Dog Taylor offered you a place in his band a while back, when he fired Brewer Phillips, and you turned it down, even though it was a good offer for you at that time. Why?

Well, I was just getting started, see, and he didn't want nobody but me, and I had a pretty good thing going - well, you know, I was just getting started, but I had a pretty good little thing going for myself. And something just told me, you know, not to do it, although me and Hound Dog, we was real good friends, because he's the one that give me this gig here; but you know, I couldn't stop, I couldn't let my fellows down, because see I had worked hard with them, especially my brother, I had worked so hard to get 'em started.

Who else was there then?

My baby brother, he was playing drums at the time, and I had worked with 'em, so I just wasn't ready to cut 'em loose then.

You played for a long time before you got your band together. Yeah, I played round, I went around, and people didn't want me to play, the same guys that are sitting here now. He wouldn't even call me up on his show, no. 'Cos the first thing he say, I can't play.

How did the music of your band change when Daddy Rabbit started playing with you?

How did it change? Well, when Daddy Rabbit started with me, see that was the kind rhythm, background, pattern, that I had always dreamed of. I didn't have nobody to play it, and when I hired Daddy Rabbit, I didn't know that he could play it. And right now, if Daddy Rabbit wasn't sick, he would be with me every place I go. But see, he is kind of sick now, and he can't make it, 'cos he's a diabetic. That's the onliest reason.

Bruce just pointed out to me that when you all start a slow blues, it gradually gets faster and faster.

Well now, the reason it gets faster, that's the drummer. Yeah, that is the drummer. Because, you know, he's a good drummer, but he will speed a song. He will do it. See, I have to constantly talk to him, to keep him down, see.

What do you look for in a drummer?

Nothing but a back beat. On this faster stuff, I don't need him. Nothing but a back beat, that's all I need. That's all I ask for out of a drummer. I don't care how good he is, or how fast he is. I don't want that. All I want is a back beat.

Maybe Nate's a bit good then, if he wants to speed it all the time.

Well, he'll do that every now and then, and then again, he won't speed it. So I think the motherfucker crazy! Oh, don't put that on there now. I guess, you know, I think he just go off, you know. But you know, I like him, and I likes the way he

plays.

Nobody else sounds like this band. How would you describe the Teardrop sound?

Well, now that's a question. I don't know, I can't describe it. But all I know, I I don't want to sound like nobody else. No. Because see, I'm trying to make it for me, and if I just go out there and sound like BB King, Albert King, Muddy Waters, Otis Rush, all them cats, I wouldn't hit on nothing. 'Course, I can do it. Yeah, I can sound like that, I can sound just like 'em. But I don't - what'm I do that for? They got their name, so - hey, I'm trying to make me one. Although me, to try to make me one, I got to have my own stuff. Yeah. So this is what I do, I try to create my own stuff.

Who were you learning from, years ago?

Magic Sam, the onliest man.

Did he give you all your chances?

He give me all of my chances. Magic Sam and Shakey Jake. They give me all of my chances.

What was it like playing for Magic Sam?

Well, you know, I wasn't really playing with him, you know, but see, we from the same home town, and we went to school together. And he showed me, he was the onliest one who showed me, he was the only one that called me up, let me play a little bass with him. And then when I started to playing with him, he didn't have a bass player, he call me up, I go p ay with him, I play bass for him. And I was trying to play a little guitar too, and he would show me, you know, how you go and all that. Basically, he the only one that give a chance. Rest of them motherf - rest of them don't you know.

You sound pretty angry about it sometimes.

No, it makes me mad, the cats that come in now and think they so good, and when I was trying to play, wouldn't nobody try to help me. But - everybody come in this place here, or anywhere else, I let 'em sit in. 'Cos I don't care. 'Cos they can't take what I got. And if they don't wants me, I get under their skin - if they don't wants me, 'cos I been playing guitar a long time. Ain't nothing about guitar that don't know. So hey - it just a mean world, just some rotten musicians out there. Some of them.

And Magic Sam was the only guy who helped you.

The only guy that really gave me a chance. And here's another guy that really speaks up for me, real highly, and I love him for it, and that's Son. Son Seals. He's a dirty motherfucker, but he's alright with me. He speak up for me. And every place he go, everyplace I done been, Son Seals been, they have told me, So Seals have speak very highly of me. And I speak very highly of him too. We can't get along five minutes without fussing and arguing about something: he won't loan me no money, I won't loan him some, I ain't got none - we got to get into it about something. He call me all kind of this, I call him, and yet still, we never get mad at one another. But he speaks up for me. And if I ever get over, or he get over first, which one of us, I don't believe he going to forget about me, and I know I'm not going to

forget about him.

You've been in the business along time, and only now, after a long time, you seem to be getting the recognition you deserve.

Well, I'm doing a little bit better. I don't think I'm getting what I'm supposed to get, but I'm doing a little bit better.

You've been to Europe a couple of times.

Been there three times. And I'm going back the 25th of October.

After twenty years playing in Chicago, what's it like to go and play in Europe?

Well, it's interesting, yeah. It's a lot of fun.

You take your band when you go.

Yeah. The first time I went over there, I went over there with - well, with a couple of guys, I don't want to call no names. Well, I'll call 'em names, fuck 'em - Fred Below, and Johnny Littlejohn. And they tried to fuck me up. You don't have to put that on there, but it's on there, I'm going to tell you. See, Freddy Below wouldn't half play drums, and then Johnny Littlejohn put the mouth on me.

Didn't you go to Japan with him recently?

No, I ain't never been to Japan. I been to Switzerland, Holland, Belgium, Italy, and Sweden. Been to Spain. Did I say Holland? And Germany. Well, I didn't play in Germany, but I went through there.

Was your reception good?

Yeah.

The blues seems to be riding a wave now, it's more popular now than it was five, ten years ago.

Yeah, it is. See, more of the young people now is getting into the blues, white and black. More of them is getting into the blues now. So I think it's getting a little bit more popular.

You've been playing Florence's for a long time, haven't you? Ever since before Hound Dog Taylor died. They won't fire me, so I ain't going to quit.

Do you like playing down here?

Yeah, it's alright on a Sunday. See, I don't usually play but one set, and hey, I just turn 'em loose, let 'em go. I didn't even have to open up this second set, I just went on and opened it up. I don't usually play but one set, and then I be standing out here and bullshit for the rest of the evening.

You play a lot in Chicago.

Yeah, every week. When they call me to play, I be ready. See, I'm not under no contract, with nobody. You know, so I'm free, I do mostly my own booking. Bruce help me out some, you know, and I do my own.

You've got that French Alligator album, and soon one on Rooster.

Yeah, the guy in England. (Mick Huggins) We recorded it here, but he took it back to England.

Looks like you're getting on the album scene.

Yeah, well, I hope so. I hope pretty soon things'll break, you know. I ain't making no money, but I'm working.

What break? It seems to me that you've arrived already.

Yeah, well see, what I call a break is, you know, I get a couple of big shows, a couple of TV shows or something, that make me a lump sum of money, like I go in there, like the other big stars, go in ther and play one night, and make you a lump sum of money, you know. See, if I could get me a couple of them, hey, then I would feel like I had my chance.