

Jerzy Kossek

Akademia Techniczno-Humanistyczna, Bielsko-Biała

## Blues media in the world – a survey

Although the history of Blues, as the music genre, dates back to the year 1895<sup>1</sup> it took more than sixty years for the blues to have permanent representation in press media. The first attempt was performed in 1963 in England where blues enthusiast started *The Blues Unlimited*, however it stopped to appear in 1987. *Blues Unlimited* (ISSN 0006-5153) was a British monthly music magazine dealing with all aspects of blues music. Co-founded in 1963 by Simon A. Napier and Mike Leadbitter, it was considered one of the premier magazines for blues music. The magazine launched in 1963 as a typed, mimeographed pamphlet; its last issue (#149), by then a full-fledged photo-offset production, was published in the winter of 1987 and edited by Mike Rowe<sup>2</sup>.

*Jefferson Blues Magazine*<sup>3</sup> is a Swedish blues magazine. The first issue was published in the spring 1968, which makes it the oldest blues magazine still in print in world. *Finnish Blues News* is almost as old as Jefferson. The magazine is published by Scandinavian Blues Association (SBA)<sup>4</sup>.

The milestone in history of blues media is certainly a publication of *Living Blues*. *Living Blues* is a bi-monthly magazine focused on covering the African American blues

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<sup>1</sup> In American mythology the search and discovery of Blues bears the closest resemblance to search and discovery of America – where W.C. Handy seems to play the role of Christopher Columbus who thought that discovered America yet was mistaken and most probably preceded by the Nordic seafarers. In both cases both gentlemen no matter whether they accounts are true or not are well remembered and commemorated by history as the people who made the step that meant so much for mankind. In some way both have contributed immensely in the search of truth and became part of American mythology. In recent years scholars equipped us with many revolutionary theories concerning the discovery of America. What is the real story behind the discovery of blues? According to popular belief strengthened by historians and supported by numerous “blues” theorists from Robert Palmer to Marcus Grail the discovery of Blues took place in the Delta of Mississippi, in Tutwiler where in 1976 the brass plague had been mounted on the stone pillar bearing the following description: A LANDMARK OF AMERICAN MUSIC. In his autobiography *Father of Blues*, W.C. Handy stated that he first heard the blues, a native Negro ballad form, in the railroad station of Tutwiler in 1895. Presented by the National Music Council, Mississippi Music Educators Association and Exxon.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Garon: *Historiography*, [in:] Edward M. Komara (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Blues*, Taylor and Francis (Routledge), 2005, 1440 pp.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.bluesnews.fi/jeffersonmeet.htm> Nelikympiset onniteltuulella at Blues News' site [20|2011].

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.jeffersonbluesmag.com/JeffersonBluesMagazine> [20|2011].

tradition, and America's oldest blues periodical. The magazine was founded as a quarterly in Chicago in 1970 by Jim O'Neal and Amy van Singel who were students of journalism at Northwestern University. Alligator Records owner and founder Bruce Iglauer, a Wisconsin native, was also one of the magazine's early editors who organized the base structure for the magazine in his one room apartment. Bob Koester, who was the music shop owner played also a remarkable role in creation of the future magazine. In his shop the blues enthusiasts were supposed to leave the articles to be published. It is crucial to mention that the initiators of the blues media movement, as in the case of blues early recordings, were white people contrary to the music which was the domain of the blacks. It is also worth mentioning that this and many other early blues magazine were established as non-commercial ventures. Howlin' Wolf was featured on the cover of the first issue. In 1983, O'Neal and van Singel donated the publication rights and the magazine's collection of blues memorabilia to the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi. At that time the magazine became a bi-monthly.

The magazine is currently edited by Brett Bonner, and celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2010. Each issue contains a variety of features, including artist interviews and profiles, record reviews, and a monthly Top 25 national blues radio chart. Speaking about the magazine for a story by the Associated Press, current editor Brett Bonner "attributes its longevity to a formula from which it rarely strays: allowing the artists to describe how their culture drives the music"<sup>5</sup>. The blues singer Deitra Farr was a regular contributor.

Founded as America's first blues publication in Chicago in 1970, *Living Blues* magazine has set the standard for blues journalism around the world. From its first issue featuring blues legend Howlin' Wolf on the cover, *Living Blues* has provided fans with insightful, in-depth stories on such legendary blues artists as Muddy Waters, B.B. King, Koko Taylor, and John Lee Hooker. In addition, *Living Blues* focuses on true creative originals like Otha Turner, Chris Thomas King, and Super Chikan, artists often overlooked by other blues press. *Living Blues* is renowned for its detailed feature stories and exceptional photography. Our contributors include the absolute best in blues journalism, including Jim O'Neal, (who co-founded *Living Blues* in 1970), Barry Lee Pearson, David Whiteis, Scott Barretta and photographers Jack Vartoogian, Bill Steber, and Jim Fraher. Each issue of *Living Blues* features current Blues News, "Breaking Out" articles on up and coming artists, and the most extensive CD and DVD review section in the business. Each issue also contains the *Living Blues* Radio Charts providing the music industry with one of the most accurate compilations of play lists from blues radio programmers throughout the world.

*Living Blues* was acquired by the University of Mississippi in 1983 and is published bimonthly by the Center for the Study of Southern Culture. Beginning in 2003, *Living*

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<sup>5</sup> "Living Blues Magazine has Four Decades Worth of Blues", 9 September 2010.

*Blues* has sponsored the *Blues Today* ! Symposium each spring on the University of Mississippi campus. The Symposium has featured such keynote speakers as Paul Oliver, Samuel Charters, and Bill Ferris as well as intimate musical performances by Honeyboy Edwards, Little Milton, and B.B. King. In 2009, *Living Blues* was honored by the state of Mississippi with a Mississippi Blues Trail historical marker. *Living Blues* is also a past recipient of the Blues Foundation's prestigious *Keeping the Blues Alive Award*.

*Living Blues* gave a spark to ignite many other American blues magazines like *Big City Blues*, *Blues Access*, *Blues Beat* and *Blues Review*. *Blues Revue* can perhaps be best characterized by Chip Eagle, the publisher who said:

"You will notice after a few issues that we don't really consider *Blues Revue* to be just a magazine. We believe that we have the important responsibility of connecting the Blues World. We consider our readers to be members of a tribe, a really special tribe of people around the world connected by the beat of the blues. Again, welcome to the tribe! As I often say, it's a great tribe and the meetings are excellent."

*Blues Revue* was founded in 1991, and is currently celebrating the twentieth year of publication. It covers the full spectrum of the blues and work to include in each issue historical information, stars, up and coming artists, international coverage, and coverage of great shows. The best photographers in the blues grace its pages, many holding the highest awards for blues photography. Its back catalog is literally a who's who of the blues. It has several regular columns, including the popular column "Steady Rollin'" by the great guitarist Bob Margolin. Many readers say that this is the first thing they read in each issue. They also have a column by Roger Stolle, "Down In The Delta," where Roger keeps everybody up to date on who and what is happening in the home of the blues. In each issue they include between fifty and one hundred reviews of the latest blues CD and DVD releases. The most respected reviewers in the industry write these; blues artists around the world prize a good review in *Blues Revue*. *Blues Revue* also sponsors some of the best blues festivals around the world. There is more than just the magazine; through their sister publication *BluesWax* they provide a free, weekly online blues experience that includes great interviews, interesting articles, photographs, show reviews, news, and even more reviews at [www.bluesrevue.com](http://www.bluesrevue.com).

*As signum temporis* no paper magazine can exist today without its on-line versions however on-line versions tend to be rather a complimentary editions differing from their paper-mates, sisters and brothers immensely. Polish fans of blues on line follow [www.bluesonline.pl](http://www.bluesonline.pl) and [blues.org.pl](http://blues.org.pl).

Europe is a home of many blues magazines. In United Kingdom the leading titles are: *Blues in Britain*, *Blues and Rhythm*, *Juke Blues*, *Blues Matters*. In Finland *Blues News*, in Holland *Block*, in Belgium *Back to the Roots*, in Italy *Il Blues*, in France *Soul*

*Bag, Blues Magazine and ABC*, in Germany *Blues News*, in Norway *Norwegian Blues News* and in Poland *Twój Blues*<sup>6</sup>.

The history of Polish blues media started in 1971 when Ryszard Gloger, more or less simultaneously to *Living Blues* in America, issued *Bluesman* in Poznań. It stopped to appear after two issues only. The idea to recover the magazine was carried by Marek Jakubowski in 1994 but unfortunately this time was given up after three issues.

*Twój Blues*, which dominates Polish blues media market, is a quarterly magazine devoted to blues music issued by Agencja Koncertowo-Wydawnicza Delta from Chorzów which has received Keeping the Blues Alive Award from The Blues Foundation in Memphis.

The first issue of the magazine saw the light in 2000. The Editor-in-Chief, Andrzej Matysik cooperates permanently with Wiesław A. Chmielewski, Piotr Gwizdała, Ryszard Gloger, Ewa Jodko, Paweł Jodko, Marek Karewicz, Andrzej Keyha, Danuta Matysik, Zofia Matysik, Zdzisław Pająk, Adam Pasierski, Krzysztof Szafraniec, Mariusz Szalbierz, Sławek Turkowski, Sławek Wierzcholski. The magazine publishes works of European and American photographers: Paul Natkin, Dusty Scott, Gene Tomko, Aigars Lapsa, Linda Vartoogian, Jack Vartoogian i Dick Waterman and journalists: Tim Holek, Ziggy Jędrzejczyk and David Whiteis.

The success of many of such magazines and online webs sides is based on the principal that blues fans all over the world form a unique and united community and that the people who venture to start and run magazines are part of this community and the magazines are based on the family business. Polish *Twój Blues* is no exception from the rule.

### Blues media in the world – a survey

#### Summary

The article attempts at presenting of brief history and outlook of blues media in the world. The first blues magazines were created as non-commercial ventures mostly by blues enthusiasts almost solely white people, as for instance *Living Blues*. The magazines are often based on the family business. Polish *Twój Blues* is no exception from the rule.

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<sup>6</sup> Source: A. Matysik, *Media Bluesowe na świecie i w Polsce*, unpublished article presented during I Academic Blues Conference in Bielsko-Biała, 2010, from the archives of the autor.