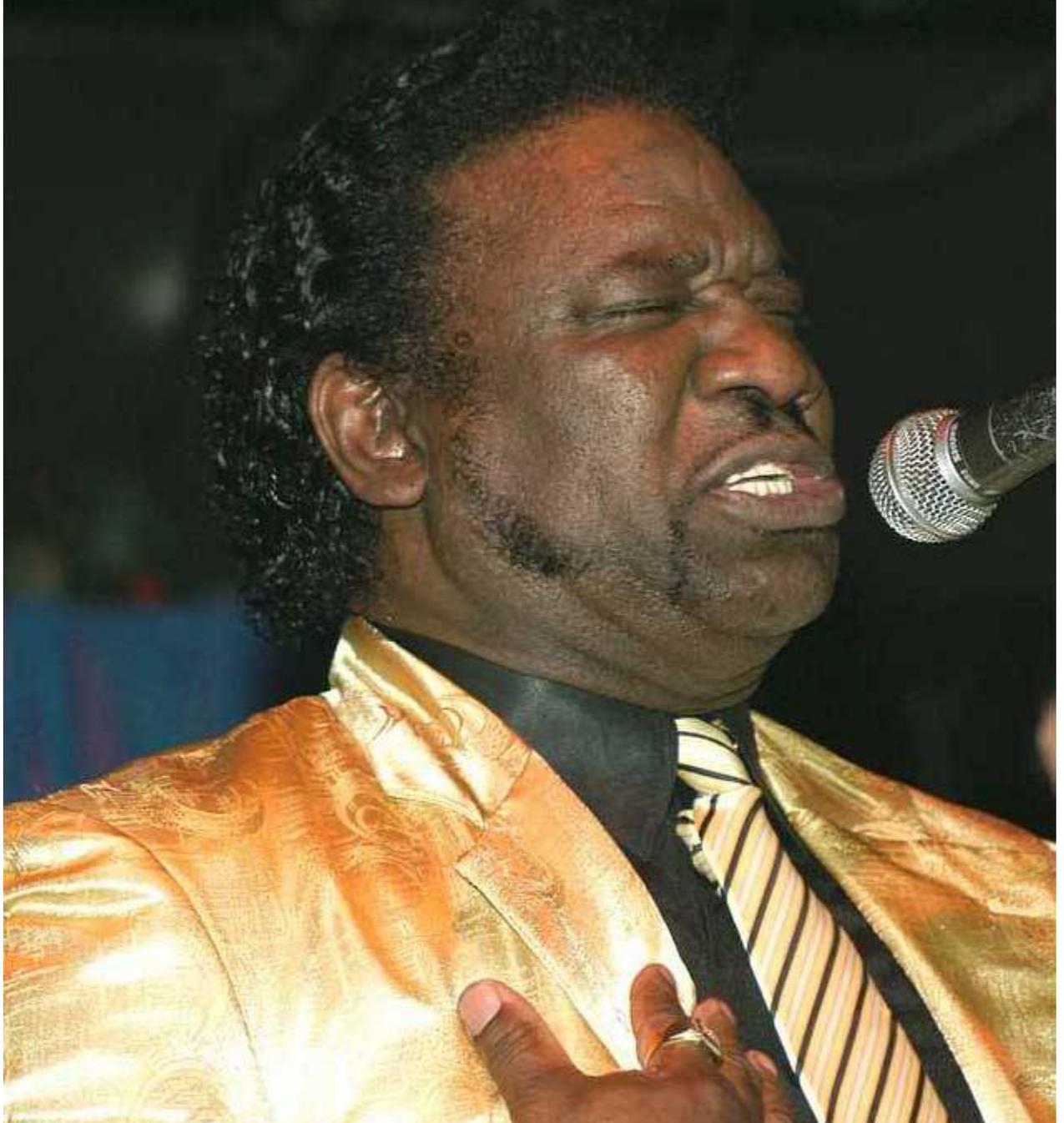


BLUES BLAST MAGAZINE

Mud Morganfield



Featured Blues Interview - Mud Morganfield



There's nothing more powerful or lasting than the bond between a mother and her child.

And for Larry Morganfield, that bond is what keeps him going, through the good times and the bad.

“The sun for me doesn't shine until she wakes up each morning,” he said. “My mom is 80 and I'm sitting here now in her apartment and every wall in here has something about me on it. She just stands there and looks at all the clippings and stuff and just smiles. You talk about a proud mother. Her house is like a shrine.”

It's certainly normal for a mother to be proud of her son – regardless of his vocation – but

when your son has a direct lineage to the foundation that modern electric blues was built on, well, that has to make a proud momma even more proud.

For you see, Larry Morganfield is the son of Mildred McGhee and McKinley Morganfield.

For the un-initiated, Larry Morganfield is the eldest son of Muddy Waters.

You could call him the son of the seventh son.

“I am ever so humbled and ever so proud to be the son of Muddy Waters,” he said. “It's an amazing thing, man.”

“James Cotton and Marie Dixon (Willie Dixon's wife) know this, but very few other people do. But pop nicknamed me “Poppa.” That's what he used to call me. Don't ask me why, but he called me “Poppa.”

These days, Larry, or “Poppa,” is better known as Mud Morganfield, deliverer of authentic, real-deal blues.

And with a new album on the horizon, it appears that Mud Morganfield is ready for his



moment in the spotlight.

That album - *Son of the Seventh Son* (Severn Records), is scheduled for an early 2012 release and features a virtual galaxy of blues stars, along with the rousing vocals of Morganfield.

He's certainly no mere carbon copy of his father, but Mud Morganfield's vocals are stoked with the same confidence and self-assuredness that was at the core of so many classic Muddy Waters tunes. *Son of the Seventh Son* is proof of that.

"It's got some of the best blues artists living that play on it," he said. "Kenny Smith on drums. Rick Kreher and Billy Flynn on guitar. Barrelhouse Chuck on keys. E.G. McDaniel on bass. Harmonica Hines and Bob Corritore on harp. I just couldn't have done this without those cats, man. They brought something to the studio that will forever live in my heart. It brought out the best in me. It's a great CD, some of the best work I've done so far. It's got one great song after another on it."

Corritore, the noted harmonica wizard, club owner and radio DJ, also produced the disc, which was recorded in the Windy City.



There's no holding back the respect Morganfield has for Corritore, and it's obvious that respect goes much deeper than just your typical artist/producer relationship.

"Bob Corritore is such a Muddy Waters' guy. He's just ... what is Bob? I'm trying to think of a word better than great," said Morganfield. "He's just such a great cat. He's so into music and he's so well-deserved of all the awards he's been getting. This cat really works at it ... and he's just so nice."

While it would have been easy to just rush into the studio and hack out a whole album's worth of his father's songs, Morganfield resisted that temptation and instead choose to sprinkle the project with a healthy dose of his own

personality.

"There's two songs of pop's on there and with anything I do, I'm gonna add pop," he said. "But the rest of the disc is made up of several songs that I wrote, along with a song that Bob Corritore wrote and one my good friend Studebaker John wrote. But it's all got that Muddy style to it, because that's who I am. Without me even trying, I come off like the son of Muddy Waters and I'm proud that it's like that."

With just-completed trips to Denmark and Finland under his belt, Morganfield

is embarking on a very similar path to the one that his father blazed back in the 1960s, when he toured Europe as part of the American Folk and Blues Festival, and also as a special guest of The Rolling Stones.

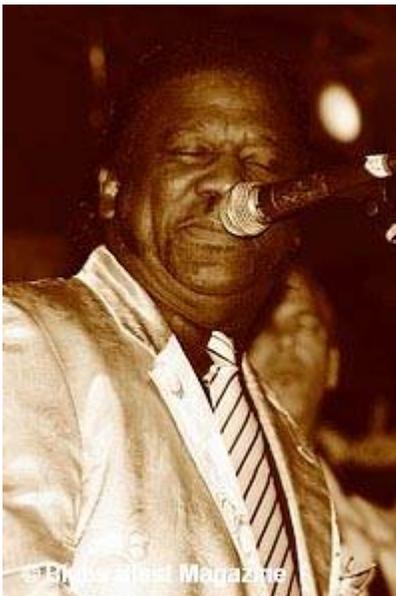
“I met a bunch of great people there that loved my father and in return, they care for me,” Morganfield said. “They love the blues over there and it makes you feel so warm and so welcome. Great stuff, man, just great stuff.”

Just as dentists probably hope deep down inside that their children will grow up and carry on with the family business, it’s probably safe to say that Muddy Waters would swell with pride if he could see Mud take command of a stage in front of hungry European blues fans.

“It’s a fantastic thing (to be carrying on a family legacy), because every parent wants their children to be greater than they are,” Morganfield said. “And that includes myself. So for me to be a part of something that my dad spent his entire life doing, it makes me humble and I’m honored to be a part of it.”

With the recent passing of both Pinetop Perkins and Willie “Big Eyes” Smith, the world not only lost two genuine legends, but Mud Morganfield lost a pair of gentleman that enjoyed long musical associations with his father and were also dear friends to him, as well.

And like scores of blues lovers across the world, he’s left wondering just why two more true innovators are gone.



“I would totally go crazy trying to figure out what’s going on in God’s will. I can’t. It’s just too much,” he said. “Honeyboy Edwards – Pinetop Perkins – Willie Smith – it’s just too much. I don’t have any answers why they’re gone. They’re legends and will be missed, but the only thing I can say is Robert Johnson and my dad is up there in blues heaven just waitin’ on them, you know? This death thing is just unexplainable, but they were a great loss to the whole music world.”

Morganfield found out first-hand just why his dad picked Pinetop and Big Eyes to be long-standing members of the Muddy Waters Blues Band, as Mud also enjoyed the opportunity to

play with both.

“Me and Pinetop just did the Blues Festival in 2009 and I just talked to Willie’s wife this morning – lovely lady – but when I see cats like that, what I see is Muddy,” he said. “I see history. I see legends. I see what it took for them to make the blues mainstream when I look at those cats. All those guys played an important part with my dad. It’s overwhelming, to say the least.”

Those expecting to be treated to a Muddy Waters cover band when they turn up at a Mud Morganfield show might be a bit disappointed. While he naturally soaked up as much of his father’s music as he could, Morganfield didn’t just lock himself in the garage with a stack of Muddy Waters’ 45s and little else.

“My pop is my pop and I’m Mud Morganfield. The life my pop lived on the plantation was not the life I lived,” he said. “I was lucky enough to have been born and raised in Chicago. Pop was raised in an era when they were singing hymns in the cotton fields of Mississippi. I came up in the era when the Motown sound had just come out. I was brought up in another time. My dad is my dad and I’m just his son, so that alone puts us in different categories.”

Those different categories naturally include different inspirations, as well.

“Pop listened to Robert Johnson and Son House and all those great legends,” said Morganfield. “And I came up listening to him (Muddy Waters) in the basement and also guys like Johnny Taylor and Tyrone Davis ... the Temptations, the Four Tops ... I came up in that era, so I related more to that.”

Still ... like father, like son.

“Lovers come and go and we get a bill that we can’t pay ... people go, ‘what is the blues?’ That’s the blues,” he said. “Take a bottle away from a baby and it cries its eyes out ... that baby’s got the blues. Anything that alters your way of thinking is the blues. Plain and simple.”

Even if those blues may sound a bit different now than they did back in the day.

“I try to do the stuff that I feel. My stuff is different. I love the slow blues, just like pop did,” Morganfield said. “But my blues are kind of a funky blues. I don’t want people to sit at the bar and get drunk and cry over in their beer. I want people to be happy in my music and have fun. I want them to snap their fingers and get on their feet and dance. That’s what Mud Morganfield wants. I want you to come out and enjoy yourself and maybe I’ll hit you with a slow blues and you’ll go home and make great love to your lover. That’s what I’m



about.”

Whereas T-shirts, shorts and jeans seem to be seen with increasing regularity on the bandstand in 2011, that’s definitely not the case at a Mud Morganfield show.



“I always dress up (for shows) because pop told me once that it shows class,” Morganfield said. “I’ve done shows and festivals where I’ve just about burnt up (wearing a suit under the hot lights). But it is my responsibility to look as good as I can for my fans. I come from a classy family and it’s instilled in my bloodlines. I mean, if you want to see me in a pair of jeans and a T-shirt, we can meet in the laundry mat. If you pay \$20 to come see me, you’re going to see my dressed up and give the best show that I can give to you.”

Some may wonder why it took so long for Mud Morganfield to make his public trek into the arena of blues players. But as for the man himself, it’s always just been a matter of when, not if.

“I have to be a part of this (playing the blues), not only because of who my dad was, but because so many great blues artists are passing,” he said. “And this is in my soul. I don’t care how I run, or where I been for 10 years or whatever, it’s in my soul and I can’t get rid of that.”

But rest assured that no matter how many miles he travels, or where those travels take him, Ms. Mildred McGhee is never far away from Mud Morganfield.

“I never tour for over 10 days at a time ... I have to come home and check up on my mom,” he said. “She’s been through so much – she lost her mom and I lost two siblings a year apart, one Dec. 3 and the next one Dec. 4 of the next year. But she’s so strong.”

And as far as the most important thing Muddy Waters ever told his son?

Was it, be sure and get your gig money up front?

Or maybe, be sure and hold onto your song-publishing rights?

Hardly, says Mud Morganfield.

“Pop told me so many things, but I think the most important thing he ever told me was that he loved me,” he said.

By Terry Mullins / Photos by Bob Kieser.

