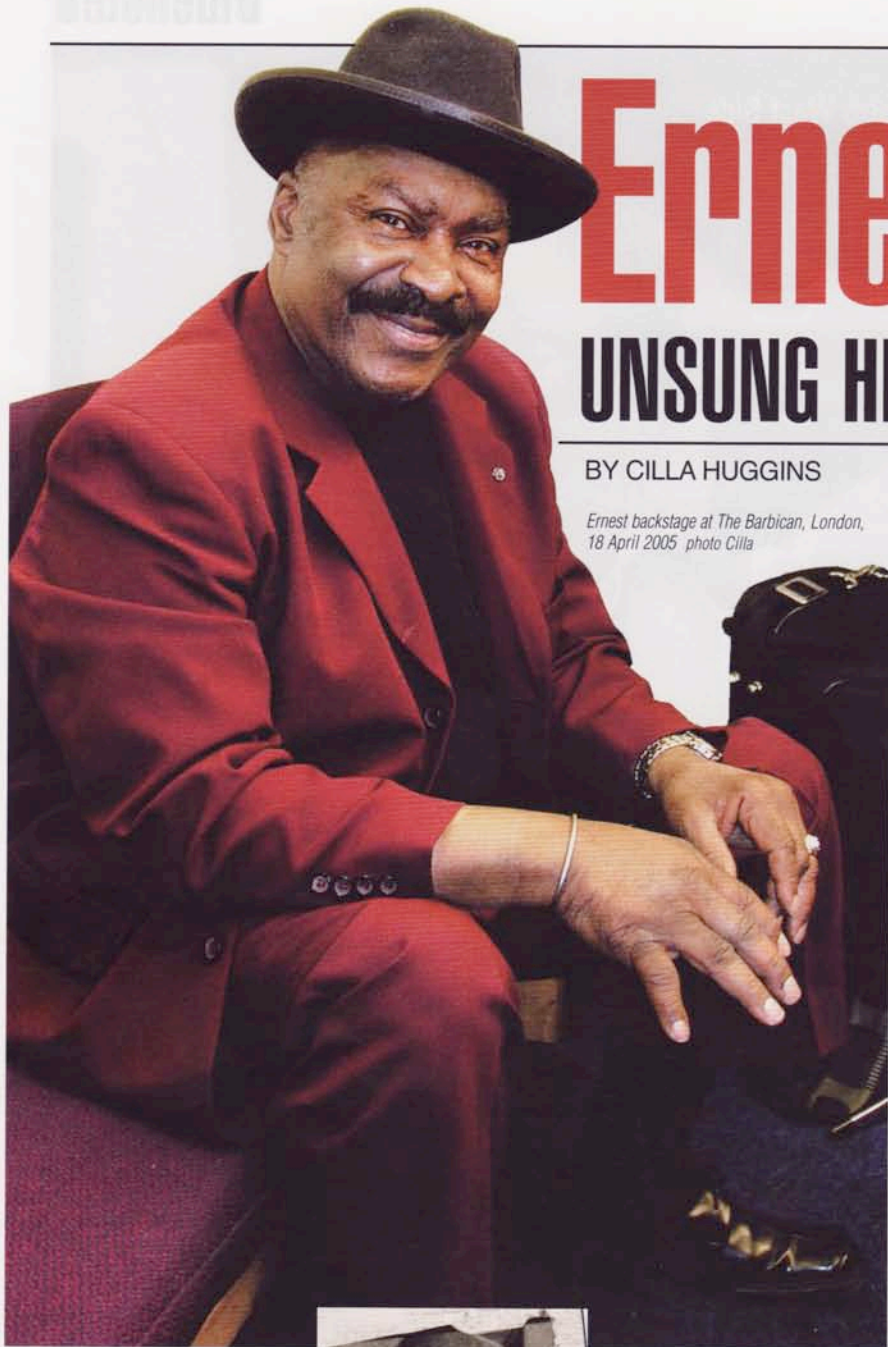


Ernest Lane

UNSUNG HERO OF DELTA PIANO

BY CILLA HUGGINS

Ernest backstage at The Barbican, London, 18 April 2005 photo Cilla



Ernest Lane has been overlooked unjustifiably when it comes to piano players from Mississippi, and Clarksdale in particular. Pinetop Perkins was the boss, and his protégé Ike Turner garnered much of the follow-on attention. But lurking in the background all the time has been Ernest Lane, who will be thought of by many as just having been a member of Ike's Kings Of Rhythm in the Ike & Tina days. But Lane has always been his own man and his work has intertwined with famous names like Robert Nighthawk and Earl Hooker. Lane led his own bands in the then jumping 1950s towns of Cairo and Little Rock, and has latterly carved out a solo career, with a lot in between!

In 2002 and 2005, I was privileged to have the opportunity to interview Ernest, and although my time with him was strictly limited by his having to be onstage 'any minute', he was able to give me a good idea of what an extraordinary life in music he has led. On both occasions he was in the UK as a member of Ike's reincarnated Kings Of Rhythm, and it was clear from the outset that he and Ike were very close. Although stating the obvious, it should be taken into account that these interviews took place before the sad deaths of Ike and Pinetop.



An under-age Ernest joined the Army!

I started by asking Ernest about his origins and how he came to know Ike Turner. 'Clarksdale, Mississippi yes, Ike and I both, we was in the second grade together, I knew him from then on.' Ernest's birthdate? 'Well, I don't like to tell that, but March 16th '31. I'm just a few months older than Ike, yeah (laughs).

'Well, you know, my father was a good piano player, I never thought about playing, I guess I was too young, seven or eight years old, somewhere like that. And my father and Pinetop, couple more guys but I can't remember the other men's names, be on the piano stool in Clarksdale, and they used to go for weekends, sometimes they used to get together and just get to playing and playing. My father's name's John Lane.

'I never thought about playing, then Miss Beatrice [Ike's mother], I guess Ike had done asked her about a piano because she says, 'Sonny, if you and Ernest pass into

third grade you might have that piano you told me you wanted', so we worked all through class and made it to third grade and had that piano sent up there (laughs). Big old pretty piano. So Ike he went to start playing first and I still hadn't, you know, thought I want to play. I wasn't waiting much that long, but some kind of way off them jukeboxes you get to listening, and Ike, he messing around on a couple of little tunes and he let me hear him play and then whooo, I really got interested then (laughs). So Ike, he let me play a little tune, boy and I was so happy and I just guess from then on I want to . . . just like him, like on them records. Then Pinetop he opens up a whole lot of meaning, for me and Ike . . .'

However, Ernest's new-found interest in the piano took a breather. He joined the Army at the tender age of 14. He says, 'No, this was after the war, the war was over. Yeah, I put my name down. Well, my buddies was going in the Service so I want

'Pinetop opens up a whole lot of meaning for me and Ike'



Pinetop Perkins, 1980s



to go too, so we all went down and taken the test and we all passed, and the guy said well, 'We'll ship you off to Camp Shelby [in Hattiesburg, MS] in the morning, so y'all be ready'. I guess I looked — I had a little moustache since I was about 14 years old, and I passed the fitness for 17. I stayed in the Service about 18 months before they found out how old I was.' Apparently Ernest was sent to Europe and served mostly in Italy, but also in Germany and France.

I asked if he'd ever gone back to do the draft? 'No, never did. I heard they was trying to find me but I was always steady moving, they never could catch up with me (laughs). I remember my mother told me one time they had came there looking for me, but I was steady moving man, Earl [Hooker], we was here and there, Robert Nighthawk here, there.

'Oh yeah, I played with Robert. That's how I got my first start, that's what really got me start playing. Yeah, this is when I first came out the Service, I met Robert Nighthawk, 'round about '48, somewhere. I met Robert in Clarksdale, I think Ike introduced me to Robert. I think Ike had

met him first, and Robert he needed a piano player. I guess Ike was scared to try it. Ike didn't never play with . . . Ike didn't want to play with Robert for some reason, because that's how it got to me.¹ We wasn't thinking about trying to play with nobody, we just were trying hard to play some boogie woogie, stuff off the jukebox, you know, take on the kids (laughs). I never went out to try to play with no band, nothing like that. I was just a kid, I didn't know nothing about playing no blues. My daddy used to get on at me all the time in the house when

I was a kid playing that piano (laughs). So Ike didn't listen to Robert, and I said, 'I sure would like to play piano with you man, I can play pretty good'. And then Robert, he saying, 'Come on, you can play, come on'. So I went out with Robert couple of times, and I went up to stay with him and play with him [in Helena, Arkansas]. I must have played with Robert three or four years, something like that, off and on. I went to Chicago with Robert, I recorded all

THE 2000TH BROADCAST OF 'KING BISCUIT TIME', 1949: ANNOUNCER (MR LANGSTON?), PECK CURTIS, DUDLOW TAYLOR AND EARL HOOKER

photo Ivey S. Gladin, courtesy Sebastian Danchin

Aristocrat label courtesy Victor Pearlin; Chess courtesy Ralph Shurley. Both titles recorded in Chicago, July 1949.

that stuff, that's me playing piano on all his stuff, Chess Records, yeah, so I must have been messin' around with Robert up to 'round 'bout '51, '52 somewhere in there.'² Did Ernest get on well with Robert? 'We had our ups and downs, yeah, we had our ups and downs.

'Robert was strictly blues, but he was good. See a lot of people didn't realise how good Robert was, I guess they waited too late till after he was gone, you know, to really appreciate what he was doing, but uh, those records I made with Robert, I don't see why they wasn't some big hits. I really don't see why they wasn't some big hits.'

There was something about Lane's playing on the Nighthawk sides that reminded me of the piano on Howlin' Wolf's last Memphis session, on which the pianist's identity is unknown, so I asked the obvious.

'No, I never did no recording with Howlin' Wolf, I never did. I never played with Howlin' Wolf but I met him, I met him in Helena, Arkansas, he want me to go — he heard me play, and he want me in fact to go to Chicago and I'd never been nowhere, you know, I was scared.

'He come to Helena, Arkansas to play one time, and I happened to be there —



think I might have played a couple of tunes with him (imitates Wolf), 'Young blood you sure can play, come on with us ...' (laughs) — you know how his voice ... (laughs).

'And I was messing around with Sonny Boy Williamson at the time, in Helena, Arkansas when they had the little radio programme, King Biscuit Boys (laughs).'

Did Ernest remember any other piano players from back then, for instance Willie Love? 'Willie Love [pauses to think] — he was around but I didn't know too much about him but I don't think he was [that great], no. Back in those days most piano players was, kinda, heard about mostly like I said, Pinetop. They had another guy, played with Sonny Boy Williamson, they called him Dudlow, but to me he was just Dudlow, he couldn't really play, not like Pinetop. You know 'bout Dudlow? Boy, you ... !'

Was Lane a proper King Biscuit Boy at any time? 'Well, uh, I used to, you know, be on air with them, sometimes. Robert also, he had a radio show too, in Clarksdale, and we used to advertise for Mother's Best Flour [on WROX].'

Having overcome his fear of travelling after being on the road with Robert Nighthawk — from Clarksdale to Helena to Chicago and back — Ernest found himself in Cairo, Illinois, which had a large black music scene in the late 1940s and 1950s and was a natural stopping-off point for trips between the South and Chicago, being the southernmost town in Illinois.

'So, in Cairo, me and Robert had some kind of falling out about some money, so I split. And after I left, Robert — he was nothing without me. So, the guy we was playing for, his name was Allen Johnson, he was a rich man, in Cairo. He owned a club. This club was in Mounds, Illinois, but we was staying in Cairo, so Mounds is just five miles away, something like that. So after I left and his crowd had failed you know, and some kind of way Robert he went and got with the Wades and this Allen Johnson he wanted me to get a band together.³ He asked did I know some guys to play? So I said, 'Yeah, I know Arthur Lee Stevenson [Kansas City Red], he's a pretty good drummer, and my partner Earl Hooker, he's a good guitar player, I could go get them', so he gave me the money to do that. He gave me the money to go to Chicago and buy me microphones and speakers and stuff, amplifiers, and to get Earl — Earl's home was in Chicago — and he gave me money to go — Red lived in Drew, Mississippi — I went to Drew, I got Red, brought them all to Cairo and bam, we had Cairo locked down (laughs). We was the best band they ever heard. We was pretty tough back then the three of us, 'cause Earl he really concentrated on his guitar, he was a bad youngster, being as young as he was, he was b-a-d, you know, me and him was about the same age. Earl got sick you know, and I used to have to tell him, 'Man you need to stay in the hospital until you ...'. He loved his guitar so he just wouldn't stay, wanted



Ernest with Robert Nighthawk and his wife Hazel McCollum

photo courtesy Geni McCollum-Ward

ROBERT WAS STRICTLY BLUES, BUT HE WAS GOOD. I WENT TO CHICAGO WITH ROBERT, THAT'S ME PLAYING PIANO ON HIS CHESSE STUFF

to play the guitar. He left here [i.e. died] when he were young too.

'I met Earl Hooker in Mississippi. He's from Mississippi and his mom moved to Chicago when he was very small and that's why I went to Chicago for my first time in Chicago, with Earl (laughs), and I stayed with him and his mother, at his mother's house, his mother was named Mary, she was a real nice lady too. I got sick first time I was there and she took me 'round to all the hospitals in Chicago boy, Chicago that's a great big place (laughs). Yeah.

'We stayed in Chicago, uh how long did we stay in Chicago? We didn't stay too long, maybe a month something like that then we left, and he wanted me to follow him to Kansas City, so we went to Kansas City for a couple of days, he left and went back down to Mississippi, and uh, you know, we hung out for a while, oh man Earl Hooker, we hung out ...

'We was in Cairo, Illinois, and uh, you see they just wasn't paying us, not too much you know, so this guy in Chicago — never had a chance to meet him — other than on the phone, he had just remodelled the club in Chicago, anyhow, it's been so long ago I forgot even what the name of the club was, but anyway, he had sent us the fare — me, Earl and Red — sent us fares to come to Chicago to open his club for him, play his club. We was at the bus station one Saturday morning, and these old police, for some reason decide they want to start



Sonny Boy Williamson with W.C. Clay (left), entertaining in Arkansas, 1952 photo Juke Blues Archives

messing with us for no reason, say to us, 'You ain't got no money', and put us in jail and he put vagrancy on us, and you know — and this ol' police officer, and I was the first one he called up — told me he was the sheriff, he was the mayor, he could do anything he wanted to do and, uh, scared me so bad. I got three months. I was so nervous, I guess I forgot it when they put me back in the cell I forgot to tell Earl and Red, don't say nothing, and I guess they cussed the man out a little bit, they got five months.

'Yeah [I did] three months and 20 days, at Vandalia, State County Farm, for no reason at all. So when I got out — I was really young then you know — this man Earl Palms, he owned the Palms Hotel so, he always wanted me to play for him, so he gave me a place to stay, in Cairo, Illinois, he gave me a place to stay at his hotel, food, everything, so I could wait till Red and



IN EARLY 1952 ERNEST WAS TO MAKE THE FIRST RECORDING UNDER HIS OWN NAME EVEN THOUGH HE HAD NO IDEA IT WOULD BE ISSUED



above **LITTLE ROCK** in its 1950s heyday photo Juke Blues Archives
right **HOUSTON STACKHOUSE** photo Jim O'Neal
label courtesy Cilla Huggins

Earl got out. And he set up a few gigs for me so I could go on, play, make me some money, 'Keep it, stay here till your boys get out', and he gave me a nice room and everything. We played for him for a while. They got out about a little over a month after I did. But that was really cold blooded the way they...⁴

'Once before in Cairo, when I was playing with Robert, this was on a Friday night and we were playing, and Shorty [the nickname of Nighthawk's drummer Edward Lee Irvin] and this white guy was talking about something, police came and they taken Shorty in jail, and the police know we was going to be playing that night and I told Robert said, 'Man', said, 'Let's go down here', in Arkansas somewhere we went, trying to make some money to come back to get Shorty and them out, and when we got back they gon' try to say we had robbed a gas station or something, and they put me in jail, Robert and Red was there too. And kept us in jail for 14 days. And they told us the reason they kept us in jail was because the old man, where they robbed him, they beat him up or something, and they kept us in jail scared to death they was gonna bother us, his family was gonna bother us.

'Yeah, I've seen some rough times. Ike he saw some too (laughs).'

In late 1951 and early 1952, Ike Turner was talent-scouting in the Arkansas and Mississippi areas for Modern Records, and along with Joe Bihari conducted recording sessions in North Little Rock and Mississippi. Ernest was to make the first recording under his own name even though he had no idea it would be issued. I told Ernest I had his 78, 'Little Girl, Little Girl'/'What's Wrong, Baby?', and that I liked it.

'Awwwww... I don't see how you could like that record. You know that was a very bad mistake. I happened to be in Clarksdale one day — always go by to see my partner Ike, you know, I ain't gonna leave town without seeing my buddy Ike (laughs). You know, Ike had just met these guys Joe Bihari and Les Bihari, and he told me to hang around 'cause they was gonna come to town and they was gonna — he wanted me to ride around with them. So I said OK, I ain't have nothing to do, so, our first time

around in a big old pretty Cadillac (laughs), so we went to Greenville, Mississippi, looking for talent. And I just happened to be there and so they asked me did I have any tunes? 'Yeah, I got a couple of tunes I wrote', I said, but uh, so I don't know, so I had nobody help me play 'em, so there's some schoolkids there, they don't know anything about timing or anything, and when we did this, you know, this wasn't supposed to be on a record, this was just a good idea of what I had and we was going to come back to Memphis and do my stuff right. Then the next thing I know they done released that old... there ain't no timing on it right, or nothin'...'

I told him that his voice and piano playing are great.

'I heard a lot of people say that you know, a lot of people say that... I don't know who played on that record with me, like I said, it was just some guys who happened to be at the club that night and they carried some schoolkids with them horns, you know. That wasn't supposed to have been released, I got really mad at Joe Bihari about that and I still didn't appreciate that, and I never got to record that again [at the time] — well, I did 'Little Girl' again.'⁵

I knew Ernest and Ike didn't play together in the early days, so when he said he went back to Clarksdale to see his pal Ike, where was he, and what was he doing?

'When I was living in Helena, you know, after [Houston] Stackhouse and them [the King Biscuit Boys] fell out, some kind of way, they split up or something, and they wasn't together so the man asked me 'bout would I come up there and play that 15 minutes every day and I could get me a few gigs and go on the radio every day and so, of course Stackhouse was working every day so I started getting some gigs and I needed a guitar player and I know about Stackhouse and although he played pretty good he wasn't real... He was a little slow for what I was doing back then you know but, Stackhouse, he played with me for ooh, three or four months.'

Houston Stackhouse said in an early 1970s interview that he had recorded with Lane. I asked Ernest if he had. 'Noooo,

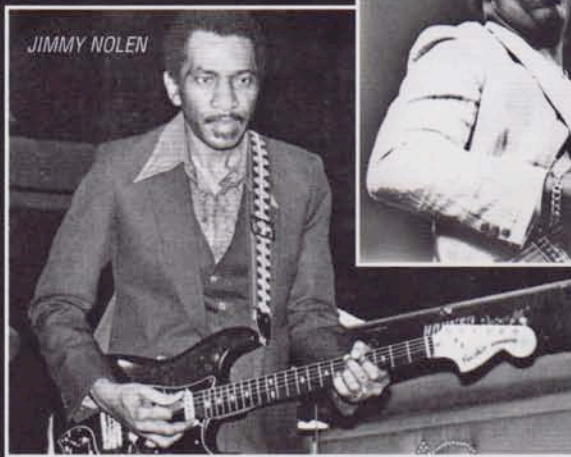


Stackhouse would stay with me, he'd get it all wrong, you know...'

In fact recent research shows that there actually was a 'three-dollar demo session' in North Little Rock, but this time Joe Bihari chose *not* to release it!⁶

'Stackhouse played with me, him and a guy named Albert [Goldsbury]. He [Albert] was *trying* to play the drums (laughs). So this man from Little Rock came looking for groups — I told him, I said, 'I've got a little group man', so he took a chance, he carried us up to Little Rock and one day he told me say, 'Man you don't need them guys, you just need to play by yourself and get you another drummer and you can make it!' So he hired me for Jimmy's [club], he had took me to Little Rock and I stayed in Little Rock for about six years. I had the house packed *every* night, every night I play. I only used just a drummer, I only used two pieces, but those two pieces — everybody loved us, couldn't hardly get in the places we played at.'

So what clubs were there in Little Rock? 'Used to call it Jimmy's. Jim's Place (laughs). Oh, Jim Lindsay, Flamingo Club, Jim Lindsay he had a couple of clubs and there was another fellow called Kingfish, he owned a club called Kingfish, and there was another fellow named 'Oobula' [?], yeah, he owned a club in the northern part of Little



JIMMY NOLEN



LARRY DAVIS



BILLY GAYLES

Rock, Arkansas, and Mabel Summer, she had a place called Owl's Club. I used to play at all these clubs, and I (punches hand) — people just followed me. But that was good little money back then, good for me. There was quite a few clubs around Little Rock, I played just about all of 'em. I had Little Rock sewed up for five or six years. Bright played drums for me. Theodis Bright [his full name] has gone now, but he was my drummer. Yeah, we held Little Rock down for a long time (laughs).'

What was the local competition, I wondered?

'I didn't have none, 'cause the competition that was there, Ulysses Brown, he had a little band but, they wasn't playing who was on the jukebox, like me and Bright were.'

Drummers seem to have played an important part in Ernest's working life. Enter Billy Gayles. 'See Billy Gayles played with me before then [Little Rock]. Billy Gayles and Earl Hooker both were playing with me, see I taught Billy Gayles how to play drums. Well, I know a little bit about it, I know how to keep time, sometimes when we didn't have no drummer, Robert [Nighthawk] always had a set of drums and me and Robert would get a gig by ourselves, I played the drums and Robert played the guitar. Yeah (laughs).

'See, I met Billy Gayles in Cairo, Illinois, and I used to go with Billy's sister, and so, Arthur Lee Stevenson [Kansas City Red] he used to be my drummer — we both played with Robert Nighthawk.

'This is how I got Billy. Some kind of way Red had got away from playing the drums, so I needed a drummer and Billy's always saying about, 'How about I play drums?', so one day I went and got him and let him get on the drums and show him how to pad his foot, keep the time on the cymbal, and come that weekend, Red wasn't around so I had to use Billy and after we played a few times you know, he got the timing right, he could keep the beat pretty good, then I found Billy could sing a little bit so I started him to sing too, you know. So Billy got pretty good on drums and helped me out singing, that was good help for me because I had to do it all — singing, playing.'

By the mid-1950s Ike Turner had installed himself and his entourage in St Louis, while Lane was still in Little Rock. So what happened next?

Next thing I know Billy was in St Louis, I heard he was playing with Ike and he had a hit record.⁸ So Billy he came to Little Rock and got me after he had left Ike — behind some kind of something hadn't happened right with him and Ike and uh, he was wanting to form a group for himself. He wanted me for piano player, Charles McGowan guitar, and I'm sure you know about Larry Davis. Larry we taught him how to play bass from Little Rock, Arkansas riding in the car. By the time we got to California we had taught him how to play bass, good enough to play what we was doing. So, that's how I got to California.

'So then, we had picked up some dates through Earl Bostic, yeah, through Earl Bostic we picked up some dates so we get back to St Louis and Billy Gayles didn't

uh, they had somebody out looking for a piano player for Jimmy's band, and they found me down in Santa Monica where I used to kind of play, little dances and things, so that's how I got in the group.

'Jimmy Nolen, yeah, bad guitar player, b-a-d guitar player (laughs). We had the best band in L.A. That was some good days. Johnny Otis was the man in Los Angeles, but after Jimmy put this group together (punches hand) Johnny was gone, yeah.'

I asked what happened to that band. 'Well, that's when I got with Ike.'

So I theorised that Ike 'stole' Ernest from Jimmy Nolen's band. 'Yeah, I was supposed to record for RCA Records [under my own name]. And Ike claimed he wanted to get me on Sue Records with him and Tina. [I was with the] Ike & Tina Revue from '61 up until '66 when I left. I left in '66, but I always came back, to 'round about '73.'

WHEN I PLAYED WITH THE MONKEES, IT WAS GOOD FUN. OH WE USED TO DRAW SO MANY PEOPLES. YOU KNOW, WE COULDN'T EVEN GO TO THE CARS AFTER AWHILE 'CAUSE THERE'D BE THOUSANDS AND THOUSANDS OF YOUNG PEOPLES

want to go and do the dates, he wanted to hang around St Louis. I said, 'Man, I'm going back to California'. So, this lady came all the way — her name was Ann — she drove all the way from Los Angeles by herself, came and picked me up and brought me and Charles McGowan, we just came back. Did Larry Davis come back with us? I believe so, yes, he came back with us, he sure did. We had to find a drummer, 'cause all that was missing was a drummer. By the time we got back we got to find a drummer . . . it's been so long I forgot the drummer's name, in fact he was married to, he's supposed to have been married to Nancy Wilson the drummer was. [Nancy Wilson was married to drummer Kenny Dennis]. You know, he stayed with us for a while until we picked up another guy on drums.

'So that's how I got back to California, and some kind of way I went back to St Louis for something and told Ike I was living in California. Wasn't too long before Ike, he decided he wanted to move to California. He been here ever since.

'Ike, he wanted a piano player and he been knowing me all his life, so I guess he always wanted me to play with him. So that was his chance — he didn't have a piano

But Ernest's old friend Earl Hooker was never far away!

'Earl came I guess to see me he came to Los Angeles to see me twice come to think about it. First I was staying out in Santa Monica and he came by to see me, I say, 'Whoa (laughs) you be getting around boy (laughs)', and I saw him once we was up in Connecticut somewhere I saw him, you know, he had a little ol' car and he had some guys waiting with him (laughs). You know I just don't understand — well, same thing for me. Earl never made it, Earl was a darn good guitar player.'

I put it to Ernest that Ike had learned a fair bit of guitar know-how from Hooker.

'Awww (thinks), Ike could play OK, but see Earl used to meet B.B. King and Albert King . . . (laughs).

'I used to stop with Earl somewhere 'round '69, '70 somewhere in there, Earl came to California he came to Los Angeles, you know he was in the studio up the street from the club that we was playing at and Ike sent somebody down there to tell me that Earl was in town, he was up there in the studio wanted me to come up there. I went up there. I did some tunes with Earl. I forgot what they was now.'

After Ernest left the Ike & Tina Revue,

player. I was playing with another group — I was playing with the best group in Los Angeles at the time. No, it wasn't [my group], it was Jimmy Nolen, he was the guitar player for Johnny Otis, and Jimmy left Johnny — you know everybody has a reason for leaving some kinda way. And



THE MONKEES – Mike Nesmith, Davy Jones and Micky Dolenz, backed by **THE GOODTIMERS**: Ernest Lane, piano top left, Thomas 'Nose' Norwood, drums, Tony De La Verada, bass, Clifford Solomon, sax (behind Nesmith), Mack Johnson, trumpet, Willie 'Jitterbug' Webb, guitar (behind Dolenz), Los Angeles, 1969 photo courtesy Thomas 'Nose' Norwood

I mean it would be thousands and thousands of kids (shouts) 'Monkees!' (laughs).

'I refused work with B.B. King two or three times, because I've been used to having my own band (laughs) and I didn't want to go on a world tour with B.B. King (laughs), not at the time.

'In '73 I finally taken a job and for about 15 years I stopped playing. I had a job every day (laughs). Driving a truck for the city of Santa Monica. It was pay day, I enjoyed that, you know. I still missed my music. I kept a piano in the house to practise on every day once in a while, but I never played (laughs).

'You know I just got tired of messing with trying to keep groups together. Guys don't want to rehearse, they don't want to be at work on time — I just got tired. My guitar player at the time was Guitar Shorty back then, yeah. My last gig was in Vegas, and he come to work two days late and then late on behind that. He's my boy, but he sure won't be on time, I tell you. [Guitar Shorty's timekeeping is reportedly fine these days!] I just got tired of that. 'I tell you what, y'all can have my band, I'm gonna get me a job, I'm gone'.

'My son was 14 months old. You know I

a major change was around the corner. It seems that most of Ike's band quit at the same time after some disagreement, and the group The Goodtimers came into existence. Lane was on piano of course, and other members included drummer Thomas 'Nose' Norwood, Sam Rhodes on bass, Clifford Solomon on tenor sax, Mack Johnson on trumpet and singer Bobby John.

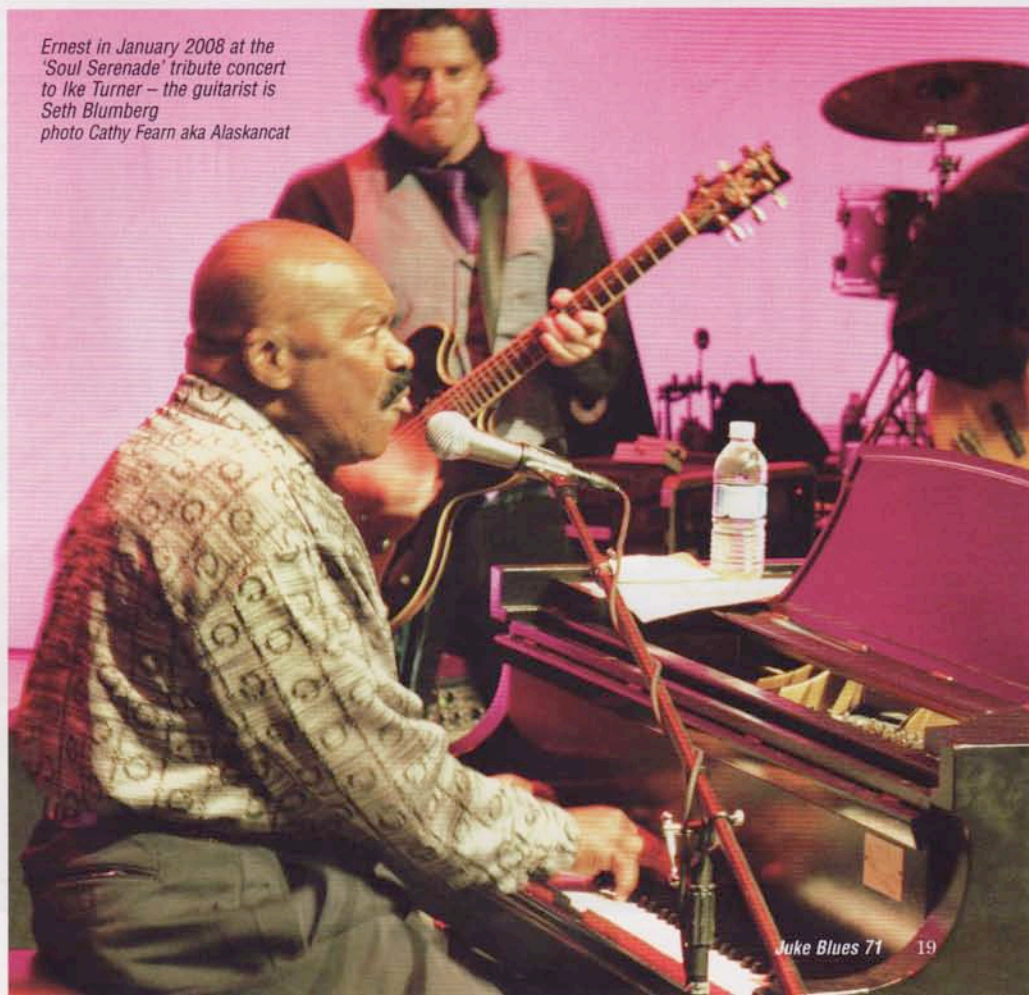
'When I played with The Monkees, that was my group. We was the first to integrate back in those days, back in '69, all '69, part of '70. Davy Jones, Micky, Michael — The Monkees. That was my band playing behind them. And Ike is the cause of it. I think they wanted to try with him and Tina, and Ike he said, 'No, but I got a group you'd probably like. You can go and check 'em out', and they came over to the club we was playing at and you could hear Micky and them shouting, 'Oh yeah, these are the guys we want!' (laughs)

I had known nothing about Ernest's connection with The Monkees, so I asked him if he had played the 'beep beep beep' organ intro on 'I'm A Believer', and made records with them.

'Well, no, they had already did the records but our band went on the road with them. We had to do that 'beep beep', all that, so we learned the songs. We did something [recordings] with The Monkees but I don't know was it ever released or not because The Monkees they broke up . . . we played with The Monkees for about a year or something like that. Arguing about who should be the leader and all that silly stuff. They were young millionaires, all three of them [there was also Peter Tork, a fourth member], I always thought Michael [Nesmith] should have been the leader like I thought he was, then Micky [Dolenz] wants to be the leader, Davy wants to be the leader. No no. Michael's rich anyway . . . so they just broke up, I sure hated that 'cause to work with them guys was real good work, it was real good.

'It was [good fun]. Oh we used to draw so many peoples. Even as we'd get to airports and land, you know, we couldn't even go to the cars after awhile 'cause there'd be thousands and thousands of young peoples, 'Monkees!' (laughs). Yeah, so they had to start getting limousines and stuff to come out and pick us up, and get somebody else to pick up the equipment.

Ernest in January 2008 at the 'Soul Serenade' tribute concert to Ike Turner — the guitarist is Seth Blumberg photo Cathy Fearn aka Alaskancat





A grand reunion at the Chicago Blues Festival, 2001

Ernest (left), with Ike Turner and Pinetop Perkins at the piano photo Jim O'Neal

Dick Shurman reported on this in his news column in Juke Blues 50:

There was pretty much universal agreement that the Magic Moment and highlight was the Ike Turner-Pinetop Perkins set... Pinetop put his arm around Ike and proclaimed 'That's my boy!' Lost in the acclaim over the duo, was that sitting and playing piano just behind Pinetop on stage was Ernest Lane... Talk about a class reunion in every sense!

was still with Ike [and] I haven't seen my son and so I decided that I would (counts the years '71, '72) somewhere in there, anyway, I decided I was gonna get back with my lady and finish help raise my son. So that's what I did. Because of that that's how the job came in.

'I stayed with the job until '89, yeah, I left last part of '89, I haven't worked since. I just been kinda freelancing since then. I was doing nothing really, just living day by day. I was by myself so it wasn't too bad, then Ike he — after Ike got himself right, he wanted to put the band back together and, yeah, yeah, I was glad to get back playing with somebody. I'm glad the stuff I play for Ike kinda got him a good record.¹⁰

'Let me tell you something about Ike. Ike is beautiful peoples. If everybody was like Ike, the world would be a lot better. A lot of people want to say a lot of things about Ike & Tina but see they just don't know... All that stuff that Tina say about Ike is not true.'

Interview time was running out at this point, so I asked Ernest if he could give me his Top Ten choice for our regular feature.

'I can't do that. I cannot do that. You asked me one I cannot do (laughs). If you ask me about a record, I'd have to say *mine* 'cause I like it.¹¹

So then I asked who was his favourite piano player apart from himself and Ike — like one of the old boogie woogie guys?

'I got two guys I like. I like Joe Sample, and I like Ramsey Lewis.'

Given Ernest's liking of boogie woogie, what about Pete Johnson, Albert Ammons and Meade Lux Lewis? His surprising answer was, 'Didn't know nothing about them. I used to listen to Lionel Hampton.'

And Pinetop Perkins?

'Oh yeah, we played with Pinetop a couple of months ago [speaking in February 2002]. Pinetop, he's about 88, and that Joe can still play (big laughs). Pinetop is tough. If you want to play with Pinetop you better think twice!' ■

● Since my interviews, Ernest has been busy playing with the new Kings Of Rhythm, both before and after Ike's death, making CDs, and in March 2011 he appeared at the International Boogie Woogie Festival in Ermelo, Holland. Here's to a continuing and successful career! Check out his website: ernestlaneblues.com

Ernest plays a nice piano solo on Part 2 of 'The New Breed' label courtesy Cilla Huggins



Rooster label courtesy Greg Johnson



M.J.C. label courtesy Victor Pearlman



NOTES

1. Ike obviously didn't want to join Nighthawk and become a straight blues player as he had ambitions in the R&B field. He told me, 'It was guitar players there but they were blues players... I'm talking about like Robert Nighthawk... all these people, they could play blues, but when you talking about playing rhythm and blues... they couldn't play anything of Roy Milton, Joe Liggins & The Honeydrippers. People like Muddy Waters and all them people they can't play no stuff like that. They just know hard core blues... Jimmy Reed stuff they can play that, but when you start talking about playing 'R.M. Blues' by Roy Milton, 'Ain't Nobody Here But Us Chickens' by Louis Jordan or 'Caldonia', they can't play stuff like that.'

2. Lane said he played on 'all' of Robert Nighthawk's Chess recordings. Sunnyland Slim is listed as an 'either/or' on the first session (September 1948); Lane definitely played on the second (July 1949), and Pinetop Perkins on the third (January 1950).

3. Allen Johnson was a wealthy strawberry farmer and nightclub owner, who was also involved in Negro League Baseball. The Wade brothers were Sam, George, Ed and Jim, who 'reigned supreme' over the black clubs in Cairo.

4. Ernest's description of the event is certainly plausible — arrested for vagrancy while waiting at the bus station. However, Kansas City Red gave a different account to Sebastian Danchin saying they were detained because of Earl Hooker's tendency to steal things like amplifiers and speakers. They were arrested on 18 July 1950 and taken straight to Vandalia, on a vagrancy charge. Lane was released on 6 December 1950, and Hooker and Red on 4 January 1951. More can be read in Sebastian's Earl Hooker book.

5. At the session, Lane was backed by students of Greenville, Mississippi music instructor Winchester 'Little Wyn' Davis. Ernest recorded 'Little Girl' again at a 1983 session in Los Angeles, released as one side of Rooster Blues single R50, and again in 2006 for the EveJim CD 'Born With The Blues'. He re-recorded the original flip side 'What's Wrong, Baby?' for Acoustic Music CD 319.1331.2. And 'Lil Girl' has just appeared on the new release on Acoustic Music CD 319.1475.2.

6. Little Rock club owner Jim Lindsay paid for the 'three-dollar demo session' at The Music Center in North Little Rock (owned by one Martin Scroggin), which had also been the venue for recordings by Driftin' Slim, Baby Face Turner, Junior Brooks and Sunny Blair. At least one of the Stackhouse demos survived and may be released on CD. The Stackhouse interview was published in *Living Blues* 17, 1974, and reprinted in expanded form in the book, *The Voice Of The Blues - Classic Interviews From Living Blues*, 2002.

7. A drummer named Pat Albright is also reported to have played with Lane. Larry Davis remembered Ulysses Brown as a baritone sax-playing bandleader in Little Rock.

8. Billy Gayles' 'hit record' would have been 'I'm Tore Up' (recorded March 1956), which made a lot of territorial noise, but did not make the *Billboard* Hot 100. Ike told me, 'I'm Tore Up' sold pretty good around St Louis and places and then Billy Gayles he got the big head, he wanted to go on his own...'

9. These recordings with Hooker were for the Blue Thumb LP 'Sweet Black Angel' session. Ike Turner is listed as the pianist on all tracks except 'The Mood' (on which he plays guitar), but there is a certainty that several tracks feature Ernest. Ike's and Ernest's piano styles were very similar, so who can decide?!

10. At the time of the interview, this would have been 'Here And Now' on Ikon.

11. This would have been 'The Blues Is Back' on Acoustic Music.

Ernest Lane on Record

UNDER HIS OWN NAME

- *Club Casablanca, 1102 Nelson Street, Greenville, MS, January 1952*, 'What's Wrong, Baby?'/ 'Little Girl, Little Girl', Blues & Rhythm 7000, reissued on Ace CD CDCHD 876
- *Los Angeles, unknown date*, 'What Kind Of Love?'/ 'Sliced Apples', M.J.C. 1
- *Los Angeles, 1963*, 'What's That You've Got?'/ 'Need My Help', Sony 114
- *Los Angeles, 1983*, unknown titles but including 'Little Girl' and 'Doggin' No More', those two issued on Rooster Blues 45 R50
- *Stackhouse Studio, Clarksdale, MS, 1997*, unknown titles, some with Jerry Ricks on guitar, unissued
- *EveJim Studios, Los Angeles, February 2004*, 'The Blues Is Back!', Acoustic Music CD 319.1331.2
- *Sunnyside Studios, Los Angeles, November 2006*, 'Born With The Blues', EveJim CD 2076
- *EveJim CD, issued 2011*, unknown session, possible issue of 1983 titles
- *Los Angeles, February 2008*, '72 Miles From Memphis', Acoustic Music CD 319.1475.2, released 2011

AS AN ACCOMPANIST

ROBERT NIGHTHAWK

- *Chicago, possibly on c. Sept. 1948 session* (Sunnyland Slim also listed) (Chess)
- *Chicago, 12 July 1949 session* (Aristocrat and Chess)

WITH HOUSTON STACKHOUSE

- *Little Rock, early 1952 (?)*, unissued 'three-dollar demos'

EARL HOOKER AND BOYD GILMORE

- *Sun Studio, Memphis, July 1953*. Pinetop Perkins told Sebastian Danchin that it was Lane on the six titles from an originally unissued audition session, including Gilmore's 'Believe I'll Settle Down' and Hooker's 'The Huckle-Buck'. These have now been released variously on Charly LPs, Sun CDs and the Sun box set. In most conventional discographies, Pinetop Perkins is credited as pianist and the titles are all lumped into one session in July, but Hooker returned in August 1953 to record separately with Pinetop.

JIMMY NOLEN

- *Los Angeles, 1959*, 'Swingin' Peter Gunn Parts 1 & 2', Fidelity 3015, plus 'Blues After Hours' Ace CHA232

GEORGE SMITH WITH JIMMY NOLEN BAND

- *Los Angeles, 1961*, 'Sometimes You Win When You Lose'/'Come On Home' Sotoplay 0021/2; 'You Can't Undo What's Been Done'/'Rope That Twist' Sotoplay 0023/4; 'I Must Be Crazy' Sotoplay 0031/2 & Carolyn 007.

IKE & TINA TURNER

- *1961-1965, then 1971-1972*, just about every recording by Ike & Tina and their associated acts (e.g. Vernon Guy, Bobby John *et al*) — far too many to list!

EARL HOOKER

- *Los Angeles, May 1969*, on some or most of 'Sweet Black Angel', Blue Thumb BT 12

CANNED HEAT

- *1969* on part of 'Hallelujah', Liberty LST-7618
- *1971* one track 'Sneakin' Around', on 'Historical Figures And Ancient Heads', United Artists UAS 5557

EDDIE C. CAMPBELL

- *Chicago, 1999*, 'Hopes And Dreams' CD, Rooster Blues R2638

IKE TURNER & THE KINGS OF RHYTHM

- *2001* 'Here And Now', Ikon CBHCD2005
- *2003* 'The Resurrection: Live At The Montreux Jazz Festival [2002]' Isabel CD IS 640202
- *2006* 'Risin' With The Blues' Zoho Roots 200611 (Grammy Award Winning CD)

STEVE GRILLS

- *Acme Recording, Rochester, NY, September 2008*, 'After Hours', Toogaloo TCD910 (released 2011)

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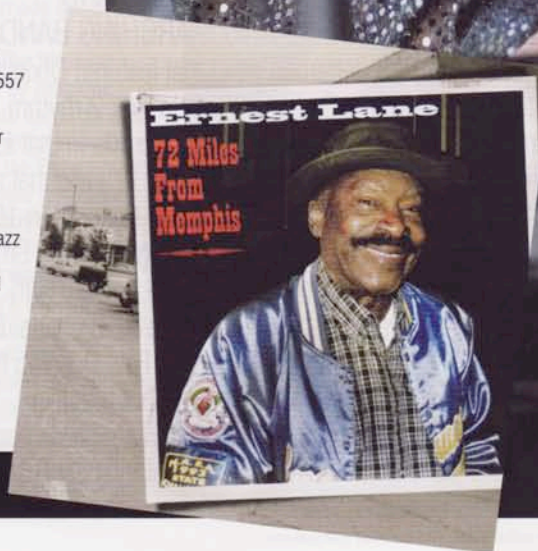
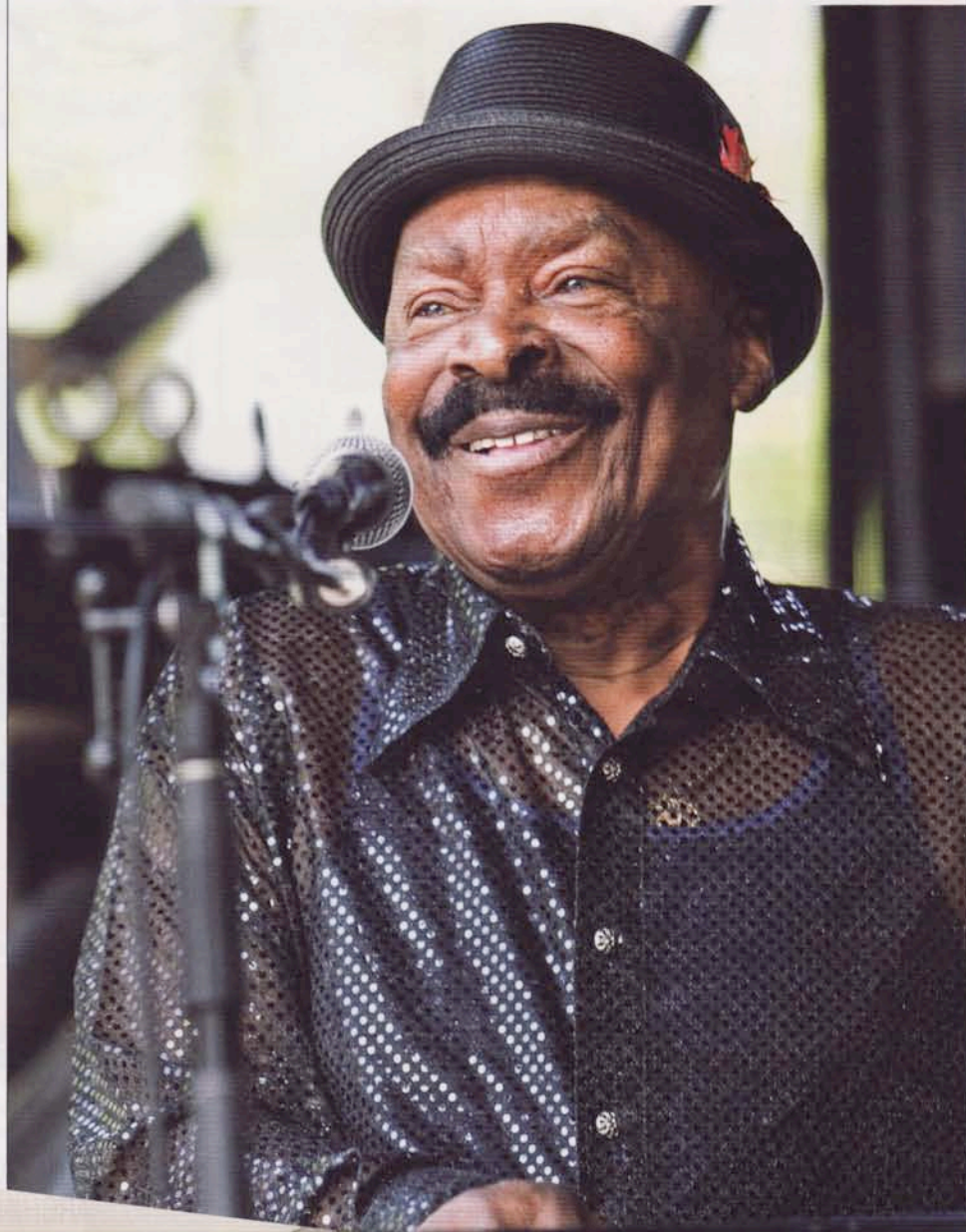
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Ernest at the Chicago Blues Festival, 2009 photo Gene Tomko
left: Ernest's latest CD release