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Real' blues artists get it on for the folks at the Festival

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'Real' blues artists get it on for the folks at the Festival

To the average music aficionado, the term 'blues' probably conjures up riffs of Eric Clapton or Duane Allman, or the gut-wrenching wails of the late Janis Joplin.

These people are all dynamos of the blues genre, but they all owe their styles to study of basic blues roots. Their heroes most often be Robert Johnson, Elmore James, or Billie Holliday.

Friday night five real blues artists played at UMO—none of them probably familiar to any but the dedicated blues lovers. (I confess, I'd only heard of two) but important artists.

Mississippi 'Big Joe' Williams, John Jackson, Victoria Spivey, 'Yank' Rachell, and Johnny Shines are at least better known here now than they were before Friday. A crowd as large as any in The Pit last winter responded wildly to each performer and called each one back for encores. It was one of the most orderly and appreciative crowds I've seen here. Both crowd and performers seemed to be having a great time.

Williams lumbered out first, and performed twelve songs with a booming voice that sounded like a well-played '78. He accompanied himself on electrified wooden guitar to such tunes as 'Baby, Please Don't Go', and 'You are my Sunshine', rolling quickly from one song to the next. Perhaps his best feature besides his voice is his use of the bottleneck slide.

Next was Jackson, who seemed overwhelmed by the enthusiastic response (he kept repeating "God bless y'all"). He performed his version of *Nobody's Business [but mine]*, *Badwater Blues*, and *John Henry* with fantastic picking and a strong, flowing rhythm line.

Spivey next moved regally to the piano, dressed in a long white evening gown ornamented by lizards, snakes and spiders. (She's written songs about all these things). She's about 55, but knows well how to communicate sensuality and sex. As his voice slid over and around *Nobody to Love*, *Organ Grinder* ("Grind it east, grind it west When you grind it south That's what mama likes best.") and her 1926 hit *Black Snake Blues*, you could almost hear the sheets rustling.

Yank Rachell followed, accompanied on guitar by festival coordinator Peter Aceves. Rachell is master of the mandolin, and can

Reviewed by Diane Genthner

rage with the best (as he has with Sleepy John Estes and Sonny Boy Williamson).

Last on the bill was Johnny Shines, who had the fortune to have played with Robert Johnson. His voice is soft, which made song titles rather unintelligible, but the voice itself was a pleasure, rolling up and down the scale with incredible depth and feeling. He, too, was skilled in picking and using the slide.

The concert was preceded that afternoon by a seminar in Hauck Auditorium. A sparse audience watched films by Bill Ferris of the Center for Southern Folklore. The three films, *Mississippi Delta Blues*, *Gravel Springs Fife and Drum*, and *James Thomas, Delta Artist* dealt with the beginnings of blues, the way southern Blacks live and interpret the blues. Ferris was followed by Jeff Tifton of Tufts, who talked about the difficulties of analyzing music, and the particular problems, blues presents.



The Blues Festival, held Friday evening in the Memorial Gym, had five artists performing before

a large audience. The show was sponsored by the UMO Concert Series. Wieland Photo