

# A Special Series of Music Concerts devoted to **THE MASTERS OF HEARTLAND TRADITIONS**

Friday, February 3

Missouri Fiddle Champion

**TAYLOR McBAINE**

**with Cathy Barton & Dave Para**

Friday, March 3

Slovenian and Armenian Music

**CHICAGO SLOVENE BUTTON BOX CLUB**

**TAKSIM WEST**

Saturday, March 18

Irish Music Masters

**JOE SHANNON & JOHNNY McGREEVY**

**KEVIN CARROLL & LIZ CARROLL**

Friday, April 7

Illinois & Indiana Ballads & Fiddle Tunes

**LOTUS DICKEY**

**REVEREND JIM HOWIE**

Friday, May 5

Scandinavian American Music

**K. WENDELL WHITFORD**

**with Bob & Becky Wernerehl**



Friday, June 2

Country & Urban Blues Masters

**DAVID "Honeyboy" EDWARDS**

**ALBERT LUANDREW aka. "Sunnyland Slim"**

All concerts will take place at 8:00 P.M. at the Libertyville High School Studio Theatre, 708 W. Park (Route 176), Libertyville, IL. For tickets or other information call: The David Adler Cultural Center at 367-0707.

This series is sponsored in part by funds from the Libertyville Rotary Club, The National Endowment for the Arts and the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency.

DAVID ADLER  
CULTURAL CENTER

1700 N. Milwaukee Ave. • Libertyville, IL 60048



## FROM THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA TO THE WINDY CITY:

### HONEYBOY EDWARDS AND SUNNYLAND SLIM

They started out in the same place-- the delta country of northern Mississippi-- and eventually settled in the same city-- Chicago. They even met a few times on the way. But the roads traveled by bluesmen David "Honeyboy" Edwards and Albert "Sunnyland Slim" Luandrew traversed widely different musical landscapes. Still, with roots deep in the soil of Mississippi and the clubs of Chicago's south and west sides, they embody the oldest and most important traditions in the blues.

Honeyboy Edwards was born in 1915 in Shaw, Mississippi, an area where most made their living as sharecroppers. His father was a musician, but it was under the tutelage of Big Joe Williams that the teenaged Edwards first hit the road as an itinerant bluesman. In 1932 they toured south together; Williams, the journeyman, with his unusual 9-string guitar and Edwards, the apprentice, with his conventional 6-string.

Soon, however, Honeyboy struck out on his own, and for the next 20 years he played all over the Mississippi Delta, in Arkansas and Memphis, and up the river as far north as southern Illinois and St. Louis. In the late 1940s he settled in Helena, Arkansas, but by the early fifties he was on the road again headed for Texas. Then in 1953, Honeyboy made one last move, all the way north to Chicago. Even then he didn't stay still, but took his blues as far away as Europe, where he has toured on several occasions.

Honeyboy's journeys are distinctive for their breadth, unique even in a field that requires its practitioners to be itinerants in order to survive. Honeyboy Edwards traveled constantly-- only in the 1960s did he stay put long enough to work a "day gig"-- and not only survived, but succeeded. One mark of how much he traveled is the date of his first recording session. Various record producers in the thirties were interested in catching his music on wax, but they couldn't catch up with Honeyboy. It was folklorist Alan Lomax, and not one of the commercial producers, who first got him to play for a recording machine in 1942. Since that first session, he has recorded at least one album every decade, a tribute to his staying power in an uncertain business.

Even more remarkable is the fact that Honeyboy Edwards has succeeded as a solo bluesman for nearly sixty of his 74 years. In his early days, he met and played with some of the other blues legends-- all solo artists-- that came from the Delta: Son House and Charlie Patton, both from the preceding generation, and the great Robert Johnson (born 1912), who died while still in his twenties. Nearly all the big names from that "golden age" of the country blues are gone.



Today the blues is urbanized; the customary sound is that of an ensemble. Honeyboy Edwards is one of the last living practitioners of the earlier solo tradition. According to record producer and blues promoter Michael Frank, he plays "very much in the Mississippi style. ... He hasn't changed much over years."

Honeyboy's guitar and harmonica playing, also his singing, work on raw emotion. His timing is erratic; it depends on his feeling at the moment and not on standardized bar structures and smooth melody lines. To hear Honeyboy play is to know that he comes from the same Mississippi Delta as Patton and Johnson. A closer examination reveals that he traded more licks on the road with such greats as Texas's Blind Lemon Jefferson than with the likes of Brownie McGhee or any of the other ragtime blues pickers from the Piedmont region of the southeastern states.

Recent recordings by Honeyboy Edwards include White Wings, just out on the Blues Suit label from Toledo. Old Friends, a 1980 release from Chicago-based Earwig Records, features Honeyboy Edwards in a reunion session with some Chicago bluesmen that he knew and played with in the south: Big Walter Horton, Sunnyland Slim, Kansas City Red, and Floyd Jones. Jones is originally from Arkansas. The rest, like Honeyboy Edwards, were born and raised in northern Mississippi.

Down in Mississippi, in the small town of Vance, just south of Clarksdale, Albert Luandrew was born in 1907. Though his mother was musical, he claims to be self-taught. He left home early, at age twelve, to go out on his own and soon found work with Ma Rainey's traveling medicine show, the Arkansas Swift Foot Review. As an aspiring young bluesman, he adopted the name "Sunnyland Slim" for his professional identity.

By 1925, he was based in Memphis, playing on Beale Street and in the lumber camps and "juke joints" of Arkansas and Mississippi. In the 1930s and early forties he spent time in Missouri, both in St. Louis and Caruthersville, where he ran his own club for a time. It was there that Sunnyland first met Honeyboy Edwards, when the latter came through with harmonica player Little Walter Horton.

The list of great bluesmen that Sunnyland met in the South contains as many names as Honeyboy's roster of associates. For instance, in St. Louis in the thirties, Sunnyland worked with the second Sonny Boy Williamson (Alec Miller). But by 1942, he had followed Big Bill Broonzy, Memphis Slim, Tampa Red and many others up to Chicago, a promised-land for bluesmen.

Here he worked with the original Sonny Boy (John Lee) Williamson, Little Walter Jacobs, Doctor Clayton, Baby Face Leroy, and others. And here he made his first recordings in 1947. Though he has performed and recorded frequently as a solo pianist and singer, Sunnyland Slim is best known as a band leader whose charges included some of the biggest names in blues.



In fact, Muddy Waters, perhaps Chicago's best known blues man, recorded first as a sideman with Sunnyland Slim's band. Ironically, Muddy drove a scrap truck for the Chess Brothers, who ran a salvage yard besides owning the record label that made Chicago blues world-renowned. Though the Chess Brothers were not aware of the talent that sat behind the wheel of their truck, Sunnyland Slim knew of Muddy's reputation from down South and helped him get his start in Chicago.

While Muddy Waters gained more fame, "every blues musician in Chicago," Michael Frank argues, "would agree that Sunnyland is the patriarch of the Chicago Blues." He earned the title, not only for his musical contributions, but for all he's done for musicians, record producers, and for many others. Frank avows that Sunnyland is "the most generous person in the music business that I've known."

In some sense, Sunnyland is the Chicago blues. Not in terms of his playing style, which is as unique and idiosyncratic as it is spirited and moving. (There are no explicit influences or regional idioms apparent in his playing.) It's his reputation that makes him the foremost emblem of Chicago blues. Through the years he has led many great bands and recorded for a multitude of labels. And he was one of the first ambassadors of the Chicago blues to tour Canada and Europe.

In the 1970s, Sunnyland added to his list of accomplishments and started his own record label, Airway Records. A remixed version of Be Careful How You Vote, recorded by Airway in the early eighties, has been reissued by Earwig Records in the past month. Two other recent recordings on the local Red Beans label feature Sunnyland Slim, both as a soloist-- on Sunnyland Train-- and as a band leader-- on Chicago Jump.

With Honeyboy Edwards' Mississippi-style country blues and Sunnyland Slim's barrelhouse piano playing and singing, the 1989 Illinois Traditional Music Awards honor two outstanding musicians and individuals, and at the same time, pay homage to one of the richest strains of musical tradition in American culture.

--by Paul L. Tyler

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