**Blues Project 2012: Heroes of the Blues**

Good evening and welcome to Ben Franklin Middle School’s sixth annual Blues Project. Tonight, in honor of Black History Month, we celebrate one of the most important and influential forms of American music, the blues. From it sprang jazz, rock, soul, hip hop, and virtually all other forms of American music. As Willie Dixon so aptly put it, “The Blues are the roots, and all the other musics are the fruits.” The blues, however, is not only musically significant, but historically significant as well.

There may be no better way to chronicle all of African-American history than through the blues. If we listen closely to the work songs, field hollers, and spirituals of American slaves, we can hear the rhythm of their labor, the pain in their bodies, and the undying hope in their souls.

After emancipation, black Americans were finally given control of their own lives and were free to travel from the plantations that had held them hostages for centuries. They were no longer simply part of a labor force, now they were individuals free to pursue their own version of the American dream, and this change can be heard in their music as well. In contrast to the large group songs of the past, a new, personal kind of music emerged – the blues. The same elements of singing, rhythm, and soul were present, but they manifested themselves in the singing and playing of a single person. The blues is the sound of freedom.

But that freedom, unfortunately, wasn’t all it was cracked up to be. Though blacks were now legally free, the economics of the south forced many back to the same fields that they had been toiling in for generations. The frustrations of this new economic slavery, called sharecropping, can also be heard in the blues.

After the turn of the century, these bad economic conditions, combined with other factors like the mechanization of farming, the need for industrial laborers during the world wars, and natural disasters like the boll weevil infestation and the Great Mississippi flood of 1927, forced many blacks north during what is known as the Great Migration. Where once African-Americans were a predominantly rural people, they now became largely urban. This shift is audible in a new type of gritty, electrified blues which emerged in places like Chicago, and it embodied the challenges of this new urban lifestyle. Even as blacks fought for legal equality and their rightful place in society during the 1950s and 60s, that struggle can be heard in the blues of artists like Etta James and Jimi Hendrix. The blues, therefore, is the soundtrack of black America, with all its ups and downs, tribulations and triumphs.

In previous years, we have examined the history and the geography of the blues, but tonight we look at the men and women that helped shape this musical art form - the “Heroes of the Blues.” By looking at these men and women, the struggles that they overcame, and the music they created, we can better appreciate our history, our culture, and ourselves. Their contributions to our music and our culture should not be forgotten, and tonight we honor them.

The original heroes of the blues were the millions of slaves that toiled in the hot Mississippi sun hundreds of years ago. The blues was likely born in the Mississippi Delta, a shared floodplain of the Mississippi and Yazoo rivers in the northwestern corner of the state, which contained some of the richest soil on earth. By the late 18th century, it was filled with cotton plantations and thousands of slaves. The blues sprang from the spirituals, field hollers and work songs that were the sounds of these American slaves. While working on southern plantations, slaves often sang as a means of coping with unbearable conditions, synchronizing their labor, or communicating with each other. Many of these songs were often sung in a “call and response” style, where one slave would sing the lead and the group would answer. Many historians believe that the lyrics to many of these songs had double meanings, or messages hidden within the songs. The spiritual, “Wade in the Water” is one such example, where escaping slaves were encouraged to travel along river banks to cover their tracks and their scent from slave hunters.

**“Wade In the Water”**

Though the blues likely developed in the Mississippi Delta sometime in the late 19th century, no country bluesman was recorded until the 1920s. One of the first recorded and most prolific of the early bluesmen was Blind Lemon Jefferson.

**Student Report on Blind Lemon Jefferson by Tony Kloss**

**Read by Dominic Davis**

**Introduce: Ollie Grcich – vocals**

**Megan Dalton – congas**

**Annie Warner – organ**

**Blind Lemon Jefferson – “See That My Grave Is Kept Clean”**

Our next hero of the Blues is John Lee Hooker. Born to a sharecropping family in the Mississippi Delta, John Lee Hooker first heard the blues from legends like Charley Patton and his stepfather, Will Moore. Like so many blacks in the early 20th century, Hooker left the Delta during the Great Migration and moved north looking for better job opportunities in northern factories and an escape from the prevalent racism of the south.

He landed in Detroit in the 1940s working as a janitor in the automotive plants in the motor city by day and playing the blues at house parties by night. Hooker developed a recognizable blues style which was built on a hypnotic boogie rhythm and a low, almost spoken word, vocal delivery. He was discovered by record store owner, Bernie Besman, and his first single, “Boogie Chillen,” was released in 1948, hitting #1 in the R&B charts. The song today is recognized as a major influence on the development of rock and roll.

Unfortunately for Hooker, Besman listed himself as a co-writer of the song, claiming a portion of the royalties, a practice that was sadly commonplace in the recording industry at the time as a way of exploiting black artists. Hooker tried to make up for this lost revenue by recording slightly different versions of his songs with other record companies under various pseudonyms, like “John Lee Booker” or “Johnny Lee.” But by the time he recorded “Dimples” in 1956, Hooker had become a bon-a-fide star, scored an honest recording deal with Gary, Indiana’s Vee-Jay records, and had become a hit making machine. “Dimples” is a genuine hooker classic - one of his best known and most covered songs.

**Introduce: Jacob Labelle – vocals**

**Elise Lee – organ**

**Luke Brown – Drums**

**Caleb Owens – tambourine**

**Nelson Keaton – harp**

**John Lee Hooker – “Dimples”**

When you think of Jimi Hendrix, bluesman is probably not the first thing to come to mind, but upon close examination, it becomes obvious that blues was the heart and soul of his music. Hendrix was first exposed to the blues through his father’s extensive record collection while growing up in Seattle. These 45s of blues greats like Muddy Waters, BB King, and Guitar Slim laid the musical foundation that he would build on, and inspired him to pick up the guitar. Hendrix enlisted in the service in 1961, and upon returning to civilian life, he moved to Tennessee with army buddy and bass player Billy Cox, and began to make a name for himself as a musician.

Over the next few years, Hendrix played guitar for several acts like Little Richard, the Isley Brothers, and Curtis Knight, and cut his musical teeth on the Chitin’ Circuit, a collection of southern venues that catered to black audiences and performers. It was while touring the American south that Hendrix experienced the blues first hand and began to incorporate more showmanship into his stage performances like playing the guitar behind his head or with his teeth, tricks that delta blues great Charley Patton had pioneered decades before.

Hendrix eventually grew tired of playing second fiddle for others and formed his own band, Jimmy James and the Blue Flames. Hendrix caught the eye of Chas Chandler, bass player for English band the Animals, and was taken to London to perform and record in 1966. With bands like the Rolling Stones, Cream, and the Who all gaining attention by playing American blues, London was the perfect place for Hendrix to make his breakthrough. His live shows often featured songs by BB King, Howlin Wolf, and Muddy Waters, but like a true bluesman, Jimi always made them his own. One of the first to utilize guitar effects, Hendrix painted with a broad sonic pallet wringing every last bit of emotion out of his instrument. Expressing yourself through music is what the blues is all about, and there was none better than Jimi Hendrix.

**Introduce: Chad Clifford – vocals**

**Bobby Shaffer-Murray – bass**

**Rocco Calipari – guitar**

**Scott Shultz – drums**

**Jimi Hendrix – “Bleeding Heart”**

If you could pick one hero of the blues, it would probably have to be William Christopher Handy, sometimes called the “Father of the Blues.” He published one of the first blues songs, “The Memphis Blues” in 1912, and thanks to the popularity of his compositions, he legitimized the genre, turning what was regional folk music into an international phenomenon. His most famous song, “St. Louis Blues,” published in 1914, became a worldwide sensation, and was even said to have been Queen Elizabeth II’s favorite song. As a result of its overwhelming success, Handy created a demand for the blues nationwide, opening the doors for many black singers and composers in the years that followed.

Handy, unlike most African Americans at the time, was born into a financially stable and well educated household, thanks to his father being a prominent minister. Given music lessons at a young age, Handy learned to read and write music, and finally settled on the cornet as his main musical instrument. He worked as a teacher for a while, but after realizing there was little money in the profession, he moved on to become a band director, touring the country with various orchestras, bands, and minstrel groups.

**Introduce: Ava Massarella – vocals**

**Blaise Sellers – violin**

**Gianni Pupillo, Jacob Labelle, Mikey Nieto**

**Olivia Froelich, Kylee Sorenson, Nicole Garcia – background vocals**

**WC Handy – “St. Louis Blues”**

The success of W.C. Handy spawned a plethora of blues recordings in the early 1920s. Most of the first recorded blues songs featured women vocalists with either piano or orchestral accompaniment.

Many of these blues women were quite good, but one was head and shoulders above the rest - Bessie Smith. Earning the title “Empress of the Blues,” Bessie was the most popular female singer of her era, performing on film, Broadway, and in tent shows across America.

Orphaned by the time she was eight, Bessie Smith spent her early years singing on street corners with her brother, before joining a traveling minstrel show and touring the south throughout her teen years. She gained a following and was asked to record for Columbia Records in 1923. Sales of her first record “Downhearted Blues” jumped through the roof, and she went on to record over 160 others in the next decade, becoming the most famous blues singer of the era. Her traveling show drew people from all over the country, and she was a complete entertainer – she told jokes, danced, acted, pantomimed, and sang with maybe the most powerful voice of all time.

And her personality was as commanding as her voice. Once during show in North Carolina, Bessie was informed that the KKK members were outside trying to pull up the stakes of her tent. She marched outside and personally drove away the Klansmen, who knew better than to put up a fight. Bessie Smith died in a car accident in 1937, but her legacy continues to impact musicians to this day.

**Introduce: Rachel Crookston – vocals**

**Judy Benham – piano**

**Bessie Smith – “Downhearted Blues”**

Out of all the delta bluesmen, there was none more influential than Robert Johnson. Johnson began as a mediocre musician at best, but after his young wife and child died during childbirth, he disappeared for a year only to come back a guitar virtuoso. This amazing turnaround led many to believe that he sold his soul to the devil at the crossroads in exchange for his musical ability, a legend that Johnson referenced often and never disputed. He spent the next few years on the move, claiming there were hell hounds on his trail. Many times hitchhiking through several states, he’d play at small country bars called juke joints, on street corners, and wherever else he could. Apparently the hounds finally caught up with him, and Johnson was poisoned while playing in a juke joint in Mississippi, presumably by a jealous husband. Like so many other musical greats like Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, and Jim Morrison, he died at the age of 27.

**Introduce: Chris Zart – guitar and vocals**

**Eric Hess – bass**

**Robert Johnson – “Crossroads Blues”**

Though not technically at *the* crossroads, 2120 Michigan Avenue in Chicago was the home of one greatest blues record labels in history. Founded by two polish immigrants, Chess records became a mecca for some of the greatest blues artists in the fifties and sixties. Muddy Waters was their first breakthrough artist, and after him came legends like Little Walter, Howlin’ Wolf, Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, Etta James, and more. The success of Chess records would not have been possible, however, without the genius of Willie Dixon. Dixon was a jack of all trades at Chess, writing songs, producing, playing bass, recruiting new talent, arranging music – you name it, he did it. He was the man behind the scenes who wrote many of today’s best known blues songs, and played stand-up bass on almost all of the classic Chess records. In the 60s, he assembled an all-star blues band and spread the blues throughout Europe. Numerous bands like the Allman Brothers, the Stones, the Doors have recorded Willie Dixon songs, unfortunately, sometimes without Dixon credit for authorship. In fact, Willie Dixon had to sue Led Zeppelin in court to receive royalties for songwriting contributions to “Whole Lotta Love” and “Bring it On Home.” In his later years, he founded the Blues Heaven Foundation, housed in the old Chess building on Michigan Ave., to preserve the legacy of the blues and help blues artists fight for the back royalties and compensation that they deserve. This next song written by Dixon became a top ten hit for Johnny Rivers in 1965.

**Introduce: Nelson Keaton – harp**

**Gianni Pupillo – vocals**

**Dylan Ovanek – guitar**

**Paige White – piano**

**Soren Dekock – tambourine**

**Kylee Sorenson, Nicole Garcia, Macy Thompson, Olivia Froelich – background vocals**

**Willie Dixon –“Seventh Son”**

Born in the Delta, Chester Burnett, better known as “Howlin’ Wolf,” first heard blues greats Charley Patton and Robert Johnson in person, and their influence can easily can be heard in his music. In fact, it was Patton who first showed him how to play the guitar. At 6’6”, 300 pounds, Wolf was a giant of a man who definitely left his mark on the blues. Wolf was first recorded at Sun Studios in Memphis, Tennessee by Sam Phillips. Phillips would later call Wolf the most talented of all his musical finds, which is saying something coming from the man who discovered Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash and Jerry Lee Lewis. After his initial success, Wolf was signed to Chess Records and relocated to Chicago in the early 50s. A proud man, Wolf was frugal with his money and didn’t take handouts from anyone. Unlike many Chicago bluesmen, he passed on the Cadillacs that were given out by Chess to their artists, preferring to drive his own beat-up automobile. He kept careful records of his finances, and to help him better understand the business side of things, he returned to school in his forties to get his GED, and later took accounting courses as well. During set breaks in rowdy Chicago clubs while the rest of his band members were dancing and socializing, Wolf could be found sitting a table, books open, doing his homework. Next to Muddy Waters, there was no greater Chicago bluesman, and he has influenced musicians around the globe. Eric Clapton even paid homage to Wolf, one of his musical heroes, by buying the headstone for his grave outside of Chicago.

**Introduce: Luke Brown – guitar**

**Sam Disney – organ**

**Megan Dalton – cowbell**

**John Miller and BF horns**

**Howlin’ Wolf –“ I Ain’t Superstitious”**

No black cats haunted our next hero, who had his own way of howlin'. Charley Patton, known as the “Father of the Delta Blues,” was one of the first recorded bluesmen, and one of the most influential blues performers of all time. Learning the guitar on Dockery Plantation in 1908, Patton developed a unique and impassioned performance style. His guitar playing was incendiary and percussive, and he was known to beat and slap his instrument to illicit all sorts of drum like sounds while he played. He was only 5’5”, but his gravelly voice was powerful enough to project 500 yards when he played outdoors. People from all around the Delta would come to see him play, and he never disappointed. His showmanship was unparalleled, and he would impress the crowds by playing guitar behind his back, on his knees, or behind his head, performance tricks that Buddy Guy and later Jimi Hendrix would also utilize.

One of Patton’s most famous songs is “High Water Everywhere” about the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927, the largest and most devastating river flood in American history. 249 people were killed as flood waters rushed across parts of ten states, destroying homes, farms, and livelihoods. In the aftermath, southern blacks were often forced at gunpoint to rebuild levees or starved in refugee camps. Many sharecropping families lost what little they had in the flood, and decided to join the great migration north to start over in cities such as Chicago, Detroit, or St. Louis. Patton saw the destruction first hand and his visceral performance brings the event to life.

**Introduce: Fruteland Jackson – guitar/vocals**

**Charley Patton – “High Water Everywhere, pt. 1”**

Speaking of waters, the story of McKinley Morganfield, or “Muddy Waters,” is a microcosm of the development of the blues. Raised on Stovall’s plantation in the Mississippi Delta, he spent his youth working the same cotton fields that hundreds of slaves had occupied for more than a hundred years. He grew up singing field hollers and work songs and learned to play the guitar from delta master, Son House. Mastering the bottleneck slide, Muddy’s playing was firmly rooted in the delta tradition and recalled shades of Robert Johnson and Charley Patton.

When Alan Lomax was traveling the American south recording folk music for the Library of Congress, he received a tip about Muddy’s talent and showed up right outside his small shotgun shack to record the future blues legend. Those first recordings gave Muddy the confidence he needed to try and pursue his musical career.

He migrated north to Chicago in the 1940s, getting a job as a truck driver in the day and playing in clubs at night. What really set Muddy apart from the rest however, was his electrified sound. He played the same down-home blues of his forbearers, but to be heard over the hustle and bustle of urban Chicago, he plugged in his guitar and began to set the city on fire. He caught the attention of Chess records, and together they constructed gritty, raw, urban sound that was full of confidence and swagger, a sound later to be christened the “Chicago Blues.”

Muddy's success helped build Chess Records into the premiere blues record label in the country and laid the foundations for Rock and Roll. Even the Rolling Stones took their name from a Muddy Water’s song. Muddy Waters is a 6 time Grammy winner, rock and roll hall of famer, and was listed by Rolling Stone Magazine as the 17th greatest artist of all time. He is remembered today as the “Father of the Chicago Blues.”

**Introduce: Alexis Gonzales – vocals**

**Ben Nielsen - Guitar**

**Kenny Thurman – Bass**

**Declan Murray –Drums**

**Nelson Keaton – harp**

**Muddy Waters –“40 Days 40 nights”**

**Student report on Memphis Minnie by Rachel Shultz**

**Read by Grace Hathaway**

**Introduce: Eddie Guess – bass**

**Maddy Wellman – vocals**

**Memphis Minnie –“In My Girlish Days”**

One of Blind Lemon Jefferson’s close friends and musical partners was Huddie Ledbetter, better known as “Lead Belly.” Lead Belly had a violent temper and a long history with the law, serving time for brandishing a firearm, attempted homicide, and murder. In 1918, while in Dallas, Lead Belly was sentenced to thirty years in prison for killing a man in a fight. After serving only seven years of his sentence, he wrote a song to the governor, Pat Neff, asking for a pardon. Neff had run for governor on the claim that he would never pardon a prisoner, but was so impressed with Leady Belly’s song that he relented and set him free. Later, while serving time in a Louisiana prison, this virtuoso musician was first discovered my musicologists John and Alan Lomax.

By this time, Lead Belly was a master of the 12-string guitar, piano, accordion, and harmonica; he could play just about anything he could put his hands on. Though he was firmly planted in the blues, Lead Belly was not limited by it. He utilized folk, country, and pop styles to write songs about a plethora of subjects, many of which have gone on to become standards in American popular music.

In the 1940’s, Lead Belly moved to New York and became close friends with folk legends Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger, lending his voice to social causes around the nation. His popularity grew throughout the decade and in 1949, Lead Belly traveled across the pond, becoming the first country bluesman to tour Europe.

Lead Belly was probably the greatest black songwriter in American history. His catalogue has become legendary in American popular music. Songs first recorded by Lead Belly like “Rock Island Line,” “House of the Rising Sun,” and “Where Did You Sleep Last Night,” have all been covered numerous times by acts from Johnny Cash to Nirvana. His most famous song, however, is “Goodnight Irene,” a song that, thanks to a recording by the Weavers, rose to #1 in the pop charts in 1950, only a year after his death.

**Introduce: Nate Kaufman – guitar/vocals**

**Woody Weisler – guitar**

**Jack Thorne – piano**

**Lead Belly –“Goodnight, Irene”**

As one music critic said, “There's simply no sound in the blues as easily digestible, accessible, instantly recognizable and as easy to play and sing as the music of Jimmy Reed.” Born in the Delta, he migrated north in his 20s, working at a Gary meat packing plant for several years before breaking on to the Chicago Blues scene in the early 50s. He was never flashy, but his incessant grooves and catchy hooks had instant appeal to white audiences. In fact, Reed had more hits and crossover success than any other bluesman of his day. While most successful blues artists might score a handful of hits on the R&B charts, Jimmy Reed landed 12 songs on the *pop* charts between 1956 and 1963. His songs demonstrate a “less-is-more” approach to the blues, and they are some of the easiest to sing and play. While Reed’s musical simplicity was shunned by blues critics, rock n’ roll welcomed him with open arms; his songs have been covered by Elvis, Van Morrison, and The Rolling Stones.

**Introduce: Kathryn Jankowski – vocals**

**Michael Gerry – vocals**

**Maddie Ross – bass**

**Bella Gonzales – guitar**

**Miya Litke-Adams –piano**

**Jimmy Reed – “Bright Lights Big City”**

Though not born in the big city, our next hero's lights shine brightly - there is no performer who has done more to spread the blues than the “Ambassador of the Blues,” B.B. King. Riley B. King was born on a Mississippi plantation, and his mother and grandmother died before his eleventh birthday. He had a reputation as a hard worker, and was milking 20 cows a day by age 6. As a teen he was trained in music by his preacher, who told him that playing the guitar was “another way of expressing Gods love.”

As he got older, he decided to leave Mississippi and move to Memphis to live with his cousin, bluesman Bukka White. Here King was trained in the fine art of the blues and was inspired to pursue his musical dreams. He spent time learning from his cousin and honing his skills on Memphis’s famed Beale Street. King got his first break at Memphis’s WDIA, America’s first all black radio station, when, after persistent pestering, he was given a 10 minute radio show called “Kings Spot.” His popularity soared and Riley christened himself the “Beale Street Blues Boy,” which he later shortened to simply “BB.”

BB made his first record in 1949, and has continued to do so over the last sixty years. He has developed a distinctive sound with powerful vocals, velvety guitar lines, and slick horn sections. He has chalked up 7 Grammys, is a rock and roll hall of famer, and has played in the white house for three different presidents. Now 86 years old, BB King is still on tour most nights of the year, spreading the blues all across the world, and on most of those nights you can still hear him play this classic, “How Blue Can You Get.”

**Introduce: Luke Brown – guitar**

**Chad Clifford – vocals**

**John Miller – sax**

**BB King – “How Blue Can you Get”**

**Student report on JB Lenoir by Justus Thomas**

**Read by Ben Staples**

**Introduce: Ben Massarella – congas**

**Justus Thomas – slide guitar**

**Tim Bell – vibra-slap**

**Mikey Nieto, Jacob Labelle - Background Vocals**

**Michael Gerry - Organ**

**Nelson Keaton – harp**

**JB Lenoir – “Down in Mississippi”**

Lee Conley Bradley, better known as Big Bill Broonzy, was born in the Mississippi Delta around the turn of the century, though he spent most of his early years sharecropping just across the river in Arkansas. His first instrument was the violin, which he learned to play at the age of 10 on a homemade fiddle constructed from a cigar box. When WWI hit, he was drafted into the army and spent two years fighting in Europe. Broonzy expected that his time in the service would have earned him more respect from the whites in his hometown, but upon returning home in 1919, all he found was the same racial slurs that he had received before.

He decided to migrate north to Chicago in search of a better life and picked up the guitar. Though he held down various day jobs, his real passion was for music and he spent the next few years honing his guitar skills and playing at local clubs. Broonzy developed a very melodic and precise guitar style that combined an intricate finger-picking technique with pulsating rhythms creating an almost ragtime feel. By the 1930, he his sophisticated guitar style had caught on with city audiences, and he began recording for Paramount. Also a gifted songwriter, Big Bill released a steady stream of successful music through the thirties and forties, which included the immortal “Key to the Highway,” now a blues standard.

His real impact, though, came in the 1950s when he was invited to tour Europe as part of a traveling folk music revue, and English audiences flipped for him. He toured extensively over the next few years, spreading the blues throughout Europe, and inspiring countless English guitarists in the process. Ronnie Wood has been quoted as saying that Broonzy’s guitar playing in this next song is his all-time favorite guitar music.

**Introduce: Sherri Nord – Stand up bass**

**Joe McKewan – vocals**

**Big Bill Broonzy – “Hey Hey Baby”**

Our next hero of the blues spent most of his life as a sharecropper and fisherman in the hill country of north Mississippi, playing music only as a hobby in the evenings at juke joints and local bars. RL Burnside was first inspired to play the guitar after hearing John Lee Hooker’s debut single, “Boogie Chillen” and subsequently developed a similar rhythmic and hypnotic style of guitar playing. Though he recorded a few songs in the 1960s and the 1980s, he didn’t have much commercial success and seemed content to work the fields and raise his family.

But after appearing in a 1992 documentary by Robert Palmer called *Deep Blues*, Burnside’s career took off. He was signed to Fat Possum records and teamed up with the Jon Spencer Blues Explosion to release several critically acclaimed albums gaining the attention and praise of such rock icons like Bono and Iggy Pop, as well as embarking on a nation-wide tour. He was in his mid-sixties by this point, but he had finally made it. Though he died in 2005, his music is still as powerful as ever, inspiring bands like the Black Keys who not only have covered Burnside’s songs, but cite him as a major influence on their sound.

**Introduce: John Miller – vocals**

**Ben Massarella – congas**

**Soren DeKock – tambourine**

**RL Burnside – “Po Black Maddie”**

**Student report on Etta James by Kylee Sorensen**

**Read by Emma Ault**

**Introduce: Julia Dooley – vocals**

**Gabby Doeling – guitar**

**Caleb Owens – drums**

**Ethan McChristian – organ**

**Amber Tan - Piano**

**Emma Schlottman, Anglea Harrington, Ellie Melin, Laura Fraine, Veronica Mockus, Allie Iseminger, Taesa Stock, Journey Jackson - Background Vocals**

**Horns – Conducted by John Miller -sax**

**Katherine Gray – sax**

**Ben Kroeger – trumpet**

**Gianni Pupillo – trumpet**

**Maddy Wellman – trombone**

**Evan Schlottman – trombone**

**Etta James – “I’d Rather Go Blind”**

James “Yank” Rachell, born in Brownsville, Tennessee in 1910, was one of the elder statesmen of the blues and one of very few to use the mandolin as their primary instrument. Yank often told the story of how he started on the instrument. When he was eight, his mother gave him a pig to raise for butchering in the fall. One day, while walking down the road with his pig, Yank heard a neighbor on his front porch playing a mandolin. He was fascinated by the sound and was so interested in it that the man offered to sell it to him for $5. When Yank explained that he didn’t have $5, the man said he would take the pig in trade. Yank didn’t think twice, and came home happily banging on the instrument. Later that fall when it was time for butchering, his mother began questioning him about the pig, and with great reluctance he finally divulged that he had traded it for the mandolin. His mother said, “Well, next fall when we get the next pig butchered, we’ll sit around the table eating pork, and you can eat that thing.”

Yank never had to eat his mandolin, and actually matured into a fine mandolin picker. He began playing around Brownsville at parties and fish fries, and soon relocated to Memphis, playing in jug bands and finding a musical partner in guitarist Sleepy John Estes. Together, these two played up and down Beale Street in Memphis and recorded for various labels. Later, Rachell also teamed up with Sonny Boy Williamson and spent time touring and recording in Chicago.

In the 1950’s, Rachell relocated to Indianapolis where he spent the last few decades of his life. He got some national attention during the blues revival of the 1960s, but most of his later years were spent in Indy playing regularly at the Slippery Noodle Inn and passing on the legacy of the blues. Though Rachell received little financial compensation for his musical contributions throughout his life, when the Blues Brothers used his song “She Caught the Katy,” about the Kansas-Texas railroad, to open their film, Yank finally got some much needed monetary relief. BB King was a big fan and once said, “It's people like you that made people like me possible.”

**Introduce: Nerissa Siwietz – guitar**

**Mikey Nieto – vocals**

**Jacob Kuiper – piano**

**John Miller – sax**

**Austin Pittman – trumpet**

**Peter Fink – trombone**

**Nelson Keaton – harp**

**Yank Rachell – “She Caught the Katy”**