

Kitchener blues legend was 'bigger than life' but was humble to the core



Now  
**HEAR**  
This!

**Errol's can't-miss list:**

**1 Halleluyah!** That's what you might be shouting when the band of the same name deliver their "urban/blues/psychedelic experience" at Grossman's tonight. 8 p.m. 379 Spadina Ave. 416-977-7000

**2 The Ron Davis Trio** will be joined by some musical friends when they play the Home Smith Bar in the Old Mill Inn tonight and tomorrow. 8 p.m. \$12. 416-236-2641.

**3** Blues fans should check out **Paul Reddick and The Gary Kendall Band** when they play Hollywood on The Queensway Sunday. 4:30-9:30 p.m. 1184 The Queensway. 416-251-0288.

# B.B., Buddy ... and Mel

The late legendary bluesman Mel Brown often described drummer Jimmy Boudreau as playing like he was standing on his drum stool and screaming at everyone to shut up and listen.

"Well, I want to stand on my drum stool and scream right now that everyone needs to stop and realize he's gone," Boudreau says he wrote in his journal the morning after Brown passed away.

"That we'll never hear that rough growl and slow cadence that made his voice so dramatic. That we'll never get to play *Goin' Down Slow* or *You're the One* or *Hey Joe* with him ever again. But, I can't do that because life goes on and right now I hate that phrase."

The Mississippi-born Brown passed away in his adopted hometown of Kitchener two weeks back. He was 69. His funeral will be held tomorrow at 1 p.m. at the Gig Music

Hall, 137 Ontario St. in Kitchener. The service will be available online at the free streaming service popularminority.com.

"You know, all the s--t in those stupid e-mails your friends send you to 'Live for the moment' or how 'You should tell someone how you feel about them because there may not be another chance?' " Boudreau asks.

"Well, I did all that and I still miss him not 18 hours after he passed."

Aside from raving about Brown's skills, Boudreau says the guitar slinger was one of the most humble cats in the business.

"If he was here right now, he'd hate the fact that I was using a public forum to talk about him," Boudreau says.

"He was bigger than life and a superstar who never wanted to be one. All he wanted was to stand quietly in the cor-

ner, sipping some corn liquor, and enjoy life as it unfolded around him at his pace."

Andrew Galloway, who signed Brown to his label, Electro-Fi Records, echoes Boudreau's sentiment.

"He was a humble, elegant and wise man," Galloway says. "His album, *Neck Bones & Caviar* won the (prestigious) W.C. Handy Award in 2000 for Blues Comeback Album

of the Year and instead of attending the gala award ceremony with me in Memphis, Mel was playing his regular weekly gig at Wally's Tavern in Guelph."

Brown was a bona fide blues legend who made his mark early in the game and ended up doing literally hun-

dreds of sessions for heavies such as Bobby Blue Bland, John Lee Hooker, B.B. King, Lightning Hopkins, Frank

Sinatra, Bobby Darin, Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings.

If we needed reminding that Brown was a giant of the blues, it happened last fall when Buddy Guy was playing at Circle in the Square in Kitchener.

"There's only three of us left now, Mel," Guy said from stage. "You, me, and B.B."

"I think Buddy Guy was referring to the fact that he, B.B. and Mel were the last original practitioners of that school and style of electric blues guitar playing," Galloway says.

"Though far better known

than Mel, both B.B. and Buddy held Mel in high esteem."

And so did guitar god Jimi Hendrix.

Galloway says that when Brown lived in L.A. in the '60s, he did a lot of session work and also played a regular Tuesday night gig at the Whisky A Go Go on the Sunset Strip.

"Hendrix arrived in L.A. to open for The Monkees on a tour in early 1967 and went to see Mel while waiting for the tour to start," Galloway says.

"After sitting and listening all night, Jimi left the club, but not before coming up to Mel and telling him. 'Man, you play good!'"

Not only would most guitarists put that on their resume, they'd make sure to tell everyone they met that Hendrix gave them props.

Not Brown.

"I'd known Mel about eight years before I heard that story

from someone else and he modestly confirmed it," Galloway says.

And what was his musical genius?

"I think he was the master of putting in the right note at just the right time in just the right place," Galloway says. "That skill served him well in all his years of sideman and studio work, and that sparse, lean, ultra soulful style became his trademark sound."

■ ■ ■

Donations can be deposited directly at any TD Canada Trust Bank to the Mel Brown Memorial Trust, Account 1952-6290076. Cheques payable to "Mel Brown Memorial Trust" can also be mailed to the Toronto Blues Society.

**Errol Nazareth's**  
**Rhythms N Rhymes column**  
**appears every Friday.**  
**Errol can be reached at**  
**errol.nazareth@sunmedia.ca**



**Errol Nazareth**  
**RHYTHMS N RHYMES**