

"BORN TO SING THE BLUES"

A Profile of Glenn Lane

by Opal Louis Nations

"I'm gonna keep on singing the blues 'til somebody hears me," says Glenn Lane. "Blues is runnin' in my blood and in my soul and can't nobody stop me." This kind of rugged determination has kept Lane going through a period of relative obscurity these past twenty-five years. With a voice which borrows color from **Little Milton Campbell** and **Albert King**, spiced with a pinch of Texas down home Pentecostal grit, dressed as the African American equivalent of Paladin of "Have Gun Will Travel" fame, Lane has excited audiences at home here in the San Francisco Bay Area and abroad.

"Glenn's vocals are dark and heavy. They smolder like left-over charcoal after a barbecue," stated *Blue Note Magazine* published in Lane's home town of Sacramento. Lane plays piano and organ like he was born with a keyboard in his hands, but standing up front, close to his audience and singing is what he enjoys doing the most.

Born in Beaumont, Texas on February 8, 1950, Lane grew up in a strictly religious but loving, caring family environment. One of nine brothers and sisters, Lane took to music at a very early age like a duck takes to water. Lane's father was pastor of Beaumont's Full Gospel Pentecostal Church and his mother (Lane's grandmother) officiated at the local Church of God in Christ, just two blocks from their home. Lane's brother, **Carl Welton**, is the only other

sibling to make music a profession. Welton sings country and country gospel, lives in Louisville, and has cut several albums in Nashville.

Lane was barely out of diapers when his father brought an eight foot grand piano into the home. Lane seized the chance to learn to play it and marked the keys with letters in pencil in order to remember the scales. But his brothers and sisters got into the act and their fooling around erased his markings. Lane devised a way to etch the ivories permanently. Taking a knife, he carved the letters onto the keys and inked them in to make them stand out. Lane's mother Jewel became furious but just the same could see just how determined her son was.

By his fifth birthday, Lane had learned to play quite well. It was strictly forbidden to play anything but gospel songs in the home. When Lane's father left the house, Lane would experiment with popular songs but just as soon as he heard his footsteps at the door, his noodling switched to gospel. One of Lane's first influences was **Maceo Woods**, singer, organ improviser, and pastor of The Christian Tabernacle Church on 47th and Prairie in Chicago. In 1953-'54, Woods' organ interpretation of "Amazing Grace" on Vee Jay Records swept the nation, becoming a best seller in the African American gospel community. Woods' long sustained notes, dramatic use of pitch, and full, rich chords caught Lane's imagination completely, so much so that he learned Woods' arrangement note for note.

Lane accompanied his father's choir down at The Full Gospel Pentecostal Church. But he could not get enough practice. Often he would gather bricks, sneak on down to the church, build up the bricks under an open window, and haul himself through the opening. Lane kept getting caught and was whipped with a switch each time. After six weeks of this, his parents saw there was no stopping the boy. They let him have his way. Soon Lane conducted and arranged music for and sang solo with the choir. Lane's father, after much harassment, took a trip to Houston and acquired a Hammond CV organ and Leslie speaker.

The Hammond CV was the precursor of the extremely popular B3 model. Both **Jimmy Smith** and **Ray Charles** became Lane's principal idols, and he picked up as many of their songs as he could. Lane never learned to read music properly, and he always played by ear. As a student at The University of Houston and at The North Houston Institute, Lane worked with choral groups but majored in electrical engineering. He married in 1970. In 1971, he and his wife moved to San Diego.

A year later he formed his first combo. They billed themselves as **Glenn Lane & The Blues**. During this period, he occupied the organ bench at Rev. Cooper's Church of God in Christ in the city. Gradually, his spiritual interests declined and his secular ones consumed more of his time. The Blues, comprised of "**Melvin**" on lead guitar, **Chuck Dawson**, drums, **Earl McGivens**,

electric bass, and Lane on vocals, organ, and piano, hung together for four years. The outfit played a mixture of soul tunes and straight blues at open air venues, festivals and clubs, most notably Rasputin's in downtown San Diego. Both the Elks and the Masons kept them working for a time.

Beside the band, Lane started up his own business, "Expert Electronics," located in National City just north of Chula Vista. Lane's wife, very much the homemaking, organza, kitchen, apron type, wanted him to settle down in a regular job. Being brought up amidst a fanatical Pentecostal family, she frowned upon the looseness of life on the road. Lane grew more determined to make it as an entertainer, and, as a consequence, his marriage fell apart.

In 1985, a year after his divorce, Lane pulled up stakes and moved to Sacramento where he formed another combo called **Soul of the Blues**, made up of **Al Arnett**, bass guitar, **Jerry Banks**, drums and percussion, **Richard Golde**, guitar, **Steve Gundhi**, flute, alto, tenor, and soprano sax, and Lane doubling on vocals, keyboards, and Hammond B3. Soul of the Blues was set up strictly to play blues as by this time Lane had a firm grip on where he wanted to go with his music.

Lane and the band worked local clubs and built a steady following. His reputation spread, and in 1990, Soul of the Blues was chosen to headline The Oroville Festival. (The guys were so popular they were invited back three times in a row.) After Oroville came an appearance at The Sacramento Blues Festival to which they were

invited back twice. In 1992, Lane and Soul of the Blues played The Medford Blues Festival in Oregon. An appearance on The Portland Waterfront Festival followed a year later. At this point, Lane felt himself ready to record, and he self-produced a short playing cassette entitled "Book of the Blues." The cassette opens with the deep sounding "Marry Me." Other standouts include "Hey Politician," a dark, murky ode to self-serving elected government officials. The original "Book Of The Blues," with its finely honed lyrics and sharply focused guitar licks plus the sensually pleasing "Don't Leave On Empty," a soothing confession of true love, contains fine organ runs and warm blooded sax fills from Steve Gundhi.

Lane took "Book Of The Blues" to Big Mike Balma at Have Mercy Records in Sacramento. Balma liked what he heard and expressed an interest in releasing the cassette and producing a full-length CD on Lane. Much to Lane's regret, he entered into a no document "gentleman's agreement" with Balma. Being new to the ways of the recording business, Lane, who wrote eleven of the fourteen songs included on his first CD release (entitled "Standing On The Edge Of The Blues"), did not receive any song writing royalties. "Standing On The Edge Of The Blues" is available in the United Kingdom through Red Lick Records.

Lane's supercharged yet smoky vocals come through on the title track as well as on an after hours arrangement of **Hoagy Carmichael's** "Georgia." The low-down revamped "Book Of The Blues," and "I'm Damn Lucky" plus a gos-

pel organ arrangement of "Allow Me To Come Home" that conveys a stylistic closeness to his hero of long ago - **Maceo Woods** round out the set.

Jim DeKostler's review of the CD in the April 1994 issue of *Living Blues* describes Lane as being able to cross easily over the (very) imaginary lines separating the blues from jazz, soul, pop, and funk. He concludes by saying that Lane possesses immense talent but needs to be a bit more fully synthesized with his influences. Be that as it may. The CD generated interest around the club scene. In Sacramento, the band played Blues la Rue, Malarkey's, Dodge City Inn, Rendezvous, and Broadway clubs plus a stint on the Mardi Gras Festival and a residency at Sam's Famous Hofbrau. Cable TV appearances on Channel 17 and 18, a gig at Barney's in Oroville and over at Mad Dogs & Englishmen in Nevada City spread the news.

Oakland venues included Your Place #2 and Sweet Jimmy's. In San Francisco the combo took to the lights at Grand & Green, Lou's on the Wharf, and Silhouettes. Most of Lane's new songs come to him while performing in concert. Lane married his second wife, Justine, in 1994. Justine is extremely supportive of Lane's work and never ceases to encourage him. "Every time he's down, I cook him up his favorite meal," says Justine jokingly. "Beans and chopped hot dogs over rice."

1995 was a big year for Lane. He made a trip to the Hawaiian Islands where he played on Maui and in Honolulu. Honolulu was an eye opener for him. It was the first time he was able

to hand pick and play beside a full brass section as part of the resident house band.

Eagle CD release, "Born To Sing The Blues," was put together down at APG Studios in Rancho Cordova. The entire collection came together in the making and was not planned down to the last note in prior rehearsals. "Born To Sing The Blues" was a completely shared experience between Lane and his fellow musicians.

Bobby Hamilton played drums, **Richard Brown** electric bass, **Terry "Big T" Jones** lead guitar, and **Rick "St. Louis Red" Martin** alto sax with Lane writing the material, producing, and laying down the vocals and keyboard charts. Brass parts were supplied by **Bobby Webb & co.** Background vocals were put together by the band. The thirteen-song "Born To Sing The Blues" compilation not only gets down with some solid, mean blues but swings to a larger, chunkier sound than "Standing On The Edge Of The Blues." Lane's voice appears to have strengthened and his licks seem more certain. Standouts include the title track on which Lane whoops and wails and lays on the anguish. The gospeling "My Story" explores the depths of desperation. It is as sad as any sad song can be. "Oowee Baby" is a **Jimmy Smith**-like romp into funky good-time blues. "Allow Me To Come Back Home" puts us back in the alley with churchy blues riffs focusing on a man being ousted from his own house. "I Wish I Never Met You" takes us back to the same dark and lonely place.

All in all, "Born To Sing The Blues" comes at you hard and strong. One wonders why a major label would not want to snap it up. The songs are first class and pro-



Glenn's breakthrough CD

duction values rate highly. At the moment, Lane has yet another CD project in the mix entitled "Can't Leave These Railroad Tracks." An advance promo cassette offers a glimpse of a tighter, tougher Glenn Lane with songs like "Stay Gone" and "Tonight I'm On Fire," both assisted by a sanctified female chorus and a fine, solid combo. One hopes that this will give Lane the clincher. He deserves more than he is presently getting. But failure to break the big time will not stop Lane. His strongest asset is his receptivity. He is continuously in the process of watching, listening, and learning. He loves company and enjoys traveling. He is looking forward to his first European tour but most of all has his heart set on playing the African continent.

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UPDATE:

Since the writing of this article, Glenn signed with Ice House Records of Memphis, TN, on December 6, 1996. The new CD on that label is entitled "Me And The Blues" and was released November 2, 1997. This CD was recorded at three different studios; Selective Frequencies of Sacramento, CA; Rocking Chair of Memphis, TN; and Sam Phillips Studio in Memphis, TN. Glenn has performed in many Southern cities and states this year such as Tulsa, Oklahoma, Checotah, OK, Wichita, Kansas, Mississippi, Kentucky, Memphis, TN, etc. Glenn also performed on stage with **Bobby Rush**, also performing that night was **Rufus Thomas**, in Earl, Arkansas. Bobby and Glenn spent a long time communicating and exchanging stories about the business and Glenn cherished the time spent with Bobby and didn't take lightly his words of encouragement.

- (Update courtesy of *Nut'n But 'Da' Blues, Memphis, Tennessee*)



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