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A limited number of Johnnie Whitlock CD's are now available!

[WolfTone Productions Homepage](#)



Johnnie Whitlock

Amazing Blues Caucus

Updated 01/24/99

Welcome to the

Johnnie Whitlock Memorial Website

What's New!

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About Johnnie Whitlock and the Blues Caucus

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Johnnie Whitlock passed away January 1st, 1998.

Johnnie Whitlock was born in Greensboro, NC and spent his formative years hitting the road and getting a solid blues and gospel education. He later chased the big time to NYC and after arriving there in the late '50s, made quite a name for himself belting out tunes for jazz greats **Count Basie** and the **Horace Silver Jazz Quartet**, to name a few.

After a career in psychology that drew him away from performing, Johnnie returned to North Carolina about three or four years ago. His renewed passion for music along with a top-notch veteran blues band has produced his first recording in years and *it is smokin !!* Strong original compositions by Johnnie as well as unique arrangements of cover material by Whitlock and the band demonstrate that *Johnnie Whitlock and the Amazing Blues Caucus* are an experience you don't want to miss!

Guitarist/Musical Director Max Drake has played with **Robert Cray**, **Mick Taylor** (of the Rolling Stones), **Johnny Copeland** and has recorded with **Nappy Brown**, **Lightning Wells** and **Big Boy Henry** to name a few. In his musical collaboration with Johnnie Whitlock, Max has put together a band capable of emotion and nuance. The *Blues Caucus* have developed a sound that

swings and rocks with tradition and raw authority, yet displays a unique sophistication that you won't hear elsewhere.

Aside from the superb musicianship backing Whitlock, it's Johnnie himself who really stands apart from others in the blues genre. His vocal style is one I might describe as impressionistic. The blues palette is vast and Whitlock paints each of his tunes with his own particular hues, and listening to him on stage, one might think he's composing right then and there. The turn of phrase and emotional intent of his gravel-tinged delivery gives the listener a solid certainty that Whitlock knows exactly what he's singing about, whether it's "let me rock you baby all night long" or extolling the virtues and sins of drinking gin.

Memorial Fund

If you would like to participate in the memorial fund established to assist Johnnie's family, contributions can be made to his daughter:

Stacy Whitlock
784 West Side Dr.
Gaithersburg, MD 20878
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Johnnie Whitlock *and the Blues Caucus*

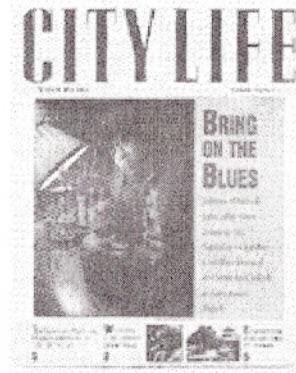
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Biography

My life with the blues

BY JOHNNIE WHITLOCK

Special to the Greensboro News & Record



As far back as I can remember, music has always been very much a part of my world, particularly my fantasy world.

When my peers spent their money on western or adventure movies, I watched musicals. For me, musicals were an outlet for my daydreams. I always fantasized about being somewhere else, and musicals always allowed me that outlet.

On Sunday mornings while getting ready for church, my parents listened to the Golden Gate Quartet and Wings Over Jordan Gospel Choir. That was a ritual in our home. As a young boy, that was always a very festive time.

During the week, though, blues artists -Muddy Waters, Billie Holiday, Bessie Smith, Lonnie Johnson and many others -- blasted away on our family's phonograph. For some reason, listening to the blues depressed me. Their music, by nature, was sad.

But you must understand, those songs were written during, or shortly after, very sad times. Many of the songwriters experienced -- very vividly -- lynchings, slavery, oppression and segregation. All of that came out in their lyrics and the soul of the ir music.

For that very reason, I try to keep a happy soul with the lyrics I write. Even as a young man in Greensboro, I had a very happy time with my upbringing, my teachers, my coaches, my neighborhood and my surroundings.

As a young man, I sang in the 4-H Club quartet. We sang mostly spirituals. I also sang in the high school dance band, The Rhythm Kids, when I attended Dudley High. It was all about fun. We sang and played anywhere -- sometimes for free.

In high school and college, my singing was more of a blend of pop ballads, jazz tunes or basically anything that made the top 10 list. We always arranged it in our own style because at the places we played people wanted to hear whatever was on top of the charts.

And even though I sang jazz and pop ballads, everyone around here still labeled me as "Mr. Blues." I never understood that.

But I've always loved the blues. The thing that's beautiful about the blues is that they are timeless in flavor, lyrics and sound. In other words, the blues you heard 10, even 20, years ago are just as popular -- and fresh -- today as when they came out.

Today, singing the blues is a very relaxing activity for me. In fact, when we're not playing, I get jittery. It's as if something very special is missing.

Johnnie Whitlock, 67, a retired public health administrator, now sings the blues for his own group, Johnnie Whitlock and the Amazing Blues Caucus, and writes such songs as "Wickit, Wickit Woman," with the crowd-pleasing verse, "Got me barking at the moon and chasing rabbits in the field."

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Interview

Jazzy blues on Johnnie Whitlock's new CD are sexy, fun

10-23-97

By JOYA WESLEY, Special to the Greensboro News & Record

In New York City in the early 1960s, one of the hottest young crooners in town was a kid from Greensboro, N.C.

He wasn't your ordinary singer -- the kind with nothing in his Marcellled head but good times and girls. This guy -- with a fresh psychology degree from N.C. A&T State -- was a therapist and graduate student by day.

By night, he packed all the clubs he played, largely because of a strong contingent of Aggies and Bennett Belles in the city. With a voice strikingly similar to that of jazz great Joe Williams, this singer was even offered Williams' old gig with the Count Basie Orchestra -- a gig that would have paid him \$100,000 a year.

He turned it down.

He later stopped singing altogether, committing himself instead to a long career as a public health administrator.

Today -- 36 years later -- he's singing again, drawing large crowds again and loving it.

His name is Johnnie Whitlock. And with his Amazing Blues Caucus, he's packing clubs throughout North Carolina.

Instead of a twentysomething crooner, he's now a 67-year-old bluesman. His new CD, "Ooh Aah," is a steady-rocking success that includes several of his own compositions alongside

some traditional favorites.

Just over a month after a release party at the Wild Magnolia Cafe, the CD is selling fast.

"I've sold four of these since I've been sitting here," Whitlock said during an interview at the Screaming Parrot Bar and Grill. "We're in the black now."

Whitlock and his band also are performing steadily. A card listing dates for the fall has more than 20 gigs, most in the Triad but some in the Triangle area and in Charlotte.

It's no wonder that Whitlock and his Amazing Blues Caucus are in demand. They're a group of serious musicians who crank out world-class blues music like they've been together for years.

"We're a tight group because we've got a good group of musicians," Whitlock acknowledges.

Whitlock designed it that way. He put together the Amazing Blues Caucus after finding that he didn't click with the first group with which he started singing blues in 1991.

"They were young and immature about the music business and very playful, and that's just not me," he says.

The Caucus features Max Drake on guitars, Steve Blake on saxophones, Bobby Kelly on bass (Chris Carroll and Chris Grant also play bass on the CD), David Clark on drums and vocals (Russ Wilson also plays drums on the CD) and Bryan Smith on guitar and vocals.

Drake and Blake produced the CD. Blake also contributed arrangements, as did Drake, who also wrote one of the tunes, "Your Momma (Is Always on My Mind)."

"It's a cute tune," Whitlock says.

It's one of those quintessential blues tunes with the kind of bizarre lyrics that help create an image of blues musicians as people who spend their days sitting around drinking "Tanqueray" (another tune on the CD) and their nights having one wild love affair after another. Throughout the CD, which features a jazzy brand of blues that highlights Whitlock's rich, crooner's voice, the lyrics are sexy and fun.

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Whitlock was in college at A&T, singing with some of his Dudley High School buddies in a band called The Allstars, when a Count Basie album featuring Williams was released.

"People were coming to me and saying, 'Man, do you have an album out?'" he recalled.

The Allstars played clubs throughout the Carolinas and Virginia, including the old El Rocco on East Market Street. The music was varied.

"When I was coming up we had a mixture of everything," he says. "Now everything is so categorized."

In New York, "I was doing the pretty ballads -- 'My Funny Valentine,' 'September Tune,' 'Our Love is Here to Stay,' 'Time After Time.'"

The Allstars included the likes of jazz drummer Danny Richmond.

"Danny Richmond was our tenor sax player, but he decided to play drums, and he became the lead drummer for Charles Mingus," Whitlock said.

Other members also became professional musicians, including Jimmy Davis, who was the lead keyboard player with the group LTD.

Whitlock, however, decided a musician's life wasn't for him.

He turned down the Basic job because he didn't want to be locked into something that would restrict his freedom.

"I said, 'Man, I may want to go home anytime. I'm a country boy,'" he recalled. "When I didn't take the job, everyone called me country from then on."

He also was given pause by stories of young, one-hit wonders from the South being slicked by unscrupulous managers who would hook them up with a Cadillac, pretty girls, parties, clothes and a Marcel hairdo, then leave them broke and broken.

"When I heard about all that kind of stuff, I said, 'Look, I've got a job. I don't have to go through all that.

"When I got my master's I just gave it up and committed myself to my work." He adds: "I never did all that stuff with my head. I wasn't into that."

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So, he went to Arthur's to hear a blues band play and ended up sitting in on a couple of songs.

The rest ... is blues history.

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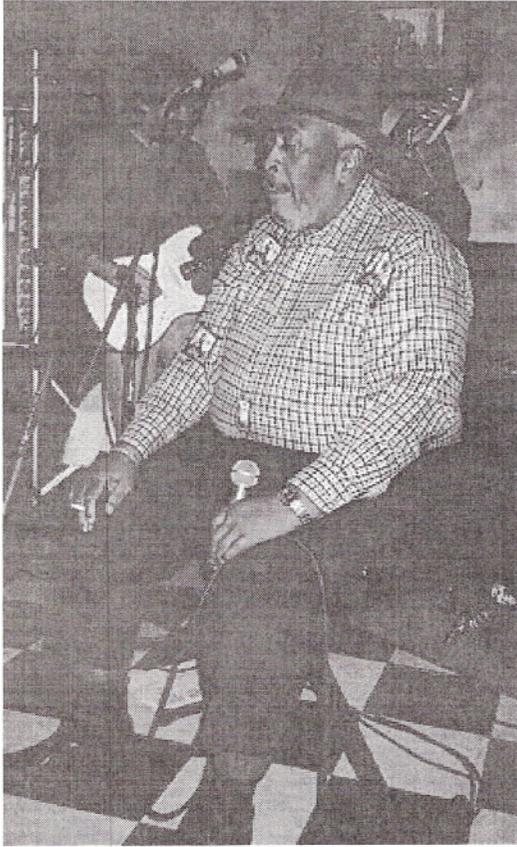
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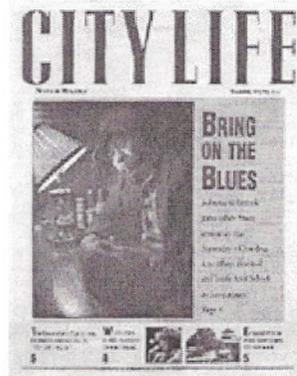
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Last Updated 04/20/00

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