

JAZZ & BLUES
F L O R I D A

FEBRUARY 2015



FLORIDA'S ONLINE GUIDE TO LIVE JAZZ & BLUES

**RIVERWALK BLUES FEST
ORGANIZER / BLUES DJ**

**DAR
LOPEZ**

PLUS...

SYL JOHNSON

PAT MARTINO

JOHN HAMMOND

VIJAY IYER TRIO

JOHNNY RAWLS

ANTONIA BENNETT

MISSISSIPPI HEAT

THE UNORTHODOX DUO

GRADY CHAMPION

MARCUS ROBERTS TRIO

JOSH HOYER & THE SHADOWBOXERS

TROMBONE SHORTY & ORLEANS AVENUE

RED BARAAT/DIRTY DOZEN BRASS BAND

IRVIN MAYFIELD & THE NEW ORLEANS ORCHESTRA



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DAR LOPEZ

by Bob Weinberg

WITH LESS THAN A MONTH TO GO BEFORE Fort Lauderdale's Riverwalk Blues Festival, event organizer Dar Lopez did the unthinkable: She skipped town. With an invitation to emcee stages on the Legendary Rhythm & Blues Cruise, Lopez and her husband, sound engineer and festival co-producer Gerardo Lopez, boarded a Caribbean-bound Holland America ship at Port Everglades, along with blues luminaries Taj Mahal, Bobby Rush and Charlie Musselwhite.

"We're trying to get as many things done before we leave as possible," says Lopez, who was pre-recording her *Sunday Blues With Dar* radio program a few days before embarking on the cruise in January. "For the most part, it's a week with no communication, which is kinda hard three weeks before a festival." Nonetheless, most of the hard work had been done, including the booking of Walter "Wolfman" Washington, Guy Davis, Seth Walker and Josh Smith, and a slate of South Florida's top blues talent, who will perform Feb. 14-15 at Esplanade Park.

This is the fifth Riverwalk Blues Fest under the Lopezes' stewardship, and both share a long history with the event, which celebrates its 25th anniversary this year. Lopez, who had been attending the festival since the early '90s, noticed that nobody was introducing the local bands performing on side stages. "They'd just go up and start playing," she says. "So I said, 'I'd be more than happy to give them a proper introduction.' And that's how I got involved in working with the festival."

Lopez had become close with Musicians Exchange owner and Riverwalk Blues Fest



founder Don Cohen, with whom her husband also worked. Before Cohen died of brain cancer in 2007, he asked the couple to keep his signature event going. While they started their festival tenure at The Downtowner Saloon, last year the Lopezes moved the event up the river to Esplanade Park. But the Downtowner will still play a role. The bar will host the Friday-night kickoff party, which will also serve as a CD-release party for South Florida blues giant Joey Gilmore's new album.

Among the first acts Lopez confirmed was country-blues great Guy Davis, who will play between acts on Saturday and hold down the main stage on Sunday. A masterful guitarist and harmonica player, Davis is also a captivating storyteller. Lopez is also excited to see the Wolfman once again, touting the guitarist's versatility as a New Orleans funk meister, blues sizzler and even a jazz player. She also raves about guitarist and vocalist Seth Walker's latest CD, *Sky Still Blue*, which bears producer Oliver Wood's roots-funk influence. And, of course, she continues to champion South Florida bands. This year's roster includes Albert Castiglia, JP Soars (who will also play a set with his Gypsy-jazz band), Rachelle Coba, Piano Bob's 88s with Bonefish Johnny, and blues vet Jeff Prine with three generations of blues singers — Juantia Dixon, Rita Willburn and Katt Riggins. Lopez will also welcome back her friend Josh Smith, who played the early Riverwalk fests as a teenager.

Some proceeds this year will go toward keeping the 21-year-old *Sunday Blues With Dar* on the air, while others will be donated to the Sean

DAR LOPEZ

Costello Fund. Named for the blues guitarist who died in 2008, the latter raises money for treatment of bipolar depression. Donations will also be collected for South Florida blues-rockers David Shelly, who's battling cancer.

More than just a chance to soak up sun and sounds, the blues cruise was a working trip for both Lopezes. One of Dar's only regrets was not being able to cheer on Miami's Iko-Iko at the International Blues Competition, which took place in Memphis while she was at sea. The band, who represented the South Florida Blues Society, will also be playing the Riverwalk. "I think Graham Drout is one of the best songwriters around, right up there with John Hiatt and John Prine," she says of Iko's longtime frontman. "We're just lucky he lives here."

South Florida blues fans can say the same about her.



Dar and Gerardo Lopez

The Riverwalk Blues Festival will take place 11am-11pm Feb. 14, and 11am-4pm Feb. 15 at Esplanade Park in downtown Fort Lauderdale. A kickoff party will take place at The Downtowner Saloon 8pm Feb. 13, and an after-jam will be held 11pm Feb. 14 at The Poorhouse. Visit Riverwalkbluesfestival.com.



FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 8:30PM

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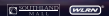
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Ticket Information:
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Mar 13: Coral Gables Blues Festival
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SYL JOHNSON
RITZ THEATRE, JACKSONVILLE/FEB. 7

Soul-blues giant Syl Johnson recorded some indelibly funky hits in the late-'60s and early-'70s, including "Different Strokes" "Is It Because I'm Black" and "Dresses Too Short." Recording for Willie Mitchell's Hi Records, Johnson was somewhat eclipsed by label mate Al Green, although he also had a hit with Green's "Take Me to the River" in 1975. A powerful singer with an ear for hooks, he continued plugging away on the Chicago blues scene. Johnson's riffs were picked up by the hip-hop community, and he's been sampled by everyone from the Wu-Tang Clan, who paid him willingly, to Kanye West and Jay-Z, who did not. He cut a fine 1994 album for Delmark, *Back in the Game*, as well as the 2002 disc



Two Johnsons Are Better Than One with his brother, bluesman Jimmy Johnson. Then in 2010, the Numero Group put out the six-LP, four-CD set *Complete Mythology*, which showcased Johnson's brilliance from his earliest singles. At age 78, Johnson still cuts a dapper figure and can funk out with the best of them. **WB**

THE UNORTHODOX DUO
OPEN STAGE CLUB, CORAL GABLES/FEB. 2

The Unorthodox Duo moniker fits vocalist SAMM and bassist Jamie Ousley like a bespoke suit. The singer uses her stage name as an acronym for Sharon Ann-Marie Mapp. And she's not predictably paired with a guitarist or pianist, but rather with upright bassist Ousley, who shades, accents and answers her warm, smoky delivery with just the right phrase every time. The singular nature of their artistry has been captured for posterity on the duo's new self-titled CD, and will be on full display during their Coral Gables concert, which serves as a CD-release party. For a preview, check out the YouTube video of the two performing "Whatever Lola Wants," a tune from the Broadway classic *Damn Yankees*



that was immortalized by jazz greats such as Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan. Ousley's bowed bass line incites a playful vocal by the West Palm Beach-based SAMM, and shows why the Miami bassist — who already has a handful of impressive solo CDs — is among the most in-demand session players in South Florida. **BM**

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Feb 22 Ave Maria Town Center, *Naples*
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Feb 27 Space 39, *Ft. Myers*
Feb 28 Englewood's on Dearborn, *Englewood*

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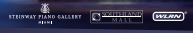
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VAN WEZEL HALL, SARASOTA/FEB. 11
STRAZ CENTER, FERGUSON HALL, TAMPA/FEB. 12
 More than any other American city, New Orleans produces musicians that spread its culture — and give back while paying it forward. It's a philosophy adhered to with religious fervor by 37-year-old native trumpeter Irvin Mayfield. "Jazz is the art form that speaks directly to the angels," he says. And his 18-piece New Orleans Orchestra certainly speaks distinctly and passionately. The group earned a 2010 Best Large Jazz Ensemble Grammy for its CD *Book One*, and its rotating cast features some of the best among a wealth of musicians in the Crescent City (including pianist Ellis Marsalis and drummer Jason Marsalis, on occasion). In addition to leading the orchestra through hometown-themed originals and standards — as well as tunes by Ray Charles and even Led Zeppelin — since 2002, Mayfield serves as Cultural Ambassador to the city and is an esteemed educator and nightclub entrepreneur. **BM**



Irvin Mayfield is a smiling man with a shaved head, wearing a dark suit jacket over a white shirt. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera.

JOHNNY RAWLS
ART'S GARAGE, DELRAY BEACH/FEB. 13
BRADFORDVILLE BLUES, TALLAHASSEE/FEB. 14
 Johnny Rawls is on a roll. The soul-blues vet has released a string of first-rate recordings over the past few years, including 2013's superb *Remembering O.V.* On that searing tribute album to his friend and mentor, O.V. Wright, Rawls called on his longtime running partner, Otis Clay, to sing with him on a few tracks. The old friends teamed up again for a full album, last year's *Soul Brothers*, and the results are predictably stellar. The pair showcase their distinctive vocals and personalities on a captivating set of songs, including Dave Mason's "Only You Know and I Know" and the Tyrone Davis staple "Turn Back the Hands of Time." Rawls and bassist/co-producer Bob Trenchard wrote standouts such as "Momma Didn't Raise No Fools" and "Living on Borrowed Time," and Clay chipped in on the autobiographical "Road Dog." One sizzling guitarist, Rawls has been thrilling audiences since he was a teenage hotshot in his native Purvis, Miss., where he still lives today. **BW**



Johnny Rawls is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark suit and a light-colored shirt with a patterned tie. He is singing enthusiastically into a microphone, with his mouth open and eyes closed.

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Their music may originate on disparate continents, but the sounds of Red Baraat and Dirty Dozen Brass Band translate to hips and booties everywhere. During this inspired mashup of horn-fueled rhythmic mayhem, Red Baraat's bhanga music — traditional party music of South Asia — will mingle with the Dirty Dozen's Mardi Gras madness. Led by drummer Sunny Jain, who was born to Punjabi parents in New York, Red Baraat takes its name from lively wedding processions in India. "Those Punjabi rhythms, and New Orleans rhythms based off the clave, are very much in the same pocket," the mustachioed frontman explains. Mixing Bourbon Street showmanship with hip-hop bravado, Jain drums on a shoulder-strapped dhol, and exhorts audiences to dance and shout along with his nine-piece band. Dirty Dozen is a New Orleans institution that's kept the parade rolling for 30-plus years. With original sax man Roger Lewis and trumpeter Gregory Davis, the Dozen, like Red Baraat,



blend traditional and up-to-the-minute brass band sounds. **BW**

**VIJAY IYER TRIO
OPPERMAN HALL, FSU, TALLAHASSEE/FEB. 6**

It's still early 2015, but pianist Vijay Iyer, 43, is making a strong case for "Artist of the Year." His latest CD, *Break Stuff* (ECM), with bassist Stephan Crump and drummer Marcus Gilmore, provides another example of the long-standing trio's brilliance. But the New York-born Iyer is also involved in other creative endeavors. He collaborated with filmmaker Prashant Bhargava and the International Contemporary Ensemble on the film *Radhe Radhe: Rites of Holi*, which displays his Indian ancestry through the country's springtime Holi celebrations. Iyer's soundtrack builds upon Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring" suite, and the music is as colorful as the visuals. The pianist also conducted a staggering



recent six-night, 12-set residency at The Stone in New York City, alternately playing with bassists Reggie Workman and Linda Oh, violist Mat Maneri, violinist Anjna Swaminathan, vocalist Imani Uzuri, percussionist DJ Val-INC, saxophonist Mark Shim, trumpeter Wadada Leo Smith, and his regular, ever-sympatico trio partners. **BM**

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S P O T L I G H T

TROMBONE SHORTY & ORLEANS AVENUE GARLIC FEST, OLD SCHOOL SQUARE PAVILION, DELRAY BEACH/FEB. 7

New Orleans-born Troy Andrews, the 29-year-old better-known as Trombone Shorty, appeared multiple times on the HBO series *Treme*. But he was certainly known around the Big Easy before, having grown up in the neighborhood for which the show was named. The 5'11" trombonist — he earned his stage name as a little kid toting a big horn — also released the critically acclaimed CDs *Backatown*, *For True* and *Say That To Say This*. Each displays his Crescent City upbringing, even when his rock influence showed through — Andrews toured with rocker Lenny Kravitz while still in his teens. With Orleans Avenue, the bandleader has assembled a



lineup capable of second-line or funk, rock or swing. Guitarist Pete Murano, bassist Michael Ballard, saxman Dan Oestreicher and drummer Joey Peebles will be on hand at Garlic Fest. The quintet's previous night's gig is at the Rock 'n' Roll Marathon in New Orleans, and it heads back the next night to play at the iconic Tipitina's. **BM**

JOHN HAMMOND TARPON SPRINGS PERFORMING ARTS CENTER/FEB. 15

LYRIC THEATER, STUART/FEB. 19 PONTE VEDRA CONCERT HALL (with Willie Green)/FEB. 20

Among the names enshrined at the almost-complete Blues Hall of Fame in Memphis is John Hammond, whose impassioned interpretations have earned him the honor. In March, Hammond will embark on a Blues Hall of Fame tour with James Cotton and Charlie Musselwhite. But for his Florida shows, Hammond will do what he's done best for more than 50 years — kick living hell out of acoustic and National Steel guitars, while furiously blowing racked harmonica and keeping time



with his stomping foot. At 72, Hammond's still got plenty of mojo, as evidenced by the 2014 solo live release *Timeless*. Here, he dives into favorites by Little Walter, Sleepy John Estes and Skip James, as well as tunes by his pal Tom Waits and even his own "Heartache Blues." The album, and the artist, have both been nominated for Blues Music Awards this year. **BW**

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S P O T L I G H T

GRADY CHAMPION
MUSIC PLAZA STAGE,
UNIVERSAL ORLANDO RESORT/FEB. 21
EARL'S HIDEAWAY, SEBASTIAN/FEB. 22

Grady Champion can play some old-school blues. But the harp-blowing Mississippian, who spent formative years in Miami, is not content to re-create the blues as it was played before. Instead, his sound reflects contemporary R&B and Southern soul for a mix that's at once classic and up-to-the-moment. And *Bootleg Whiskey*, Champion's 2014 debut album for the Malaco label, is a smooth blend that burns in the belly. From the jump, Champion displays a vocal with enough gravel to repave Highway 61. He can use that voice to shout out a party, as on the fingerpopping "Beg, Borrow, Steal," or



dive into the depths of the blues, as on the slowburning "Don't Waste My Time" — and even then he finds some humor, complaining to his woman, "You called me Bobby Rush, when you know Grady Champion is my name." With a 2014 cover feature in *Living Blues*, and raves for the new CD, Champion's name is becoming better known all the time. **BW**

ANTONIA BENNETT
ARSHT CENTER, MIAMI/FEB. 13
KRAVIZ CENTER, WEST PALM BEACH/FEB. 14
JAZZIZ NIGHTLIFE, BOCA RATON/FEB. 15
MARINA CIVIC CENTER, PANAMA CITY/FEB. 16

As the daughter of Tony Bennett, a decades-spanning jazz and pop icon, Antonia Bennett, 40, bears the weight of heavy expectations. Not that she doesn't have her own identity. In fact, the Berklee College of Music graduate's voice echoes elements of Billie Holiday, Jane Monheit and Rickie Lee Jones on her 2010 debut CD *Natural*, 2012's *Ordinary Girl* and 2014's *Embrace Me*. Bennett's performing career actually predates her discography. She's accompanied her father on-stage since childhood, and opened shows



for him, as well — as she'll be doing in Miami, West Palm Beach and Panama City. Quite naturally for a Bennett offspring, the singer's warm, expressive voice colors American Songbook chestnuts such as "Embraceable You" and "The Man I Love" on her latest CD. For her shows at Jazziz, she'll be accompanied by pianist Christian Jacob. **BM**

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PAT MARTINO
ARTIS, DANIELS PAVILION, NAPLES/FEB. 4

Every rising guitarist in jazz owes a debt to Pat Martino. After all, Martino helped to keep the electric guitar relevant in the genre past the fusion era (the late-'60s-to-mid-'70s), when the use of rock distortion caused some jazz artists to shun the instrument. The Philadelphia native's clean tones graced solo efforts during that time frame, plus releases by the likes of Sonny Stitt, Jack McDuff and Jimmy Heath. And they've continued into the 21st century through compelling live and studio CDs. Martino, 70, also overcame the unthinkable to display his current intricate, lyrical post-bop style. The gap between his 1976 album *Exit* and 1987 LP *The Return* was due to a brain aneurysm and surgery that left him



remembering almost nothing — including how to play the guitar. By listening to his own recordings, including *El Hombre* (1967), *Desperado* (1970) and *Joyous Lake* (1976), Martino returned to form. Artis listeners can expect material from those releases, plus more recent selections from 2013's Japanese release *We Are Together Again*. **BM**

JOSH HOYER & THE SHADOWBOXERS
THE HIGH DIVE, GAINESVILLE/FEB. 5
LOCAL 662, ST. PETERSBURG/FEB. 6
MEG O'MALLEY'S, MELBOURNE/FEB. 7
JACK RABBIT'S, JACKSONVILLE/FEB. 8

With powerful pipes that rival the likes of Boz Scaggs and Delbert McClinton, Josh Hoyer has been leading the six-piece Shadowboxers to great acclaim. The band emerged from Lincoln, Neb., of all places, and was nominated for a Blues Blast Awards Debut Album of the Year. They also came in second to Sharon Jones and the Dap-Kings on *The Roots Music Report's* Top 100 Soul Album Chart for 2014. All the fuss was for the group's self-titled first recording, which includes original songs that sound like they could've been ripped from 1970s



soul-music playlists. The bearded, tattooed frontman is genial and charismatic and also rocks keyboard. Hoyer and company have just released a new CD, *Living by the Minute*, which features their silky, brass-kissed sound, as well as driving soul funk. Touring behind the new slab, they'll light up Florida stages for a few dates this month. **BW**



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Mississippi Heat is a Chicago institution. Harmonica master Pierre Lacocque has led various incarnations of the band for almost 25 years, driven by a mission to present razor-sharp traditional Chicago blues. Having moved with his family to the Windy City in his teens, Lacocque intimately knows this music. After hearing Big Walter Horton, he decided to dedicate his life to the blues harp. While he took some time off — he's among the few blues players who formally studied theology — Lacocque remains at the helm of Mississippi Heat. In 2014, they released their 11th album, the outstanding



Warning Shot. As she has since 2001, powerhouse vocalist Inetta Visor fronts the band, which also includes veteran drummer Kenny Smith and guitarist and vocalist Michael Dotson. Lacocque's warm, gritty tone blows through it all, lending depth and texture to his evocative original songs. **BW**

MARCUS ROBERTS TRIO

FLORIDA THEATER, JACKSONVILLE/FEB. 20

The trio led by pianist Marcus Roberts is a blend of Southern musical personalities. A native of Jacksonville, Roberts cut his teeth by playing in the band led by New Orleans trumpet icon Wynton Marsalis while in his early 20s. And, since 1994, his drummer has been Wynton's youngest brother, 37-year-old Jason Marsalis. Bassist Rodney Jordan, a Memphis native, met Roberts after both became faculty members at Florida State University in Tallahassee, and joined his trio in 2009. The three have showcased a unique chemistry on releases like *New Orleans Meets Harlem, Volume 1* (2009) and *From Rags to Rhythm* (2013), and Roberts displays an uncanny touch. Largely eschewing modernity, he salutes heroes



such as Jelly Roll Morton, Scott Joplin and Fats Waller, to whom he's recorded tributes, and favors composers such as Ellington and Gershwin. Having lost his sight at age 5, Roberts then attended the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind in St. Augustine — the same educational facility that Ray Charles once attended. **BM**



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