

Hubert Sumlin Passes

Written by Pat Graham

Friday, 09 December 2011 07:26 - Last Updated Wednesday, 27 March 2013 01:37

Blues Blast Magazine - **RIP Hubert Sumlin** - November 16, 1931 to December 4, 2011

We lost another Blues legend this week with the passing of Hubert Sumlin. Hubert made his mark with his unique guitar playing as the long time guitarist for Howlin' Wolf.

His health has been failing for the last couple years. When we attended the 2010 Chicago Blues Fest Hubert had to cancel his scheduled afternoon appearance on an all-star panel celebrating the music of Howlin' Wolf.

We assumed we would not get to see him that day. But even though Hubert wasn't having the best day, he was not going to miss the chance to play with some of Howlin' Wolf's former band members. To our pleasant surprise Hubert showed up to play with his oxygen tank in tow. It was a set he was not going to miss! He got to play with other Howlin' Wolf alumni including Eddie Shaw and the Wolf Gang, Jody Williams, Sam Lay, Henry Gray, Abb Locke and Corky Siegel.

Hubert just lit up with the biggest sh*t eating grin as soon as he hit his first note. He had an ear to ear smile on his face the whole time as he seemingly played from his very soul! The joy of playing this music he loves was AMAZING to experience!

We will miss this wonderful man!

Here is the sad news as reported by our good friend Bob Corritore.

"Hubert Sumlin was best known for his extraordinary guitar work on the 1950s and 1960s recordings of Howlin' Wolf. Hubert Sumlin is considered among the greatest guitarists of all time. Hubert passed away of a heart attack on Sunday, Dec 4 after a long bout with respiratory illness. He was 80 years old. Though his health had been problematic for years, he continued to tour and delight concert and festival audiences until close to the end.

Born in Greenville, Mississippi in 1931 and raised in Hughes, Arkansas, Hubert got his first guitar at age 6. Hubert was very interested in music and as a boy snuck into a nightclub to see Howlin' Wolf perform. Hubert's youthful enthusiasm won Wolf's heart, who took the young boy in and developed a father-like mentoring role with Hubert. Wolf would move to Chicago in 1953 and a year later would call for Hubert to move to Chicago to join his band. Initially Hubert played a secondary role in the group with guitarist Jody Williams getting most of the limelight. But when Jody left the band about 2 years later, Hubert became the star guitarist.

Hubert's unorthodox approach, using innovative rhythmic textural lines and wild bursts of lead guitar, became an integral part of the Howlin' Wolf sound., Howlin' Wolf and Muddy Waters reportedly had a rivalry going as to who had the top blues band in Chicago (both were amazing bands) and for a short period of time Muddy recruited Hubert away from Wolf only to have Hubert return to Wolf's band and never leave again. Hubert's guitar was an essential and consistent part of the success of Wolf's recordings and live shows. The music achieved by the Wolf / Sumlin combination reached the highest of heights in the blues.

When Howlin' Wolf recorded the London Sessions in 1970, Hubert began a life long relationship with UK blues artists like Eric Clapton and The Rolling Stones. In 1976, when Wolf died, Hubert was devastated. At first Eddie Shaw (Wolf's saxophonist) tried to keep the Howlin' Wolf band together but Hubert would drift: spending time in Austin, Texas under the care of Clifford Antone, or in Chicago where he stayed with Sunnyland Slim.

In addition to recordings with Wolf, Hubert appeared on Chicago sessions with Eddie Shaw & The Wolf Gang, Andrew McMahon, Sunnyland Slim, Louisiana Red, Carey Bell, Little Eddie, Big

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Mac, and others. He recorded numerous albums under his own name for L+R, Black Top, Tone-Cool, Rykodisc, APO, JSP, Blind Pig, Blues Planet, Blues Special and other labels. At a point, under the guidance of manager Toni Ann Mamary, Hubert started to get his due as the guitar legend he was. Hubert found himself hanging around and performing with rock stars, playing major festivals, and having his historic bio, Incurable Blues, published. He was inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame in 2008, Through all this notoriety, Hubert remained the kind, gentle soul with the same boyish enthusiasm that first befriended the Howlin' Wolf. His guitar playing was always intriguing, unorthodox, and impossible to copy.

As he was bedridden and nearing the last hours of his life, his final request was to play his guitar one last time. We thank Hubert for the light of joy he shined on the world and the heavenly music that he left for future generations to behold."

Hubert Sumlin Funeral Information

Festa Memorial Funeral Home - 111 Union Blvd. Totowa, NJ 07512 (973) 790-8686

Viewing and Receiving of guests - Sunday, December 11, 2011 2- 4 PM & 7 - 9PM

Funeral Service 10AM Monday, December 12, 2011

Chicago Area Musical Celebration Of Life - Tuesday, December 13, 2011 doors open at 7PM

FitzGerald's 6615 W. Roosevelt Road, Berwyn, Illinois 60402

Donations accepted at door. Many musicians will honor Hubert this night.