

Ralph Metcalfe Interview.

At his house, Michigan Avenue, Chicago.

August 17, 1982. 1pm

Ok. Well, I first got the blues back in 1948, when I was born. I got born into a world full of problems. But I didn't know I had the blues per se at that time. First of all, growing up, there was like a blues ambience in the community. If you went to the Regal to see the Miracles, which was one of the more popular groups of the day, you may also see Screamin Jay Hawkins, BB King, or Chuck Jackson, or one of those more gutsy type of artists on the show. But it's funny how I got hip to the blues, man. See, my folks sent me away to prep school - they figured this would be rather a good thing for me, since I was becoming rather precocious as a young teenager. So they sent me to the Choat School, in Wallingford, Connecticut, which is the same place that John Kennedy went, and other people. So I took all my records, Drifters, There Goes My Baby, stuff like that, right. So I used to sit around with the guys and listen to records, and I would turn them on to my music, which they weren't aware of, and they would do me the same favour. And I guess my favourite among the white groups I got exposed to were The Beatles and the Rolling Stones. I liked the Stones a little better, because they were more gutsy, you know. And then one guy came back - was I a junior? No, I was seventeen, I must have been a senior - and he had a Paul Butterfield record, the first Paul Butterfield record. And I said, 'My, that's a very intense sound, them guys sound really sold.' And I said, well I'm going to get this Paul Butterfield record when I go home. And I went home for Thanksgiving, November, and I went to a record store on 5<sup>9</sup>th Street to get some records, and among them was this Paul Butterfield record. But right next to this Paul Butterfield record on the shelf was this record called Hoodoo Man Blues by Junior Wells, which had just been released. I said, well this is Chicago blues and this is Chicago blues, these guys are white, and these guys are black, let me try his album too. So I take Junior's album home, and it's really smoking, I liked it tremendously, I fell in love with the record. And I was reading the liner notes, and I noticed on the back of the liner notes that Junior worked at Theresa's tavern, which was on 48th and Indiana. Here I've lived on 45th and Michigan all my life, and I say, my goodness, all these good blues are right around the corner from me. I'm going to check 'em out. So, even though you're supposed to be 21 to get into these clubs and I was only 17, furthermore I think I had some kind of ID from somewhere, and I was kind of big for my age, and I went down to Theresa's, man. First night there, I guess I was one of the first people there - I know, I went down on a Sunday night, and there was no band that night, just a jukebox, but there was a crowd, and it was real lively, and everyone was real friendly, and they bought me drinks, and sent me home drunk. I found out that Junior did the blue Mondays, so the next night I went back with one of my girlfriends at the time, and we got there early. In fact we got there in time to see Junior carry in his amplifier and stuff, and we met Theresa, and she knew my Dad through the political connection,

and she was very concerned that I enjoy myself, and she introduced me to Junior, and I started talking. It was beautiful, that evening, so I kept going back to Theresa's. At that time it cost 50cents to get in, and 50 cents for a beer, so if you had two or three or four dollars in your pocket, you were ready to party all night long. And my contemporaries at the time were going to house parties - you know, turn the lights down low, and put all the records on. I was going to Theresa's to hear Junior Wells and Buddy Guy for 50 cents. I was having a good time. One of the problems I noticed was that there were no young pretty girls around my age group there, but I've always been somewhat popular, I've never really had a girl problem, so I figured I could either take a date with me, or see one of the young ladies another day. And all my friends kept asking me, 'Well, how come you haven't been to this party, and that party, and where were you going at the weekends,' and I said well, you got to come down to Theresa's. Many of them that I would take down to Theresa's would be just totally turned off by the atmosphere, and others would say they like it and never come back, and a few would come back. So that's kind of how I got into it, and I was just a blues fan and a blues lover. So I figured out I wanted to be a harmonica player, and I bought these harmonicas, and started practising up to the records and stuff, and I was still doing that when I went to college. Matter of fact, I was in a band called the Scott Simon blues band in my freshman year, which I stayed in there about a week or two. But now Scott Simon's with Shanana, the piano player with Shanana, so he went on to find a real career in music. And all those guys in Shanana were in the Columbia glee club, when I went to college there, so I know all them. I have a knack for meeting people who are destined for musical success. For instance, the first night I went to New York, to start college, I met Jimi Hendrix that night, that was at the Cafe A Go Go, in Greenwich village. Right before he went to England, in 1966 it was. A very auspicious time to meet the Hendrix. I never got real friendly with him, but you know, we had a slight acquaintance. I met the Last Poets before they met each other, I was there the first time they read together on Malcolm X's birthday in 1969 - Morse Park, in Harlem. And I just fall into these things, just like I got to meet Junior, early in the evening, before it got crowded. So then I just came through college, just being a music lover, basically. And I had thoughts about going into the record business then, and that was one reason why I did my bachelor's in Economics. But somehow I got married, and my wife got pregnant, and we came back to Chicago and I started working for Jet magazine, at a lowly wage. And I'm doing that, and we fell out over editorial disputes and all that junk, and I went up to Northwestern, where I started working in the grants office. Along about that time, then I went into their Political science programme, that was about 1973, and along about that time was when some friends of mine, Mr and Mrs Morris Jones, who worked with me at Johnson Publishing company, they went about the same time I did, and they went to Kalamazoo College to further their education, up in Michigan. It's about three hours from here. So they called me, to say hey, we're having a black cultural week festival, and we wanted to have a blues band on there. I said, well great. They said well, who's really smoking? Well, at the time I had been hanging around various

blues clubs pretty heavy, including Florence's on 54th and Shields, have you been there? You go there on Sunday, early in the afternoon, it's like a blues church, or an alternative to church. So Lefty Dizz was thundering on at Florence's and various places, so I told my friends the Jones', well, Lefty Dizz would probably be the best guy to get, since Junior and Buddy's career was going pretty good, and their price was up. So I asked Lefty, did he want to do it, and he said yeah, so we went up there on my birthday, April 7th 1973, and we did the gig at Kalamazoo, and I picked up fifty bucks for MCing the show, took my family with me, and I was officially into the music business, from there on; Lefty asked me to look for more gigs for him, we started working together, we had a personal management deal going for about four years, during which time we played for the Smithsonian Institute, the Crown Theatre with Barry White, and Kentucky, and all over, a lot of places. At one of those Smithsonian festivals Lefty was videotaped, and that turned out to be the videotape that circulated through all the European rock stars, and he was the mystery guitarist, because on the tape he had introduced everybody in the band except himself. So they didn't know who he was, but they knew he was smokin', right, so when the Stones got through here in '79, for their concert, they looked Lefty Dizz up, and they found him at the Kingston Mines, and went all three nights at the weekend to jam with him. That's when all of the pictures hit the press. Meanwhile Lefty's been to Europe a few times, and I've done what I could for other artists, and right now I'm very interested in Johnny Twist, who's full of thunder and lightning, and he's a very legendary man, and has a very positive orientation in the blues movement, and you know the blues is sort disrespected and downplayed in many circles, and Twist is about changing that. That's why I admire him very intensely - not only is he a very intensive, super-talented musician, but he has that social vision of the significance and purpose of his art form, which to me distinguishes the great artist from the mediocre ones, and I look to him to be a very positive force in the future. He doesn't curse on the bandstand, he doesn't drink, he doesn't smoke, he's a family man. I'm interested in Twist, and I'm interested in Junior Wells very much too, because he's been so good for so long, he really needs to condense his career into a new peak. Let me say that all through this time and up to the present, I've been constrained from being as fully effective in the industry as I'd like to be, because of my other involvements, my teaching at Kennedy-King, the political travails of my late father and myself, I have social service orientations in various groups and organisations, and they have taken a lot of time and concentration. And also I haven't had the fiscal stability to have a stable living condition, and to have room to rehearse my artists, and to have room for office setup, to pursue the bookings, and to have a 24-hour answering service on the phone. You know it takes a lot of get up and go, to build someone's career, so that's why when Lefty's and my contract ran out, I wasn't in such a great hurry to re-sign, because I'm not comfortably able to fulfil my complete obligations to the artists under the circumstances that I'm in now, and I don't want to hold them back. If it's some kind of half-stepping deal, then they may well be able to do better. So I've just really been dabbling on the fringes of the

business. What I'd like to do now, is get a production deal with a major label. I feel the blues has rarely if ever been produced properly, and that's one of the reasons why it's not so commercially viable. These other albums were produced and over-produced, with big six-figure budgets, and they take the blues guys in the studio for a day or two or three, and whip it out and get them drunk and that's the end of it. And it's not produced properly, it's not promoted properly, and I'm looking for somebody who can take over where Hendrix left off, which was to bring the blues to a new level of relevance and international acceptance and higness among the young people, especially young black people. They've been disenfranchised of their own heritage by the programme directors of the radio stations.

Yes, I don't understand why the blues is no longer on the radio. Well, there's money and there's self-hatred. You make more money with these formula records, inwhich you can change the hit of the week every week, and make kids go out and buy more. But if orient them towards, hey, this is a piece of classical music, it'll sound just as good thirty years from now as it does now, something like Hoochie Coochie man - then you can't keep selling copies of Hoochie Coochie man. So there's a strong financial influence there. And then there's that old cultural psychology in the background, which is, 'I don't know anything about my heritage, and I don't want to be reminded of it, I don't want to know anything about slavery and suffering, I don't want to know about Africa.' If you're black, get back, if you're brown, stick around, if you're yellow you're mellow, if you're white you're all right, good hair and bad hair, all these kind of psychologies floating around, and keep people from really appreciating the blues. A lot of our young, middle class, upwardly mobile, so-called sophisticated people don't even party in the black community. You want to have a party for them, you have to go check out a room in a white-owned hotel, hopefully downtown or up on the near North Side, so they can think they're getting into the main flow of society.

I thought that attitude was out of fashion.

No, it's very much in fashion. In fact, there's places where that goes on that I can take you, where you can see it, live it. The women are all scheming for husbands, and the guys are trying to get pussy without obligation, and it's just a big game. The blues is based on truth, right? 'I'll tell you how I really feel, and you can take your relationship to it.' It's much less game. So we get crises of psychological identification. Also, music is such a powerful tool to reach people and wake them up. So I feel the power structure in this country doesn't want black folks to have a viable music tradition, because it would be too galvanising in the community, it would give too much pride and respect, it would open up too many questions about the past, the present or the future. So that's why Hendrix got over in Europe before he came back here, which is a strategy which well may work for other artists, like Johnny Twist, or Junior Wells, or Lefty Dizz. But take a lot of the guys, I guess John Lee Hooker is the worst violator of this, is that they're over-exposed and underpaid. Hooker's got about forty albums out here, and about thirty-six of them are under-produced. You know, you buy an album and about two cuts that hang together

pretty well and that you like, and the rest of them are just clearly stuff that was run through to fill out an album. I don't go for that approach. You didn't see Jimi Hendrix out here over-exposing and under-paying himself - every album he did was an international hit, and the record company promoted him as an artist of major stature, and helped him to attain that lofty perch. Well, somebody like Twist, or Junior, or Lefty Dizz has got enough talent for that. It's just that they haven't been properly nurtured with the things that they need within the industry. If you look at a Stevie Wonder show, or a Rolling Stones show, and you look at all the support services they have, and the side people, to help with the equipment, and design the stage, and make sure this is all right, and take care of that and the other. All these guys have got to do is have fun, and play their music, and maybe take half an hour a day to check and see everybody's doing their job. We're more like a gypsy outlaw type of tradition, you know - you'd rather have a small amplifier than a large one, because you're going to be carrying it around to different clubs every night, right? And you go in, and play the blues, and make the money, and keep stuffing. And probably drink up at least half of your pay at the bar. But the blues is a very powerful music, because it came out of slavery. And the function of music is to lift the human soul, the spirit.

And there has seldom been any more need to lift the soul, than during slavery.

Right. So the music became very intense, and powerful. That's why today everybody around the world loves it; because we're all oppressed, one way or another. Everybody in the world has a problem, life has always been a struggle, it's never been easy. You know, if you go down the stairs and your car got a flat tyre, you got the blues. You may never have picked cotton in Mississippi, you may not know who Muddy Waters is, but when your car has a flat tyre and you're ready to go, man, you got the blues. Also the blues has given rise to all the other musical traditions that people get off on. Jazz is nothing but blues on the horns, right? So then for somebody to dig Kool and the Gang, and Rick James, and then say they can't appreciate Muddy Waters, to me it just doesn't hold much water. So we got difficulties. The deck is stacked against us in the business realm, because the major labels are insensitive to the blues. They're not about creating taste, they're about catering to them. And there's just a negative psychology attached to the blues, throughout the country. It's much better appreciated in Europe and Africa and Japan. The blues has been an international ambassador for our people, even before we realised there was a political need for such a thing. So the blues is real strong, and it's really been dogged around, but I believe it will live forever, and that the tradition will rise again.

Why are these upwardly-mobile types not interested any more? Because it reminds them of their heritage and their background, of which they're ashamed.

Is that a recent attitude?

No. Leroy Jones speaks of it in Blues People, right after the abolishment of shallow slavery, and the rise of the bourgeoisie.

But the blues was pretty popular music amongst blacks, up until about twenty years ago.

No, even 20 years ago those attitudes were existing in middle class circles.

I suppose it's mainly been a working class music.

Yes. There's a strong class factor in there, although some people transcend it, it's not universally iron-clad, but there is a strong class factor.

So now all I do is these Blue Mondays at the Taste. I started them off as a fund-raiser because I was in political debt. Well my political debts have been paid since then, but we've lost money on Taste. We're just not getting to the point where we're breaking even on Monday nights. But we believe in paying the musicians at least half-way properly for what they're doing, and that's what I like about the Taste Entertainment Center; is that the people make sure everybody get theirs before they get theirs, you know, and that means you don't mind coming back and keep working with them. Well, now my campaign debt has been paid off from other sources, but I'm still into that movement at the Taste on Mondays. And it's just been difficult to get people to change their patterns, there's a whole lot of psychology there too, because your riff-raff that comes to the blues clubs, they're intimidated by the Taste, because there's a dress code, you know, you have to be fairly neat and clean. The drinks don't cost any more than they do at the Checkerboard or Theresa's, but people are just intimidated by it. We've got free food for folks now, two blues bands there on a Monday, but still, you know. Well, Monday night, a lot of people who party say, well, let's start off the week resting. But we say, if you start off your week with a boogie, your whole week will go smooth anyway. It's all psychological, you know, if some of the financial and advertising forces in this country decided the blues needed to be hip, it would be hip overnight. It's all psychological, man. People are like sheep, they're so easily led. But most of them can't help it, because they don't have the experience and awareness based in education, and the broader exposure to issues to give them the vision to be able to analyse their situation. So we're fighting, man. Suppose I'd been in here writing a song for Johnny Twist, or figuring out a proper negotiating strategy with a record label or something, and mama comes in: 'Where are the cigarettes?' So I need to be behind closed doors, where I can turn off the doorbell and telephone, and I could also write the Metcalfe story, of my Dad's very illustrious life under those conditions. Under these conditions I'm totally distracted and interrupted, and there's no island of sanity in my world right now. So if I act kind of funny, you understand why.

How long have you been doing the blue Mondays at Taste?

Since late April. We started off with a kick-off for Lefty Dizz's birthday, which Lefty didn't attend himself. He claims that they owed him \$9000 at the Checkerboard, and he had to stay there, but I don't believe that, because I think that LC told him that if he leaves, he wouldn't pay him back, because LC knew that if Lefty left and came to the Taste, the crowd would most likely follow him - and about all the Checkerboard is surviving on is those blue Mondays, where they've been able to assemble a nice definitive collection of talent. Because, man, people come to the

Checkerboard, and they go outside and their battery's stolen, and they never come back. And the Checkerboard's just not set up to cater for a modern quality clientele - which is another reason why it's easy for the young blacks and other people to get turned off from the blues. Who wants to go down there and there's all kinds of dust on the floor, and you get your battery stolen, and you've got ignorant greasy motherfuckers hitting on your woman and shit? Nobody want to go through that. It's very distasteful. So that's what happened there. Lefty also blew a quarter of a million dollar recording deal that I had set up with Columbia records. We had a video demo, and I was going to take that to New York while he was over in Europe, but he was so up in the air about going to Europe that he spent the day before fucking some bitch, man. We were all at the studio, and we had all the technical deal cleared, and the bass player had carried his big bass amplifier down from the third floor, and they had a suit and tie on for the show, and I was there, and all we needed was for Lefty to show up with his brother Woody, the drums and guitar and amp in their car, and we could have cut a beautiful free video demo with some original material. But he got the pussy, and now he has no record out on Columbia records.

When was that?

That was in '79. So that, plus his disappearance at his own birthday party has limited my involvement with Mr Dizz. He is one of the greatest, but - he keep drinking all that Grandad 100, man, he's not going to ever recover. And he doesn't show any signs of stopping - he doesn't seem like he wants to help himself, so if he wants to guzzle his way into oblivion, he'll have to do it without involving my name and business reputation in the process. Hence my greater concentration on Mr Twist and Mr Wells. Alcohol is a problem, man. It rots these guys' brains out after so many years of use, it makes them real assholes. And you can't have any business reliability, and that further hampers the blues movement, you know. I'd like to do what I can, but I've got to take care of myself.

That's very sad about Lefty. That could have made a tremendous difference.

A tremendous. The saddest part is all of his talent that's going down the drain.

I saw him in Paris that time. He was pretty good. He did an album for Black and Blue, probably later on the same night, and it's not very good.

He did a recording for Victoria Spivey, before she died, just one or two tracks on one of her anthology albums. I don't know if he got any money for it at all, but I know they got very drunk before they did it, and the tapes are terrible, just terrible. And so any record company executive that says, 'Ah, here's Lefty Dizz with the Stones, maybe I'll make Mr Dizz an offer, let's see what's on record of him already.' Then they go hear the Spivey release, or something like that, and they say, 'Well, it must have been a freak, that's all it was, a freak occurrence for him to sound so good, because he sounds so bad.' You can't tell them anything, hardheads.

He seems to be a live act, predominantly.

Yeah. But he could be very well produced and recorded, but I'd have to dry him out in the woods for six months before we could even go into a recording studio. I don't have time, and I don't know anybody who's willing to spend enough money to make it worth my while to do. So, you know. Lefty and a lot of the other guys are weakened from fighting their cause, and even from seeing it properly through the haze of all that alcohol. It's heavy. I drink some, myself, but I'm not a drinker, and I can't keep up with them at all, and I don't want to learn how. Listen, if you're going to work all night for fifty dollars, and then spend forty of it up...

It's not getting anybody anywhere.

Yeah. And that's depressing on the artists themselves, he gets up the next day and says, 'Here I am, I worked hard, I got ten dollars in my pocket, I'm hung over.' You spend five on breakfast to get the hangover off, and you're out poor and desperate and grabbing again. There's no point in doing the gig for that. And these clubs are not paying what the top artists demand. That's why you don't see Bobby Bland and BB King at the Checkerboard or the Kingston Mines, because they can't pay 'em. So these guys are working for less money, and just clogging themselves out. So if somebody wanted to be Lefty's business representative, whether it's me or anybody else, it's got to be worth their while, too. So his asking price has got to be increased to include a percentage that can be lucrative to a booking agent or a personal manager, if not both. But he won't hold out for that price, and he won't do the things necessary to get an album out so he could command that price. And he's satisfied at a lower level of the industry, a much lower level than I'd ever be satisfied with. And it's because he really doesn't think he can do any better. Lefty fears success. He's had success knock at his door several times, but he's turned his back. I don't fear success, I crave it - so I can't work with Lefty.

He's a really enigmatic figure.

I put a lot of time and energy and money. Lefty still owes me quite a bit. Any time he makes a fair amount on his business, he gambles it away or drinks it up, or pays off other old debts, or gives it in child-support for the many many children he has out here. There is no business stability to it, man, I go crazy trying to bring some order to that situation.

A bit of a losing battle, I guess.

Unfortunately. It's very discouraging, actually. But there's some young guys coming up into the blues now, like Billy Branch and Ron Abrams, and folks like that, who offer great promise for the future, if they could manage to capture most of the secrets from the great masters.

Ron Abrams is wonderful.

He's got a good touch, and he's very very serious about his music. He's got a real positive clean lifestyle, too. So, we look with hope and encouragement to the future. Unless a label comes in with a major commitment to the Chicago blues, man, there's going to be a whole lot I can do. My efforts are towards getting the involvement of a major label, but I haven't been able to make too many steps in that direction, with my distractions, with my lack of wherewithal, and with the lack of a stable

product, to present to the industry. These are some of the problems that we have. But yet the blues agenda still remains before our community - it's still important to preserve and dignify our cultural heritage. So no matter how dogged-out the individual gets, no matter how strained I get, it's still important that the blues tradition be built, and survive, and move on up to a higher realm.

The folk culture of the black American is one of the very few left anywhere that is still alive, that hasn't been completely disconnected. In England you can hear wonderful folk music, but it's being done by a guy from London, who's studied it for years.

There's nobody from out in the hills, who grew up with it.

Right. But the blues, there are people who have been doing nothing else all their lives; it really is a living tradition. And that's a very rare thing, today.

We're proud of it, you know, and we value it very greatly. Well you see that New Orleans has capitalised tremendously off their jazz tradition. Chicago has failed to do so off the blues because of racism. Raw racism. Mayor Daley was very racist, for 25 years. He had a plantation form of government Alan, that you wouldn't believe, and people are still used to doing business that way - which is why we have difficulty in producing a candidate for black mayor, and for things like that, man.

Is there going to be a black mayor of Chicago?

I don't know if there ever will be.

It's probably the most difficult city in which to achieve it. I think so. What I'd really like to do is just build the blues. Just produce records, and do the things necessary for the tradition to grow, and share it with more people, provide for the financial stability of the artists. But the same problems that keep the blues down, are the same problems that keep us from having a black mayor, that keep police brutality, and sub-standard housing, and unemployment so strong. So they keep cropping up, and it tempts me to take the overall political approach to the situation, because once you can create a more positive political ambience in the city, then better things can happen for the blues tradition. I've approached the last three mayors about the need for a blues museum - Daley, Bilandic, and Byrne. The response has been lukewarm in all three cases. It's rough, man, we're living on the plantation, and a lot of the white people are willing participants in the system. But fortunately for me, I was born into a situation where I live half way between Theresa's and the Checkerboard, and I've got a rich blues tradition at my disposal, so I can at least go and listen a little bit while we try to work out all the other difficulties. If I had to pick one artist who had the best chance to transcend this up to a more qualitative plane, it's Johnny Twist. He has the power and intensity to his guitar playing, and his attitude and approach to the music - and the blues is really an attitude, man - Twist got the attitude. He's got the understanding and respect upon him, he's got dedication and determination, he's got experience, he's got as much talent as anybody if not more. So I'm looking to Johnny Twist. If I was a record company executive, I'd move quick on Twist. But

of course, I'm not.

Is there anything happening with recording for Twist?

Haven't, I've really looked into it. I've got a friend who's developing a feeler with a label that hasn't had a hit in a long time. Maybe it will do us some good, but that's all speculative right now, it's nothing really firm.

He's not very well known, is he?

Not outside of the blues underground, no. Blues fanatics know Johnny Twist, and those who have seen him since his comeback know him, but no, he's not really well known. He'll be a great discovery to put out there.

Comeback, yes. When did he retire?

I don't know exactly, because I just met him about a year ago myself, but I think he's been off for about five or six years. He just got disillusioned - all the backbiting and negativity and undercutting. Suppose you and me got a band together, and we say, well, we're not going to work for less than \$200 a night, because there are four of us, and we each need fifty dollars to make it worth it. But then here come Joe Blow's band, who says we'll do the gig for one-fifty, one-seventy-five, one-twenty-five. People are so desperate to display their egos that they have no business sense at all, and they just keep doing that. So it's negative. But, if you have a highly definitive product like Twist, or Junior Wells, or Dizz, then you can command a little bit better price. Still, it's hard to make a livable wage here at the home of the blues. If you can't make one here, you know it's difficult elsewhere. When Junior and Buddy's albums were hot, then Dick Waterman could do some things for them, and they even went to Africa and stuff, based on that wave of success, but that's subsided, and they don't have the creative direction in their recordings to excite the mainstream, to get that top-forty airplay. And that's where I feel my role as a producer comes in - the subject matter of the material, and the way it's executed, I think we can break down these barriers, because if you listen to your radio in your car all day, you'll hear a bunch of blues tunes, and re-worked blues tunes, which are not billed as such, right? But it's just a bunch of real funky music that's based up off the blues. So if we make the blues a little more cosmopolitan, and move it on up to the Eighties, without losing the traditional root of it, like Hendrix did, then we can be successful. That's what it's going to take. You know, these young black kids don't want to hear about cottonfields, man, they don't know nothing about cottonfields. They want to hear about stuff that affects their lives.

In a sense, the blues' own powerful tradition is strangling it, isn't it? because those old cottonfield songs are still being done, and they're turning a lot of people off.

Right. Well, then you got the literacy question, too. Many of your blues singers are semi-literate, if not totally illiterate, so then they can't write. And if they come up with a few words, they'll forget 'em. I hate to tell you how many artists have forgotten some of their tunes, man. Like, you may be a blues fan, you've heard something they did ten or twelve years ago on an album, you request it in concert, and they can't do it. See, thought proceeds in language. The more literate

a person is, the clearer his thought process. That comes across in my teaching at Kennedy-King, where people just can't get it, and it doesn't come across in their papers, and they don't take the notes right, they read it and re-read it, and still don't understand it. Their language base is weak, and this makes their thought base weak, and this is what's happening in the blues. And people can't conceptualise what the ingredients of a hit record would be, or how to execute it, so that they just keep going along doing other peoples' material. And it's the originals that really cut the mustard, right? There's Howlin Wolf - nobody will be the Howlin Wolf but Howlin Wolf. And it's rare that you take one artist, and he can do the other artist's tune better than the originator of the tune. A rare exception was when Hendrix did All Along the Watchtower, right, and even Bob Dylan said, 'Gee, I wish I could have sang that like that!' Excuse me for a minute...