

Fredericksburg Honors Its "WOMEN IN BLUES"



By Peggy Weston Moore

Fredericksburg's own "Uppity Blues Women of Saffire" will be included on a new CD titled "Essential Women in Blues," just released by the House of Blues label. The collection, which includes such big names as Billie Holiday and Bessie Smith, is intended to be a tribute to the great women in blues history.

"This is a major thrill!" Saffire's singer Gaye Adegbalola says.

After years of playing every nook and cranny in Fredericksburg, Saffire became incorporated in 1988, took out a loan, bought a second hand van, and hit the road touring. They worked "off nights for the door, slept on floors, and ate a lot of chili dogs," says the group's hot keyboardist Ann Rabson.

Now Fredericksburg's Adegbalola and Rabson, along with Indianapolis' Andra Faye McIntosh, are reaping from their well paid dues. Since audiences often hear with their eyes, the novelty of this group of middle-aged blues whipping women left audiences spellbound from

the start. But now Saffire is being recognized for what is essential for longevity in the music business: Quality in their music.

For Saffire, the secret to good blues is combining the unique contributions of each member. They bring their individual wisdom, wit and compassion to the songs they write.

Gaye Adegbalola, a gifted blues writer, said "blues is about salvation,

right now . . . Blues is not a sad music. It's about doing something about your problems right now. A lot is boasting and threatening. It's a way of getting your feelings out without hurting nobody."

Adegbalola, who won the WC Handy Award for her hit, "Middle Aged Blues Boogie," refers to herself as "a griot", African for "keeper of the history." Adegbalola writes with her own vision, or observes people to reflect their struggle, or sometimes the song "just comes out of the air."

Adegbalola says "it's about shakin' and dancin' and sweatin' and getting rid of your problems for the moment."

Ann Rabson will tell you, "that's when I come alive, when my fingers hit the keyboard" Rabson remarked that too many pianists "have stopped using their left hand somewhat. They only use the top end of the piano, then why play? It's like tying one hand behind their back, not using the instrument, not exploring." She creatively uses all the piano with a

strong left-handed bass line.

But why did she choose the blues?

"It's like I had been living in a foreign country. Other music is lovely and I enjoy it, but it just doesn't speak my language; it doesn't talk to me. I used to say everything else is in black and white, [but blues] is in color."

Rabson's humor prevails when she reveals her sources of inspiration for writing Saffire's original songs.

"Having had a couple of bad marriages is great; I can mime them for material." She says she is "not so good at writing stuff when I'm happy . . . I have to write when I run out of more normal avenues of expression, like talking."

Rabson has reason to believe "life is very good." Alligator Records has just released her CD, "Music Makin' Mama," launching her career as a solo recording artist. She writes, plays keys, acoustic guitar and sings in her distinctive style.

"This solo album is something I've been wanting to do for a long time. It means a tremendous amount to me. I really wanted it to be something I was-

n't ashamed of. I'm actually proud of it which amazes me." Rabson will be performing solo dates while also touring with Saffire in the States, and she has a European solo tour this month.

Adegbalola and McIntosh are amicable of Rabson's solo career, much like choosing the songs to perform and performing them. Each of them plays the best they can for every song, not only for their own songs.

The women of Saffire say they appreciate the tremendous support Fredericksburg has given to their group.

"Fredericksburg made it happen and [we want to] say thank you."

SAFFIRE will be performing:

April 5th and April 6th
 Wolf Trap, The Barns
 Vienna, VA

April 10th
 Tobacco Company
 1201 E. Cary Street, Richmond, VA
 804/782-9555

THE POET'S CORNER

By Bradley R. Strahan

Welcome to The Poet's Corner. For those of you who are unaware, "the poet corner" is the place in England's Westminster Cathedral where many of the country's leading poets are buried. We hope rather to bring to life, to your life, good poetry.

It's appropriate to begin by honoring St. Patrick's Day, since Ireland is a nation that holds poetry in higher esteem than any other. From ancient times 'til today, poets have been considered the bearers of the best in Irish culture.

It's also fitting that the first poem we publish celebrates a harper, another group honored in Irish tradition. Turlough O'Carolan (1670-1738) was the last in the old Irish line of great harper/composers, prior to the modern folk revival. Like many he was blind. Beyond that, let this poem speak.

O'CAROLAN'S FANCY*

To live for that alone
 The silver shimmer
 Of the sea unseen
 The notes that form from stone
 To warm pearls of sound
 The tap of dancer's feet
 Ripples of the heart
 From a turf of fire
 The sharp smell of sweat
 The sweet bitter brew
 Its surf clinging to your lips
 Everything you feel
 Pouring from your fingertips

— B.R. Strahan

We welcome submissions of unpublished poetry to this journal and look forward to introducing more of this area's own bards in these pages.

Please mail your submissions to The Free Press, Attn. Poet's Corner P.O. Box 8403 Fredericksburg, Va. 22404.

Irish eyes

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