

## Magic Sam keeps the blues out front

IN HIS liner notes for Magic Sam's Delmark album, 'West Side Soul,' Bill Lindeman wrote this of the guitarist-singer. "...you will like Magic Sam regardless of your previous tastes if you are reasonably 'aware,' 'hip,' 'turned on ' or whatever your generation's slang may be for being in touch with humanity and life."

And the man could not have said it more clearly. Sometimes we get the impression that the blues is a dying form, an old man's world, yet artists like Sam Maghett are still busily keeping the blues out front.

When Magic Sam plays his own kind of music, the timeless quality of the genre comes creeping through. There is nothing dated or old-fashioned about what he does, but he does it with the strength and poignancy of yesterday's greatest.

Although he was a stranger to Europe, Magic Sam had no qualms about facing a white audience. He still appears at black clubs like Sylvio's in Chicago, but he has recently been hugely in demand by college audiences.

On the recent Lippmann and Rau American Folk Blues tour, Magic was accompanied by his long time bass-playing sidekick, Mac Thompson. It was the otherwise taciturn bassist who gave him his appropriate nickname. In fact the two men have been playing music together for more than a dozen years now.

"We were just messing around the neighbourhood playing parties," Sam recalled. "Everyone kept on telling us: 'You're good, why don't you go and play in clubs?' and so on, but I was too young."

When I was 18, though, I went with harpist Shakey Jake and round about the same time I wrote a song called 'All Your Love'. Eventually I took it to some guy and he accepted it right away. He wanted it just like it was, didn't want me to change it at all.

"I recorded it one day and the next day it was on the air. That's where he goofed because people wanted the records and he just didn't have any!"

In the 'fifties he sold many records, then it tailed off until 1966 when he started recording again, first for Crash, then eventually for Bob Koester's famous Delmark label. His next album will contain mostly his own material, though he sings blues from all quarters.

"I just write the blues as they are **now**," he explained. "I sing it, do it, whatever way it comes to me, whatever way it grabs me.

"Like one time I remember my wife was fixing to leave me. I just sat down there while she was getting her things together and I started playing my guitar and singing. I sang 'baby, do you really have to go?' and so on, but it didn't stop her from leaving! I didn't make the words too sad," he grinned merrily.

While Magic Sam's blues are as contemporary as anyone's, he has scant time for the so-called "progressive" blues.

"How far out can you go with the blues?" he repeated the question. "Not too far out like Jimi Hendrix. Blues is something you have to stay with and, to me Hendrix is psychedelic or something. He's taken the blues and made it into something else and that's not for me.

"But blues has been taken by so many people who don't know what they're doing with it and I'm afraid that they're really going to mess it up. And that's a pity."

He cited the pitiful Muddy Waters fiasco, 'Electric Mud,' as a case in point. "Someone said to me 'hey man, dig this' and so I said OK. I took it out, played one cut and that was IT. I said 'take it off—now!' and I put it back in the sleeve. I don't know what they're doing, but it sure sounds like nothing to me!" VALERIE

WILMER

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