

Magic Dick

By MICHAEL RICHARDSON

Richard "Magic Dick" Salwitz was born May 13, 1945 in New London, Connecticut. Magic Dick co-founded the J. Geils Band in 1968 and has been a professional musician ever since. *Big City*



Rhythm & Blues reached Magic Dick on his tour bus while on the road to the next town with the Legendary Rhythm & Blues Revue for this interview.

Did Little Walter influence you?

Most harmonica players would probably say Little Walter was a big influence. Walter was a major influence on me, the biggest as a harmonica player. It was the way he sounded, the sound he got was unique. Little Walter had a jazz-like phrasing. He made the instrument sound like a horn, a saxophone. He was heavily influenced by the Creole sounds of his Louisiana upbringing. He played like a jazz player.

What other harmonica players influenced you?

Both Sonny Boy Williamsons, Junior Wells, James Cotton, and Walter Horton. Much earlier influences are some of the jug band harmonica players like Will Shade.

What is your favorite harmonica?

Marine Band Deluxe. It has a good bass sound.

What is your favorite harmonica song?

If I tell you what it is without an explanation it wouldn't be understood. Little Walter's "Mean Old World" is my favorite. The elements of Little Walter are embedded in the song, its phrasing and timing. It is not easy, the song teaches the importance of breath control. It is just a great harmonica song.

Why did you pick the harmonica, when did you start?

I started playing in earnest at 21 but my mother gave me my first harmonica at three. She was hoping it would change my life and it sure did.

What is your favorite amp and microphone?

That is a changing situation. Up until a year ago I would have said a red-topped Fender and bullet mic. The mic and amp go together. Right now I'm using a ribbon mic. But the most important part is to get a good acoustic sound first, the amp only magnifies. You need a good sound first.

Do you play any other instrument?

Trumpet and saxophone. I've been playing the trumpet since 3rd grade. I haven't played in quite a long time but I had a pretty good tone. I'm not good enough for the stage, just my own fun.

Did you even have a day job?

Once, about a month. I assembled gas water heaters at a manufacturing plant before we formed the J. Geils Band. I had to cram the fiberglass in the water heaters. A month was as much as I could stand!

How did you get your nickname?

I used to be Pittsfield Slim when I lived in Massachusetts. After connecting with the Chicago music scene where there is an old tradition in blues and jazz of having a nickname I decided to try Magic Dick. My first name is Richard and Magic Sam was hot then so I decided why not Magic Dick? Let me ask you, if you could be Pittsfield Slim or Magic Dick, which would you be?

Do you have advice for a youngster interested in music?

Work on it in small doses and regularly. And have fun. For professional musicians it can be kind of like work, you've got to remember to have fun. Music is an expression of the heart, keep it that way.

Last word?

Keep up the good work. I'm grateful for the magazine's interest in Little Walter. The harmonica is the world's favorite instrument. It can be carried anywhere and played beautifully.

For further information:
<http://magicdick.com>