

Memphis Slim, Sydney Bachet, Louis Armstrong and Bud Powell. By being exposed to Paris when I was 16 or 17...I realized that is what America would be like. My first taste of New York was in Paris. They have a similar cultural attitude.

#### What about "downhome" food in California?

No, down home food to me is Thai food. I eat Thai food mostly when I am traveling all over the world, because I know that I can rely on it. The kitchens are always good, they're always clean, and they have great hot spices...I always feel elated when I leave a Thai restaurant. That's my food for the soul.

#### Do you surf?

No I don't. But if I was to start my life all over again, if I was a California native, I would probably gravitate toward surfing. I respect the sport a lot [and] I think it is the...sport that is [most] in touch with the environment—close to the environment...you've taken on nature when you are taking on the big force of water...if you don't know what you're doing you end up wiped out....Jimi Hendrix...on one of his tracks [said] "and you shall never hear surf music again." He made it clear that surfing music and surfing ideology was not for him, and yet he ended up in Hawaii and in love with the place, and he thought that the center of the earth was Maui.

#### It ain't a black thing, it ain't a white thing, it's a blues thing. Comments?

Yeah. That is pretty much a true statement.

#### What is the Soul Of A Man?

I had a bit of a problem with [the song] "Soul Of A Man," whether I should do [it] or not, because I had to answer the question, which the song asks of the listener, myself. I had to be satisfied with [my]...answer...[to that] question...it took me time to figure that out, to get my teeth into the song. And I think the answer to that question is your conscience, what your conscience will bare.

Big City Rhythm & Blues gave Eric Burdon's latest album, *Soul Of A Man*, its highest rating—five hats—in the February/March 2006 issue. *Eric Burdon will appear in Detroit on July 4, 2006, as head liner for this year's Michigan TasteFest in Detroit's New Center area. Admission is free. Visit Eric Burdon on the web at [www.ericburdon.com](http://www.ericburdon.com) for news, tour dates and merchandise, and visit his record label, SPV Recordings, at [www.spvusa.com](http://www.spvusa.com). For booking information contact Simon Eder at [simon@ericburdon.com](mailto:simon@ericburdon.com).*

Kid Ramos burning down the house with his co-conspirator Finis Tasby looking on at the 2006 Blues Music Awards



## The Mannish Boys

### One man's dream, everybody gains

BY ROGER WHITE

The Mannish Boys aren't just a band, for singer/promoter/CEO of Delta Groove Productions, Randy Chortkoff, it's become his own personal blues crusade. He saw the club scene dying and festivals as the only way to get the blues out to the people. Copying the style of the Johnny Otis traveling blues shows, rotating out players as the night builds, to the all-star finale, he has a hit. The Mannish Boys is a core group of veterans and up and comers with a rotating crew of the best West Coast players to fill out the band. The Mannish Boys are a literal who's who of West Coast blues. Having just returned from a successful tour of Europe, they have been playing to appreciative audiences where ever they go. Here's the current line-up along with an interview at a recent show.

#### Members of The Mannish Boys

**Richard Innes** is one of the originators of modern West Coast drumming styles. Having over four decades of experience playing, he has a uniquely tasteful and economical drumming style unparalleled in modern blues. He keeps the pace of the music flowing.

**Tom Leavey** playing bass since the late '50s. Tom moved out to the west coast in the early '70s. Cutting his teeth backing a wide variety of rock'n'roll and R&B acts such as Big Mama Thornton, Lightnin' Hopkins and Big Joe Turner.

**Johnny Dyer** makes playing the blues look easy. Born 1938, he spent his formative years on the Stovall's Plantation in Rolling Fork, Mississippi, the home of Muddy Waters. His roots run deep in the South, but relocated to Californian in the late '50s. Johnny is one of the

truly great harp players of his generation. His phrasing and steady swinging cords often take later generations of harp players a lifetime of study, to get a handle on. Add to that a voice as rich as Mississippi mud and you've got a bluesman of legendary proportions.

**Leon Blue**, and yes that is his real name, is one of the finest blues piano player on the coast. Born in Wichita Fall, TX in 1931. Leon was inspired to play piano after hearing early boogie-woogie records of Meade Lux Lewis and Albert Collins. In 1955, Leon and his brothers relocated to Los Angeles and performed as The Four Scooters. He played with the Ike and Tina Turner Revue from 1964-1978. He has spent most of his career as a sideman, but the company he's kept speaks volumes about his talent, professionalism, and versatility as a musician. He has recorded with some of the biggest names on the west coast including B.B. King, and Albert King (who he says hired and fired him three different times). Spending most of his career as a sideman recently, Leon got a chance to show off his secret weapon a warm and husky blues voice.

**Finis Tasby** was born in Dallas in 1940, and grew up immersed in the vital Texas blues. He started his musical career as a drummer with The Blues Blasters. By the early '60s Tasby switched to bass playing, and back up vocals behind legendary blues singer ZZ Hill. When Hill left the band in 1962, Finis took over the lead vocals establishing a reputation as one of the most soulful blues singers on the circuit. In the early '70s Finis moved out to L.A., and worked with many of the greats, including B.B. King, Percy Mayfield, and Big Mama Thornton. Forming a

lifelong friendship with blues great John Lee Hooker, with whom he often performed, Finis' reputation reached new heights.

**David "Kid" Ramos** began playing professionally in his teens. Born in 1959 into a musical family in Fullerton California, which is coincidentally the birthplace of the Fender Stratocaster guitar, he got his education on the job playing along with the late, great guitarist Hollywood Fats (Michael Mann) in the '80s, and as the lead guitarist with the Fabulous Thunderbirds. He works both on record and on stage with the cream of the crop of West Coast blues talent. One of the younger players, he is a natural fit into the talent pool of The Mannish Boys.

**Rusty Zinn**, having joined the group for the recent European tour, he is a great addition to an already stellar line-up. Born in Long Beach California in 1970, and inspired by the guitar styles of Jimmy Rogers, Eddie Taylor and Robert Jr. Lockwood, Randy's guitar work and soulful vocals show he can hold his own with the best of the seasoned masters. According to Kim Wilson, "Rusty Zinn has more talent in his little pinkie than most people could see in three lifetimes".

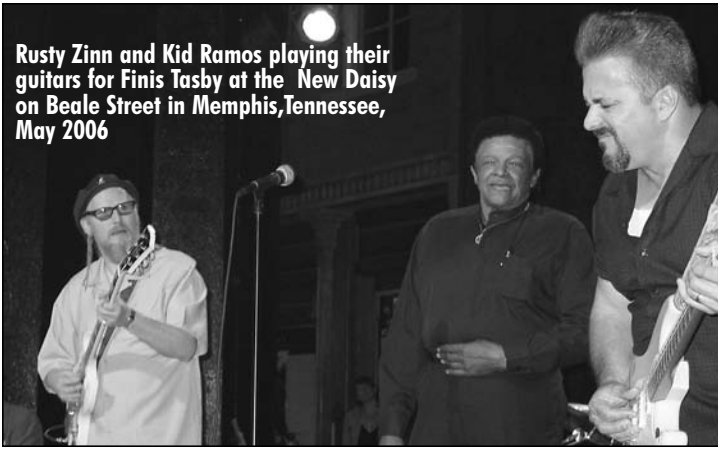
**Randy Chortkoff**, an integral part of the L.A. Blues scene for many years, he has produced some of the biggest and most respected names in the blues, including Albert King, Otis Rush, Jimmy Rogers, Billy Boy Arnold and Carey Bell. Having an ear for putting together winning combinations for both recordings and live performances he has a reputation for recognizing and bringing out talent. His latest project in one of his most ambiguous and perhaps most rewarding. The Delta Groove All-Star Revue is a west coast collective of dynamic blues talent and the cream of the crop. In addition to his important work behind the scenes, Randy also is a talented performer in his own right, having fronted numerous bands with his deep blues harp playing and vocals with which he takes the stage. He holds his own with best, including with The Mannish Boys. Hats off to a man willing to take a risk to keep the blues alive in a time when the scene, itself, is singing the blues.

Our writer had a chance to speak with some of the musicians at the New Daisy Theater in Memphis.

#### How did the Mannish Boys come about?

**R.C.** - The concept of the Mannish Boys was to create a basic group with some of the best players in Southern California and the West Coast. Then include some very substantial guest artists like Johnny Dyer, Micky Champion and Roy Gaines. We did accomplish this on

**Rusty Zinn and Kid Ramos playing their guitars for Finis Tasby at the New Daisy on Beale Street in Memphis, Tennessee, May 2006**



the first record. Then we used the core group with Finis Tasby who is one of the best black vocalist still living on the second recording. We changed the personal as needed due to other priorities. The idea is like the old Johnny Otis Revue in a sense, people go to see the Mannish Boys Review, its going to be publicized before the show who will be on it.

**F.T.** - Well Randy had this idea, he wanted to put this together. He asked me, what kind of good name can you come up with and we kind of shlept it around and came up with the Mannish Boy's, and its isn't too bad. It kind of fit's, it sounds like a down home blues thing.

**The new CD was a live show. Can you tell us about it?**

**K.R.** - I don't really know, we had a good time on that show in Winthrop. It wasn't planned, they recorded it and then afterwards said, We're thinking of putting it out, sort of like that.

**F.T.** - I didn't even know that they were recording it. That was in Winthrop, Washington. And the next thing I know they said, Listen to this, and there it was. And they wanted to put it out, that's the first live recording we've done.

**R.C.** - Let me tell you how that happened. We were playing the Winthrop blues festival in Washington, we're one of the headliners of the festival. Unknown to me

they were recording the show. You're supposed to get something signed, let somebody know that, that you're recording a show. They didn't do it because they were trying to be sneaky. They thought nothing of it. They just record all their festivals. They were recording it in a separate tent. They mic'd all the various instruments, the kick drums, guitar, out in the crowd, everything was individually mic'd and it was recorded on digital. After the festival they told me, "Yeah, we recorded the show." I asked them how come, without even asking me? And, then I said I would love to hear it. It was our live show. It had a lot of energy. And, then I found out that I could go in and remix it and take down the kick drum, bring up the snare, lower the guitar, and bring up the piano. I could put effects on the vocal and do a lot of good stuff. So, I brought the engineer who recorded it, who was a total pro, down to L.A. and we mixed it, and it was good enough to put out as a record. It was just a lucky shot. So I saved some money on that I can tell you. It really expresses our live show.

**L.B.** - That was a good night, its all good, different strokes for different folks you know.

**The band is made up of seasoned veterans and younger players?**

**K. R.** - Oh its great, I played off and on with Johnny...bunch of differ-

ent time through the years. We go back twenty five years, and Finis, too. We go back a bunch of years. It was fun man.

**F.T.** - Oh yeah, definitely no problem we all get along, it's a blues thing. It's all a blues thing.

**R.Z.** - I'm having a ball. I always have a ball.

**R.C.** - The older veterans are fading fast so there are some great guys out there who need the exposure and play great music. Take Johnny Dyer, there is nobody living that can duplicate that Little Walter, Sunny Boy Williamson situation like Johnny, he's the guy. Finis has that voice that can sing soul, blues, swamp, but their all getting older so now is the chance to see them with these younger guy that can push the music and make it happen for younger people.

**Its a fairly big group?**

**F.T.** - Randy tries to keep the whole damned thing together, everyone he has is here except Rod Piazza, he's on the label but he couldn't be here. We do mostly festivals and that type thing. Its been good.

**People have called you a blues super group. What do you think?**

**L. B.** - Well we're just playing the plain old, good simple down home blues, it just blends together. Super is when you doing what you feel and that makes it super.

**Why is Delta Groove a great record label?**

**K. R.** - Randy, he puts a lot of money into promotion, he has a good staff, really promoting the stuff. It's been great.

**F.T.** - Randy has always been a blues lover and he got some investors and opened it up. He said he was going to do it or die. So many blues labels they have you record and then throw it over to the side and don't put it out there to get played. I really appreciate him doing that because it helps keep us [stay] alive.

**R.C.** - Our main concern is the

music. Its not the commercial value of it, we don't make concessions.

Because of my movie job I don't have to make concessions to only put out music. I hope it will touch the rock audience and sell like that, but we're just going to continue to put out really good blues music. We are going to represent the true roots in a very contemporary way, that young people can relate to. So, I think that is what separated us from the rest. Other labels are dependent on sales to stay alive, and if that means putting a rock guitar player on their blues record, someone that really doesn't have a knowledge, or paid their dues to sell records, [it] is just wrong. I don't have to do that because I have money coming from another source, so I can present the real down home shit without having to make concessions.

It's about the music, it's about paying the guy's well. I am just really blessed to be fortunate enough to be able to do this. I came from poverty, my family didn't come from money, I've had a rough life up until maybe about 10 years ago, so I try to pay the musicians, and get them the recognition and due the best I can for those guys.

**R.Z.** - They've got great artists, I don't even record for them and I still think there great.

**Not many people think of California as a blues mecca, why is that?**

**F.T.** - Well I don't know, Los Angles, there are so many people from so many places, they come to there to California and it seems they want to forget about the blues. San Fransisco is pretty good. You do find more blues in the San Francisco bay area.

**L. B.** - Well, one thing about it, practically everybody in California is from Texas or [a] Louisianan. All the rest of them are coming from down south.

**R.Z.** - Not true, what about Oakland and the Bay area. I tell you man, when black folks migrated from the South they all didn't all just go to

**Randy Chortkoff and his Mannish Boys Playing for Memphis in May at the New Daisy, 2006**



Chicago, a lot of them went to Texas and then on to Los Angeles and the Bay area. It's never gotten a lot of publicity, but there have been some unbelievable players from the West Coast. What about Lowell Fulson? There are a lot of great musicians from the coast, we could be here for days talking about the music that came out of the area.

**R. C.** - They have their information absolutely incorrect. Los Angeles, the Central Avenue scene was one of the biggest blues and jazz originators you have, T-Bone, Walker, Pee Wee Crayton, George Smith, Lowell Fulson, Roy Brown, Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson, Big Mama Thornton, Joe Turner, I could go on and on. Somehow Los Angeles lost it somewhere along the way, their recognition as being a blues mecca of the past. Hopefully, my label is showing people that the influences has carried over to the present. And that we're got not just in L.A., but the whole West Coast from Oregon and Washington all the way down to the Mexican border. We have some of the greatest blues players in the world.

#### **How did the blues get to California?**

**F.T.** - In the '40s and '50s I think, it's a lot of musicians from a lot of different places, Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, they migrate to another place, meet each other and they get it on.

**LB.** - By T-Bone Walker of Dallas Texas.

#### **What is the best place to see the blues out west?**

**K. R.** - The West Coast club scene has dried up, the Café Boogaloo is happening, and there's Cozy's out in the Valley, and the Blue Café is starting to have blues again, they are the only ones I can think of that are happening. Been rough out there lately.

**F.T.** - I would say, Biscuits and Blues in San Francisco, they have blues there seven days a week. It's a good spot, they have only blues. I was just there two weeks ago with my own band, Finis Tasby Band.

**L. B.** - Well in San Francisco Biscuits and Blues. It's a good blues place. And L. A. They have one called Cafe Boogalou in Hermosa Beach, that's a good one.

**R.Z.** - Now a days, blues is not in the best shape, I mean really everywhere, but you have places like Biscuits and Blues where you can see blues seven nights a week. And as long as there are places like that you'll be able to see some blues, and luckily they book touring acts as well. When I was a young man in the Bay area there was a hell of a scene, but it's unfortunately a lot of the performers have passed on or become ill and don't perform anymore. You have to see them while

you can. But there is always young people to carry it on

**R.C.** - Unfortunately it has been really tough the last year or two. Blues clubs have been fading off the map. Again, people are relating the blues that's being played by guys that just want to find some niche for themselves. The rock market is so competitive that they can't get ahead there, so their trying to find it niche for themselves in the blues world and they not qualified to be playing the blues. So a lot of the clubs have faded. There is a club called the Café Boogaloo, in southern CA. It has some of the best blues and touring acts around. There is a small club called Cozy's playing national acts and good quality music, but frankly there are just not to many venues that are available. It like, people can only see blues at festivals.

#### **Any famous unknown California blues treasure you can share?**

**K. R.** - Can't think of any, I don't get out much, I sit at home and put my feet up

**F.T.** - Well he's here now, Kurt Fletcher, he's one of the best guitar players, he's a young guy and he is really good

**L. B.** - We have one guy name is Blues Sonny Green, he's from Arkansas. A hell of a blues singer.

**R.Z.** - There was a gentleman that never got a lot of publicity that has since passed on. He is still to this day a great hero of mine, his name was Cal Valentine. He was a multi-instrumentalist. He played guitar and harmonica, and he was a singer. He was originally from Texas but I used to see him around the Bay area, he was from Oakland. He was fantastic, he had a style all his own, but you don't hear to many people talking about him east of the Rocky's but he was great.

**R.C.** - We're going into the studio with a guy named Jackie Payne, he's a black/soul/blues/gospel/funk singer that is just amazing. Jackie Payne is somebody that is going to get a lot of attention real soon.

#### **What about down home food in California?**

**K. R.** - Berell's is great in Santa Anna, the tips and ends and the dirty rice.

It sounds good right now doesn't it!

**F.T.** - They have a place called M&M. They serve good food, really good food, and you can get anything you want. They have collard greens, black eyes peas and candy yams they don't get more down home than that. In Los Angeles as a matter of fact they have more than one.

**L. B.** - M&M Soul Food in Los Angeles. They have neck bones, cabbage, collard greens, chitlins, peach cobbler they got it all..



**L-R: Zac Harmon, Dennis Jones, Finis Tasby, Chris Bell, Sirius Trixon, DugMug, and the fabulous Julia "Lady J" Gerard, Pacific Coast Blues in Santa Monica, November 2005.**

Photo/Robert Jr Whittal

**R.C.** - There a great BBQ in L.A. that says, "You don't need teeth to eat our beef," I just can't think of the name. On Labrya and Crenshaw.

#### **What is your favorite California blues story?**

**L.B.** - Nothing we can talk about, all of mine was on the road.

**R.Z.** - Probably not something we can write in print. I've had a lot of great experiences. I was lucky enough to perform with a lot of great performers when they came out to the West Coast. From Chicago and what not, I was lucky, I was tapped to play with all kinds of people. Folks like Jimmy Rogers, Carey Bell, Billy Boy Arnold, there are a lot of great stories that we probably can't talk about here.

#### **Do you surf?**

**K. R.** - Hell no I don't surf! Al does, but I don't.

**F.T.** - No, no! No way! Never tried it and never will. I have been here since 73, I don't surf, that's too much water for me.

**L. B.** - No, no. No way. Well, not yet.

**R.Z.** - I used to surf when I was a teenager. And do you know Al Blake [Hollywood Blue Flames], his is part of the Delta Groove Revue? He surfs, too.

**R.C.** - I did surf through the '60s. Rod Piazza is a really good friend of mine, he surfs every day. He keeps saying he is going to take me out so I am looking forward to start surfing again.

#### **It ain't a black thing or white thing, it's a blues thing?**

**R.Z.** - I don't check for a man or woman's skin color. If the music moves me I don't care about their skin color, you don't hear music with your eyes, you hear it with your ears and your heart.

## L.A. Musician Chris Bell

By DEBBIE WATSON

**S**inger/guitarist/songwriter Chris Bell is a forthright performer whose adherence to the blues tradition is impressive and refreshing. Born in DC, Bell was raised on blues, jazz, and R&B by his New York City father and North Carolina mother. Starting guitar as a youngster, then continuing with jazz workshops in college (Umass) with Archie Shepp, as well as studying with guitar great Tony MacAlpine, Chris has developed a style all his own. Eclectically mixing such styles as traditional, roadhouse, soul, back porch/Delta and blues-rock, he is inspired by and pays tribute to star musicians who range from BB King and Albert Collins to Jimi Hendrix and Stevie Ray Vaughan. Silverbridge recording artist Bell has been headlining blues clubs and festivals all over the United States including Chicago, New York City and Los Angeles, in addition to hosting and producing *100% Blues*, a cable access TV show in the Los Angeles area. Bell is one of today's hottest independent blues artists.

#### **Not many people think of California as a blues mecca. Why is that?**

Sunshine, babes, bikinis, beaches... blues, doesn't quite fit together. Not many swamps, juke joints, moonshine, or even a single front porch in L.A.

#### **What is your favorite California blues story?**

That's easy! In November 1982 a guy named Stevie Ray Vaughan had 72 free hours of recording time at a place called Down Town Studio owned by Jackson Browne... here in