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Tall City Blues Fest 2017 to Showcase 24 Award-Winning Performers in Downtown Midland, TX

Blues radio and music charts are bursting in recent years with an explosion of creative new blues artists, many of whom are bringing exciting new innovations to the genre and others who are carrying forward some of its oldest traditions.

The 24-act lineup for this year's Tall City Blues Fest, which will take place in three venues (stages) all nestled in downtown Midland, TX on July 14-15, is a who's who from this new generation of blues artists.

Each year, Tall City Blues Fest carefully selects the hottest blues acts, many of them still emerging in the blues industry, by paying close attention to which performers are winning recognition on the international scene.

"We watch acts, sometimes for a couple years, before we make an offer," said Fest Producer Lisa Grissom. "They are getting airplay, or they are finalists in the International Blues Challenge, or being nominated and winning Blues Music Awards. They are doing all the things that put them on the right trajectory."

Blues Music Award Honorees

The Blues Music Awards (BMAs), held each year in Memphis, are blues music's highest honors. Often going to long-established blues giants, a BMA means an up-and-coming artist has truly arrived. Many the acts at this year's fest have been nominated for or won these coveted awards.

Victor Wainwright, the headliner of this star-packed weekend downtown festival, has already won more top awards in 10 years than most blues artists do in an entire career. In just more than a dozen years since his debut album, *Piana from Savannah*, turned the piano scene on its ear, this 36-year-old phenomenon has won five BMAs, most recently earlier this year for Pinetop Perkins Piano Player of the Year.

Fronted by harmonica giant Brandon Santini and world-touring wild man guitarist Jeff Jensen, this power-packed super group **Santini-Jensen Project** puts two fest favorites front and center on the main stage as this year's finale act. Together this pair has racked up eight nominations for Blues Music Awards and Blues Blast Music Awards.

Opening the headlining set on the main stage, Israel-born blues and jazz guitarist **Guy King** was a 2017 BMA nominee for Best Emerging Artist Album, which also hit #1 on the Roots Music Report Contemporary Blues Chart.

Missy Andersen, who returns to the festival after a crowd-pleasing set in 2015, is a two-time BMA nominee for Best Soul Blues Female Artist.

International Blues Challenge Contenders

Each year, more than 800 acts from around the world compete in their local blues markets to represent their blues societies at the International Blues Challenge (IBC) in Memphis. More than 250 make it to Memphis and only the best few make the semi-finals and finals.

The IBC is a popular place to recruit blues artists, and Tall City Blues Fest has hired some of the best competitors in the Challenge. Solo pianist and harmonica player **Randy McQuay** of North Carolina took home a 1st place win in the solo/duo competition in 2015, and **Ben Prestage**, a former Beale Street busker, won 2nd place in the solo/duo category in 2008.

Cincinnati's **Noah Wotherspoon** has also dominated the competition, winning Best Guitarist in 2015 and a 2nd place overall finish. Other IBC notables include Colorado teen guitarist **Grace Kuch**, the youngest performer ever invited to perform as part of the 2016 National Women in Blues Showcase, and **Brody Buster** of Kansas City, who won Best Harmonica at this year's International Blues Challenge.

Grits & Groceries Orchestra also represented the Boston Blues Society at this year's IBC and caught the judges' attention, and that of the festival organizers, for their spirited brand of swing.

Chart Toppers

Many of this year's festival acts have appeared atop blues music charts around the nation and world.

Named for the Memphis street leading to their label, Stax Records' **Southern Avenue** is the "most talked about band in Memphis," according to Rock 103 FM. Founded by Israeli guitarist

Ori Naftaly, this five piece band features Tierinii Jackson, who has one of the best voices in contemporary music, regardless of genre, while her sister, Tikyra Jackson, provides the bands tasteful drum grooves. Their self-title debut album, *Southern Avenue*, hit #6 on the *Billboard* blues chart in March.

Los Angeles guitar hero, **Dennis Jones**, has captured enormous attention in recent years, including from the roots blues legend Keb' Mo', with whom he made a documentary in 2013. The latest of his five albums hit #1 on the Roots Music Report blues rock chart.

The innovative **Voo Davis** hit #1 on the Top 100 Blues Chart on WMHB Radio in 2015 with his genre-mixing Americana and roots rock style. And songstress, **Toots Lorraine**, has been featured on over 40 stations worldwide, hit #2 on the *Living Blues* chart, and cracked the Top 10 on B.B. King's Bluesville and the Roots Music Report.

"Toots stole our hearts from the word go with her velvety voice and vintage style," said Fest Producer, Lisa Grissom.

Regional Giants and Critics' Faves

Some of this year's blues artists came to the fore after rising to the top of their regional blues scenes. Jump blues band **Eight O' Five Jive** have scored many Nashville Industry Music Awards for Best Live Performers, and six-string scorcher **Ruben V** has been voted San Antonio's Best Guitar Player multiple times.

Erin Harpe & the Delta Swingers were Blues Act of the Year at the Boston Music Awards, and **Ally Venable**, just 18, has won so many East Texas Music Award nominations and awards for her band, guitar playing, albums and vocals that her wall can't hold them all. Another Texas titan, **Rochelle & the Sidewinders**, won the Austin Blues Society's Heart Of Texas Blues Challenge in July of 2016.

Chase Walker, who appeared on Season 10 of *The Voice*, was also up for two Independent Music Awards in 2016 for Best Album and Best Cover Song and was named one of the "Top 10 Artists Under 18 You Need to Know" by *American Blues Scene* magazine.

Finally, three of the acts appearing at the festival this year have caught the eyes of critics and big name artists in a major way. Guitar goddess **Heather Gillis**, 22, was the lead guitarist for former Allman Brothers drummer Butch Trucks and his band The Freight Train.

The multi-instrumentalist and vocalist, **Tullie Brae** was named one of the "Top 25 Women in Blues" by *Blues E-News* magazine and Australian songwriter **Kara Grainger** won a top honor



when she was awarded Best Roots CD by the Indie Acoustic Project Awards.

“This is an exciting lineup,” said Grissom. “It is truly the best of what’s out there right now.”

Tall City Blues Fest takes place Friday and Saturday, July 14-15 in downtown Midland, TX. For a complete concert schedule and more information, including ticket information, visit www.tallcitybluesfest.com.

ABOUT VISITMIDLAND

The mission of *VisitMidland* is to encourage economic growth by developing, promoting, enhancing and supporting Midland as a vibrant visitor destination. The above information has been provided by Tall City Blues Fest and distributed by *VisitMidland*. This event is projected to bring in \$781,000 in direct visitor spending to the Midland economy.

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