

eleanor ellis

Eleanor Ellis, blues singer and guitarist, will be coming to Britain this October to play four gigs in the London area for the first time since 1987.

A native of Louisiana and now a resident of Maryland, Ellis's musical influences include the blues players she has known personally as well as early blues greats like Memphis Minnie and Mississippi John Hurt. She has developed a distinctive and personal approach to the music, and has played at festivals, concerts and clubs throughout the United States, in Canada and in Europe. According to one reviewer, 'More than copying one artist or another, Ellis distils the elements of the originals and transmits them intact, in her own expressive way.' She was recently nominated by the Washington Area Music Association for Best Female Blues Vocalist and her most recent CD, *Comin' a Time* on the Patuxent label, was nominated for Best New Blues CD of 2007. This CD, available from www.cdbaby.com, was also chosen for heavy rotation on XM Satellite radio's Pick to Click.

Ellis has a long involvement with the US blues scene. She travelled and played with the late Gospel street singer Flora Molton, was a regular at the Saturday afternoon barbershop blues jams of Piedmont bluesman Archie Edwards, and sometimes accompanied Delta blues great Eugene Powell down in Greenville Mississippi. She is a founding member of the D.C. Blues Society and the Archie Edwards Blues Heritage Foundation, has written about the blues for several publications, teaches guitar, and is producer and editor of the video documentary *Blues Houseparty*, which features well-known Piedmont blues musicians such as John Jackson, John Cephas, and Archie Edwards. She also worked at the Archive of New Orleans Jazz at Tulane University in New Orleans, and at the New Orleans Jazz Museum. - *Anne Rosenberg*

Eleanor Ellis writes: This year started on a sad note, with the sale and closing of the Archie Edwards blues barbershop after almost fifty years of operation. When Piedmont blues musician Archie Edwards was alive, he'd close down his barbershop on Saturday afternoons and we would drop by to, as Archie put it, "drink a few beers, play a little music, and tell a few lies." After Archie's death in 1998 a handful of regulars got together to keep the barbershop open and continue Archie's tradition of weekly jams and spreading the gospel of the blues. We managed to do that, and eventually these jams grew into a

large musical community made up of people from all walks of life: music-obsessed attorney for the U.S. Justice Department who took his resonator guitar to work and practised in his office (not particularly quietly) every chance he got; an impassioned blues-singing woman who is also a Methodist minister; an actor in a weekly TV series; a federal employee who made wooden 'bones' on his lunch hour, sitting alone in a cloud of flying sawdust; a harmonica-crazed man of 86 who discovered the joys of playing blues harp at the age of 85; a woman with a lovely voice and stage presence who is also a judge. But mostly you never knew or cared what someone did in 'real life' because the important thing was the friendship and the music which brought us all together. I think we will eventually find another home, but it can never take the place of the original barbershop.

In March, I opened for Buddy Guy at The Birchmere, a well know local club. At the end of April, Lightnin' Wells (long-time musician friend from North Carolina) and I played at a festival at Lutherhaus in Osnabruck, Germany along with, among others, Robert B. Jones from Detroit, Michael Roach, and the Down Home Perculators (Klaus "Mojo" Killian, harp and Bernd Simon, guitar). Lightnin' and I also did a gig with Mojo and Bernd at the Jazzkeller in Frankfurt. We then went to Bad Gandersheim to stay with blues photographer Axel Kustner and do a series of gigs sharing the bill with Front Porch Picking, a multi-talented German group of six really nice guys. Axel's place is overflowing with 78 (rpm) records, LPs, CDs, books, photos, a collection of hot-sauce bottles, front pages from some of the more outlandish U.S. weeklies plastered on the walls ("half-man half-bat discovered in Vermont. Scientists say he's smart as a whip") and other interesting things. It was fun to have access to all that, but you had to be real careful not to stumble over the piles of rare 78s stacked on the floor.

In June, I learned several songs from the traditions of Southwest Virginia for a show at a rural museum which featured the blues of that area, sharing the gig with John Jackson's nephew



Jeff Scott, Michael Baytop, Gregg Kimball, and Cheryl Wheeler. The Old Songs Festival in upstate New York was at the end of June: I taught an introduction to Piedmont blues guitar and Ron Gordon, Norbert Hebert and I were in charge of the kids' jugband (adults allowed), which performed on the Sunday afternoon show. Mid-July I taught guitar at Augusta Blues Week in Elkins West Virginia, and a week later I was in Port Townsend in beautiful Washington state to teach guitar at Centrum's Blues Week and hang out a bit with the Weenie Campbell contingent (www.weeniecampbell.com check them out).

Those are a few of the highlights of my musical year so far. The first part of October, I'll be doing some gigs in France, thanks to my friend and fellow musician Karim Albert Kook. Tony and Ann from Brooks Blues Bar have invited me to England again for the first time since I was there with Gospel streetsinger Flora Molton, in 1987, for a short tour. I look forward to it!

Eleanor Ellis tours with guitarist **Simon Prager**, with appearances from **Kevin Stenson** on harmonica. **October tour dates** 16th Ram Jam Club at The Grey Horse, Kingston Upon Thames KT2 2EE, 17th Brooks Blues Bar, The Telegraph, Putney Heath London SW15 3TU, 18th Oliver's Bar, Greenwich London SE10 9JL, 19th The Oval Tavern, Croydon CR0 6BR.

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