

Thank You!

The trip to Memphis really broadened my horizons on my band mates, on blues music and the industry, the history of musicians that pre-dated me, and the ones who are still at it. I'm finally grasping the concept of fully appreciating what goes into making a trip like this possible a lot of hard work and dedication. Whether it was meeting deadlines or scheduling practices, I would do it all again, 10 times if I had my way! Debbie, Rick, Cara, Matthias, Steven Hobbs, Ralph Lusian, B.J. Miller, and all the board members and staff, and the parents who stick with us and allow their children to be a part of this program and making endeavors like this possible. I am so grateful for The Alabama Blues Project and everyone and anyone who supports the organization and organizations like us. Thank you all so much and long live the Blues!!!

The Details

January 20, 2010

OMG!!! -is what I was thinking January 20th the day before our trip to Memphis, Tennessee. We had been practicing for the IBC Youth Showcase two times a week for the past two and a half weeks and the time was now upon us. I wasn't antsy yet - I just couldn't believe how fast it came. That night, being the genius that I am, I decided to stay up until 2 o'clock in the morning and not pack a single thing.

January 21, 2010

The morning came quicker than expected, and with it my rush to wash clothes, brush my teeth, take a shower, pack my bags, and eat some kind of breakfast which I managed to do somewhere between Buttermilk and merging onto I-20 West. Next on the agenda was to pick up fellow band mate Tasheka, one of our percussionists, and head to Cara's.



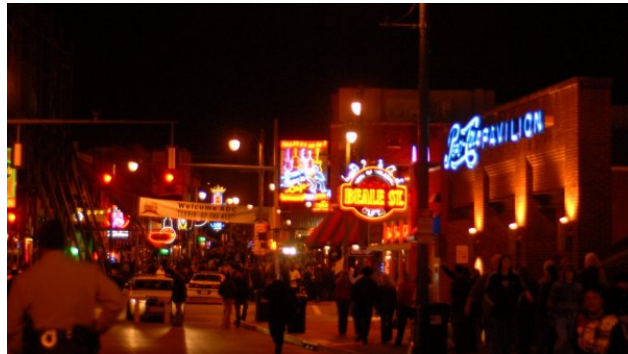
Tasheka and I arrived at Cara's house around 9:00 a.m. Tasheka was thoroughly amused at my driving etiquette that morning because I miraculously stopped at every single stop sign; I blamed it on lack of sleep. Cara greeted us in the garage, "You guys ready to go to Memphis!?" she said, with a broad grin on her face. Tasheka and I gave enthusiastic responses such as "I'm excited!" "Let's do this!" and "I might as well as be..." Then after loading the luggage into Cara's car we got the show on the road... literally!



About an hour and a half later on the road we stopped at a Texaco gas station to wait for Duncan, also our percussionist, Jan King his mother and diva photographer and Duncan's friend Alexa, a sweet girl with a really cute sense of style. I greeted Duncan with my usual "DUNCANNNN!!!" in which a glare with a hint of smile was received from him. Jan then announced that she would be taking pictures through the duration of our trip. So we linked up in front of the "Wonderbread" style Texaco and took the first picture of our trip.



We arrived in Memphis probably around 4:00 p.m. To me this meant one thing and one thing only: Game Time. We made it to the Benchmark Hotel and took all of our luggage up to the 4th floor to room 419. Next stop: BEALE STREET!!! I've seen Beale Street before, but there was nothing like being on Beale Street. Every bar had music pouring out of open doors. People were going in and out of places to whichever sound attracted them most, and musicians were everywhere with determination in their eye as they hauled their instruments to their next venue. I was inspired and felt the raw need to make our trip to Beale Street a memorable one.



The first place we visited on Beale Street was hard Hard Rock Café. An utter blast into the past! I saw a lime green suit worn by Isaac Hayes, Johnny Cash's suits and signed guitar and multitudes of other celebrity signed paraphernalia. We saw some of the bands that were competing in the IBC. The band that stood out most to me was 2BLU and the Lucky Stiffs. I loved their stage presence and original music, not to mention their original instruments. Afterwards we walked down Beale Street and did some shopping, Tasheka found this awesome pair of Elvis glasses and took a picture while saying "Thank you, thank you very much." The night came to an end with us gawking in fascination at a ceiling peppered with toothpicks of a restaurant named Huey's.



January 22, 2010- GAME DAY

I began to feel restlessness creep into my legs as I stood in front of the mirror looking at my outfit - a black dress hemmed with white lace, a pair of dark denim blue jeans, and black and silver Converse. "That looks really good Rachel, you should wear that." Tasheka suggested. "You think so, are you sure?" I inquired further. The morning had been filled with trying to locate the place for the registration of the band. I was grateful when Ralph said he was on top of everything and he'd take care of it. I turned back to the mirror and smiled at the blend of masculinity and femininity in my outfit and replied, "You're right, you ready to go?"



Tasheka and I made our way down to the lobby; dancing wildly while the elevator doors were closed and resumed our calm cool collectiveness when they reopened. We ran into Austin, guitarist, and his parents in the lobby; "Hey Mom and Dad," the way I greeted all the band members' parents because they all felt like family to me. By that time, the Kings joined us in the lobby, so we took the trek to the New Daisy on Beale Street together. I was eager to see what the other bands would be like, what they would sound and look like. I was ready.



At the New Daisy, Ralph gave us our IBC passes and we all grabbed some seats around the stage to check out the bands that would go on before us. Cheyna and LaBorn, our outstanding background singers trained by B.J. Miller, were already there. Cheyna sat by me with giddy excitement and said "I'm scared," and I replied, "You shouldn't be, you're wonderful!" LaBorn piped in with more encouraging suggestions and his outgoing humor. Rick and Debbie had arrived, and I was so glad to see them. I ran up and hugged them both, and then the first band was up. They were the band from Chicago. They were really good and I thought they had a nice jazzy twist on "Spoonful." Two more bands were up after the band from Chicago. By the time the third band was up I was dancing in front of the stage with another avid dancer screaming and yelling each time a musician took a knockout solo.

♥WE'RE UP!!!♥

Ralph was there right on the stage with us. We only had ten minutes for setup and take down, so having his professionalism was very helpful. We did our sound check, and with that, we began the show. Usually when I perform, everything is a haze. I'm conscious of doing what needs to be done and getting off the stage in a hurry, but this time was much different; I remembered everything. I've always been very fond of my

band mates, but even more so in Memphis. We were attentive to one another, solos showed up and out, and our dynamics were on point. The avid dancer I had befriended was standing in front of the stage giving us the thumbs up. I could see Debbie and Cara cheering for us off the stage and I couldn't help but grin. Cheyna and LaBorn were in sync and sounded great. Backstage Cheyna, LaBorn and I cheered, danced, and supported our band while we waited for our last song. LaBorn rallied the crowd to their feet for 'Let The Good Times Roll.' Then we proceeded to... mmm... how to put this nicely... we tore the house down - yeah that's what we did! I was so proud of us and so excited I was seeing rainbows. Off stage we were congratulated by parents, admirers, and other youth showcase acts alike. Back to business, though. It didn't take me a good twenty minutes before I was lugging one of the conga drums back up Beale St. and to our hotel, and I was loving every second of it.



Later on that evening, Cara, Tasheka, and I were walking around Beale Street and other surrounding streets and decided to go hit the Peabody Hotel to see the famous Peabody ducks. We get there and run into Tyler, Bennett, Austin, their parents and Matthias. The ducks were so cute, but watching the ducks with commentary from Bennett and Tyler made the ordeal hilarious. We took pictures by the fountain, then the five of us band mates split back to Beale Street eager to hear more music. Since the IBC made for all ages venues, we went bar hopping and heard great songs and a lot of funny ones, too. We ran into Homemade Jamz everywhere, and we exchanged enthusiastic conversations about our next destinations and which bands we were in route to see next. It was so nice to see them again. I was so glad to have my band mates with me in Memphis because we

really got to know each other more and hangout. It was like being with family and they really are. HA! Besides it's not everyday Tyler and Bennett teach you how to do The Jerk-some backwards skipping dance that I still haven't quite got the hang of yet.



JANUARY 23

Our trip was coming to an end but not before we got to see the IBC Finals. The Orpheum Theatre was beautiful with its gold leaf moldings and giant crystal chandeliers. All the Blues stars and fans that came to witness the finals only added to the venue's grandeur. The Finals began, and the array of sounds I heard from the finalists was amazing; some were jazzy, some had swing some were rock, but they were all blues. The band Labron Lazenby And L.A.3 had made it to the finals, which I was thoroughly pleased because I am a huge fan of their song 'Tramp.' Between acts Debbie introduced me to the fine art of "schmoozing" where you introduce yourself to different individuals and network. The last performance of the IBC Finals were also the winners - Grady Champion delivered a performance to die for by jumping off the stage and bringing new meaning to the concept of crowd interaction.



JANUARY 24- Farewell Beale and Memphis

This was the end of the road for our trip to Memphis... BUT FIRST we had to go to Graceland and Graceland Too!!! That's right - Elvis Presley's house: Graceland. At first I was thinking, "Why does everyone idolize this guy?" I knew how huge he was, but

it just didn't connect with me. My perception of Elvis changed drastically, though, when I got to take the Graceland tour - and I'd like to thank Cara so much because I loved the history and I actually appreciate how influential Elvis was as a person, not only in the music industry but also to his community and his country. Plus, his music and stage presence was phenomenal! Needless to say I was almost in tears at the end of the tour at the Meditation Garden where the Presley's were laid to rest. Then from there, we got on the road in ultimate route to Tuscaloosa, but not before we stopped at Holly Springs, MS to visit Graceland Too. Graceland Too was a Presley's fan fantasy with a twist. MacLeod, the owner and keeper of Graceland Too, has chest loads full of documentation of each and every time Elvis has been mentioned in the media. The walls were covered in photos and news articles on Elvis. It was amazing and quite a treat right after seeing Graceland. So with that our trip to Memphis came to an end, but not before Cara gave Tasheka and I a little taste of what the jam band Widespread Panic was all about.

