

RECIPIENT OF THE BLUES FOUNDATION'S 2007 KBA AWARD!

# BLUES MATTERS!

JUNE/JULY '07 | Issue 36 | £4.50



**STEPHEN DALE PETIT**

**THE ALLMAN BROTHERS, GRATEFUL DEAD,**

**PHIL LESH & FRIENDS AND**

# GOV'T MULE

**ROCK ROYALTY DEMANDS WARREN HAYNES!**



ISSN 1477-5093  
9 471647 450920



# STEPHEN DALE PETIT

## GETS HIS POINT ACROSS

INTERVIEW: SAM WILKINSON



e's spent time with B.B. King, Robert Plant, Albert King and Jeff Beck, had breakfast with Eric Clapton, and has played on stage with Dave Gilmour, Phil May and Ian Stewart, yet many will be unfamiliar with the name Stephen Dale Petit. More likely to be seen playing underneath a venue than actually inside, nevertheless Stephen has begun courting the attention of mainstream press and radio following the release of his debut album, "Guitararama". With Stephen working hard to increase profile for his Blues, which saw the album enter the HMV Blues Album Bestsellers Top Ten, and intent to see the genre return to its former glories, Blues Matters! had to take heed...

"I want to restore the Blues to the Top 40 in this country, where it belongs," he said to me, almost banging his fists down on the table to leave me in no doubt that he meant what he says. "All modern guitar music is in debt to the Blues. There is a current rock genre called 'emo', short for emotional, and the Blues is the original emo, really, isn't it?" he added.

Stephen Dale Petit, an American born Blues guitarist, in recent years, could regularly be found busking on the London Underground. It was here that Stephen experienced first hand, the appeal that Blues music can have. "I know from playing below The Astoria that even death

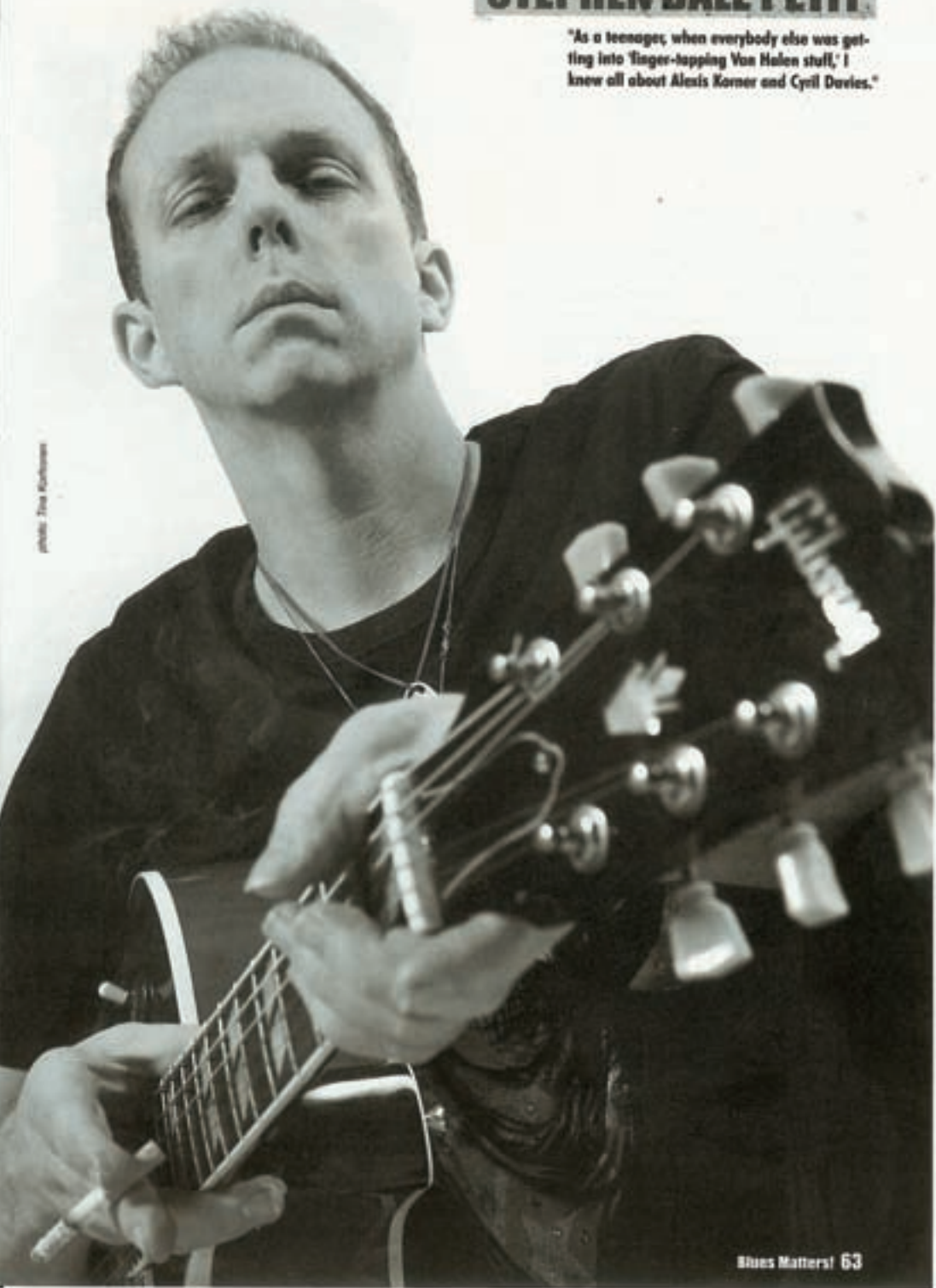
metal heads, goths, punks...and skateboard kids like the Blues. They didn't know they were listening to Blues, they just liked it. If you said: 'Do you wanna go and listen to a Blues guy?' They'd go: 'No,' but none of that's happened, they just encountered me, and heard it. Sometimes, the metal kids up stairs would come down and say 'you're better than the stuff we just paid £15 to see,' that sort of stuff makes an impression on you."

It was as a teenager growing up in California that Stephen recalls one of the highlights of his early career. "I grew up in Huntington Beach California, a small surf-town south of Los

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"As a teenager, when everybody else was getting into 'finger-tapping Van Halen stuff,' I know all about Alexis Korner and Cyril Davies."

photo: The Richman



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Angeles, and there was a club called The Golden Bear, which was part of the small club circuit in the States, and so I had easy access to these legends as they quite literally rolled up on my doorstep. There would be two shows a night and I went to the early show for Albert King. His tour bus was parked out front, and on my way out I noticed him sitting in it, smoking his corn-cob pipe. The door was open and I asked if I could get on. We talked for the 2 hours or so until he was due back onstage. He had a guitar, and he showed me some things, and then he got me into the 2nd show." Within a year Stephen was playing at The Golden Bear in his own right.

Stephen also remembered the time he was invited to play at the opening night of Phil May's "Friends Band", at a club in Leicester Square. "When I was called to the stage I strapped on my guitar, turned on my amp and checked my guitar control knobs. When I looked up David Gilmour was stood next to me doing the same. Stage right was Ian Stewart!"

Stephen was barely 20-years-old when he made the decision to move to England, driven by a desire to be part of the British Blues boom. "By the time I was able to make a choice about where I wanted to be, I came here." Stephen explained, "I was introduced to the Blues by British music of the '60s, and I include Hendrix in this. After all, outside the UK, for the first 6 to 12 months many didn't know he was American, and he certainly owed his career in The



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Stephen with John Mayall (right)

Experience to the 'swinging London' scene of the '60s.

That initial introduction had a large impact on me. I also would watch movies/TV shows shot in the UK, and I became fascinated with how different everything was in these movies to what I saw around me in California. As a young teenager, when everybody else was getting into 'finger-tapping Van Halen stuff,' I knew all about Alexis Korner and Cyril Davies. I think it is crucial to recognise that bands like Cream, Zeppelin, Hendrix, Stones, Beatles and Fleetwood Mac were aimed at a young audience."

Once again Stephen was gesturing, clearly frustrated that this point even needs addressing. "The marketing was fairly sophisticated and in my case very effective. I did not have any desire to move to, say, Chicago or to the Mississippi Delta because all the music that I was turned on to

by these UK bands."

It is clear that Stephen considers that Eric Clapton is one of the most significant guitarists, not just in Blues, but in the instrument's history, insisting "he was the first person to ever marry a Les Paul to a Marshall. Jimmy Page is on record as having said 'without Eric Clapton playing a Les Paul through a Marshall, I wouldn't have' if Jimmy Page hadn't, Slash wouldn't have, and so on." Yet again, animated by his passion, Stephen continued, "He really built his solos, like a well written speech. He'd say 'hello, I'm here' then make a statement and then another, but carefully reiterating the earlier points, and then leave you with powerful finale."

Stephen went on to explain how he now associates with Clapton. "When I had just started busking, Eric asked me what I was up to and I felt a little shy about telling him, but the first thing out of his mouth was 'That's great! That's really admirable!' His face lit up and he quizzed me about it for ages. Of course, such an immediate musical experience is just not available to him,

**STEPHEN DALE PETIT**

# GUITARARAMA

What we said (Blues Matters!, issue 32):

"For a self-confessed busker, Stephen Dale Petit isn't doing badly with his self-financed latest album, 'Guitararama'. His confidence in himself is unbearable almost, but possibly well deserved. Personally I'm looking for the entertainment in an album and I don't feel it here. It's not an easy access album. It's for the specialists, so if you are a guitar nut, then you need to hear the licks on this album. It will inspire your playing, and push you to further develop your talent. Not a bad thing at all. Every track sounds like an anthem, and should be listened to if you wanted Led Zeppelin without Robert Plant, or you wanted Jimi to just shut up and play the guitar. Everyone wants different things, and there is a time and a place for all music."

guitararama

Stephen Dale Petit



**I feel like the UK needs to be reminded of their treasure trove of a contribution to the Blues.**

he'd get mobbed, and the whole thing would be ruined for him."

I was interested to know what it is that attracts such a musician to busking, and so Stephen explained, "I had actually had some albums out, but not Blues. They were guitar rock, with as much Blues as I could get in there. For various reasons things didn't work out with the companies involved. I was going stir crazy, and saw busking as a way to be musical. It does feel very real, and true to how the Blues greats performed. Knowing that Robert Johnson, B.B. King, Howlin' Wolf, Lonnie Johnson, Blind Lemon Jefferson etc. all did it, made what is essentially doing it the hard way feel like it was the only right way to start."

As we continued discussing Stephen's busking, there was one question I could not help but ask... "The most amusing thing thrown in my case was a young woman's bra and a souvenir photo from the photo booth that was 2 meters

from the pitch, in which she had just taken a topless photo. The least amusing, is boring and predictable - chewed gum."

Stephen told me of a time when he met Jeff Beck at a Rolling Stone's gig, and Jeff Beck had talked of feeling guilty for 'taking their music', referring to poor black American musicians, a notion which Stephen clearly does not share. "I told him that I feel that the British contribution to the Blues was equal to that of the American originators, both musically and by creating greater appreciation of the Blues. I think it is a certainty that without the British Blues Boom the music would not have anything remotely like the profile it does." Stephen also recalled his suggestion of a British Blues Foundation being met with the response



## STEPHEN DALE PETIT

“All modern guitar music is in debt to the Blues.”

that the British “just don’t get it,” a suggestion that this time Stephen agrees with. “I guess I know what he means. It’s like a similar situation in reverse almost, there were these predominantly British musicians pointing out this largely unrecognised treasure trove of amazing American music to the Americans and now I feel like the UK needs to be reminded of their treasure trove of a contribution to the Blues.”

Having now released “Guitararama”, his impressive debut album, funded entirely by busking, Stephen is now beginning to move away from his busking and back to playing live with a band; with recent shows at the Borderline and live on BBC Radio 2. Even a short conversation with Stephen makes it clear that this is more of a campaign than a career move. “There is no point in playing to the converted as far as I’m concerned. I just want to play live everywhere, the existing Blues scene is a place to start, but I absolutely want to make it further. It’s not necessarily about me, I want to be a part of it of course, but all that matters to me is that it happens, not who does it. As long as Blues acknowledges, and not ignores, other musical styles, there is no reason why it can’t be restored to the level of popularity that is once had,” he insisted, and it has to be said, a meeting with Stephen Dale Petit leaves you inclined to believe him. **SW**

# Stephen Dale Petit

**"A damned good  
album with  
loads of depth  
and vibrancy"**

Dave Ling  
Classic Rock Magaine

**"He plays with the fury  
that has left Clapton  
and Co"**

Paul Jones Blues Show  
BBC Radio 2

**"It's Lovely"**  
Eric Clapton

**"The best guitar player  
in Britain today"**

Phil May  
The Pretty Things

**"A stunning guitarist"**  
The Blues Show, GTFM Wales

# guitararama