

The old Juke-Joints – the homes of the blues

I have for quite some years now been fascinated by the history of the American juke-joints in the southern States, and it is interesting still to find information about the old but living juke-joints, and of course to find information about new owners and investors that bring life into the small establishments.

A recent article that renewed my interest told the story about the “Ground Zero Blues Club” in Clarksdale, which is co-owned by one of the famous African-American actors, Morgan Freeman. The blues club was opened in 2001 as a real classic juke-joint with live music (mostly by Afro-American blues musicians), but the joint is of course, since it was opened in 2001, not one of the oldest juke-joints in the State of Mississippi, but it looks authentic in the heart of historic downtown Clarksdale. It is indeed wonderful to see that Morgan Freeman and his associates Bill Lockett and Howard Stowall invested their savings to preserve the culture connected to the old juke-joints in the Southern States – the homes of the blues. It is not known to me if there was an authentic juke-joint in the building on Blues Alley before 2001, but it seems that the building, which is about hundred years old – maybe more, originally housed a company called The Delta Grocery & Cotton.



Ground Zero Blues Club, Blues Alley, Clarksdale (2009).

Another great person, who has invested his savings in a juke-joint, but in a very old one, is the famous bluesman B. B. King. Mr. King took over the historic “Club Ebony” in his said hometown Indianola after the previous owner Mary Shepard, who had been the proud owner of the joint for more than three decades. The joint “Club Ebony” was in fact established back in 1943 by Johnny Jones and was originally called “Jones Night Spot”. Mary Shepard bought the joint on the Mississippi Delta Blues Trail in 1974, and decided in 2008 after having suffered two strokes to hand over the keys to Mr. King. Mr. B. B. King was coming back to his hometown for real.



*Nikolaj Andersen in front of the historic **Club Ebony**, 404 Hanna Avenue, Indianola. To my knowledge the only Dane ever playing blues on the famed stage in the green shed (2007).*

The two famous people mentioned here, Mr. Freeman and Mr. King, really have with their investments brought back the interest in the original blues of many music lovers worldwide. If nobody keeps the traditions of the juke-joints alive most joints will end up having a fate like for example the abandoned location near Moorhead. Today many 'jook-joints' claim to be the oldest, or one of the oldest, joints still open for business in America, and a few of them have even been recognized as national landmarks.



Old abandoned jook-joint with no name near Moorhead a little east of Indianola.

Keep the jook-joints jumpin'.....

Take a look at these photos showing real jukeboxes on location in real-deal juke-joints in the Delta:



AMI/Rowe "R-85 Starlight" (1981) at Bruno's juke-joint in Alligator a little south of Clarksdale (photo by Daryl Thetford).



AMI/Rowe "LaserStar Eagle" (1995) in the Club 2000 at 349 Issaquena Avenue in Clarksdale (photo by Daryl Thetford).

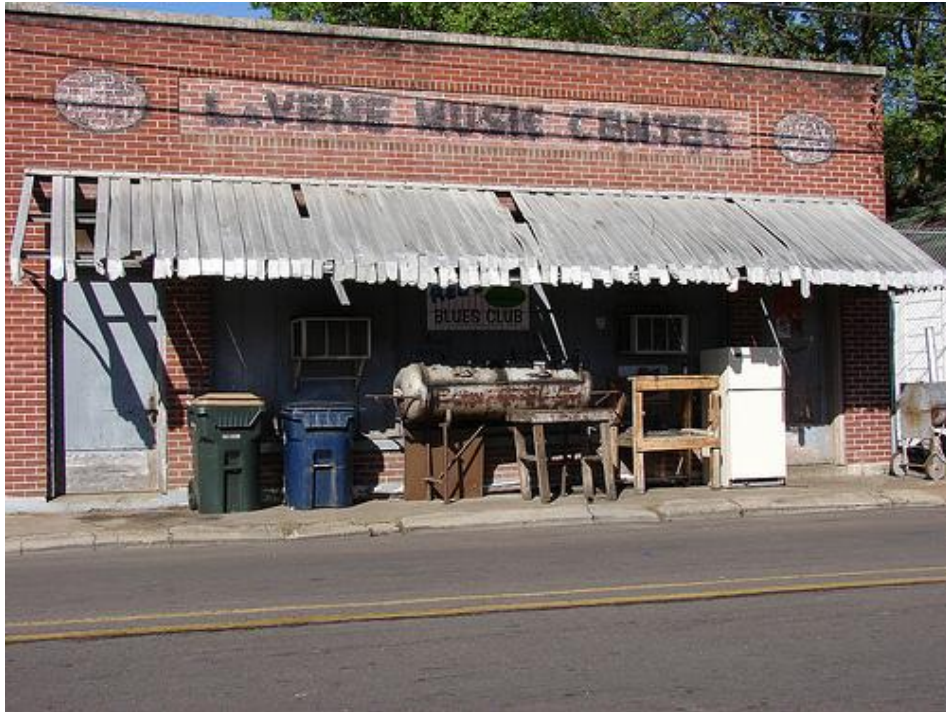
Also take a look at these photos showing some of the classic real-deal juke-joints in Mississippi:



C.W.'s Blues Club, also known as Margaret's Blue Diamond, at 381 West Tallahatchie Street in Clarksdale (photo by Daryl Thetford).



The historic Blue Front Café at 107 East Railroad Avenue in Bentonia a little north of Jackson (photo by Kees Wielemaker).



Red's Blues Club at 395 Sunflower Avenue in Clarksdale (photo by Kees Wielemaker).



Po' Monkey's Lounge, a real classic countryside juke-joint, a little outside Merigold north of Cleveland (photo by Daryl Thetford).

