

LET IT ROLL WITH LEAD BELLY

Living Blues

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**WILLIAM
BELL**

*Music Has
Been My Life*

**SNAPPER MITCHUM
DOWNTOWN
CHARLES BROWN
CEDRIC BURNSIDE**

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*New Reviews of Walter Wolfman Washington,
Omar Coleman, and the Memphis Blues Box Set*

LIVING BLUES

Issue #289

William Bell 10

Music Has Been My Life, My Whole Life

By Robert H. Cataliotti

One of the greatest living soul men, William Bell released his first single for Stax back in 1961. Over the next six decades he has poured out a string of hits including winning a Grammy in 2017. We take a deep dive into the legendary vocalist's long career.

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You Got to Be There at the One

By Justin O'Brien

Bass player Snapper Mitchum has played behind dozens of Chicago's great guitarists including over ten years with Son Seals. His funky bass drove the sound of Chicago blues in the 1970s to new heights. Mitchum also served two tours in Vietnam as a paratrooper and was awarded the Bronze Star. He tells his story to **LB**.

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I Just Love the Blues

By Mike Stephenson

Chicago-based Downtown Charles Brown started his first band in 1995 on keyboards and then picked up the guitar about ten years ago. His live shows now range from full band to trio to solo acoustic.

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Lead Belly: Library of Congress, Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola, circa July 1, 1934

By Jas Obrecht

Lead Belly was serving time in Angola for assault with intent to murder when, in July 1934, John and Alan Lomax of the Library of Congress arrived to record. They recorded 14 powerful tunes from the 12-string guitar master with the booming voice. One of the songs even secured his release from prison.

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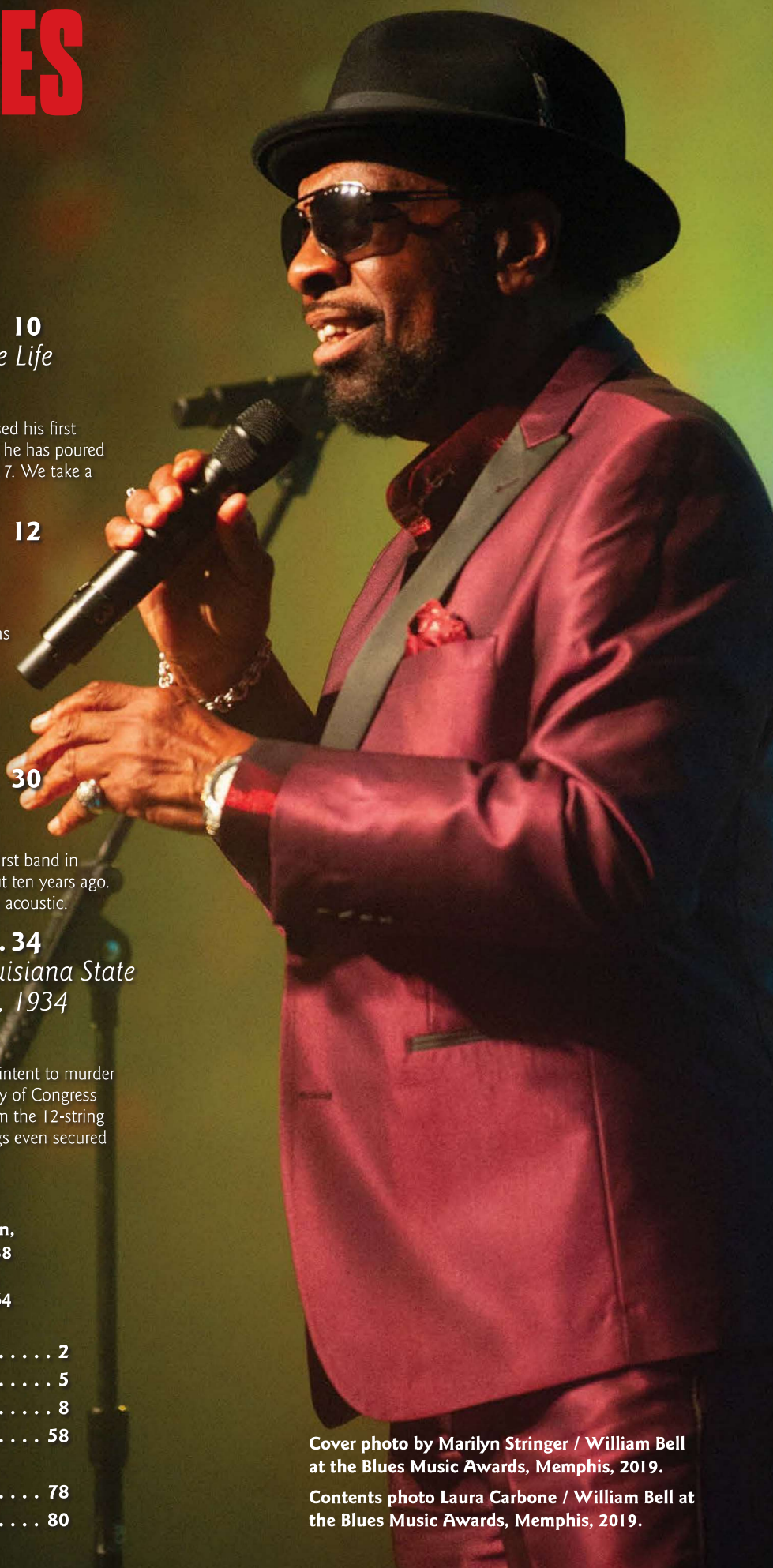
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Cover photo by Marilyn Stringer / William Bell at the Blues Music Awards, Memphis, 2019.
Contents photo Laura Carbone / William Bell at the Blues Music Awards, Memphis, 2019.

Snapper Mitchum, Oslo, Norway,
May 26, 1979.

ERIL LINDPAHL



SNAPPER MITCHUM

Harry “Snapper” Mitchum is perhaps best known as the bass player for Son Seals through ten successful years of recording and international touring, plus a Grammy nomination. But his story is greater than that, with recurring themes of service, humility, and gratitude. He survived the streets of Chicago, served two combat tours of Vietnam (for which he was decorated), experienced a train wreck in which he saved several lives, put his musical career on full stop to care for his mother, raised a family, endured several family tragedies, and moved to Ohio for love. One might say his life was saved by music that he might save others.

“I was born in the county hospital in Chicago, Illinois, September 27, 1945. My name was Harry Mitchum. Harry. My mama said the reason why she called me Harry was that I was a very hairy baby. You know, they had their reasons.

“I was on 33rd and Vernon. It was the ghetto. I remember waking up in the middle of the night and seeing the rats in the kitchen tryin’ to get on the table. Then we moved out to Cicero. I was in these projects called LeClaire Courts.

“When I was little, like second grade, the kids knew I didn’t have two front teeth, and they called me ‘Snap Jack.’ Then when I got older and started playin’ music. Lefty Dizz’s brother, Woody Williams, he called me ‘the Red Snapper.’ So that’s how I got that name.

“My uncle Bubba was a jazz guitarist. Me and my little brother, Larry, used to watch him practice on his guitar. His name was Butler Mitchum. He was actually my mama’s uncle. My mother was a singer, Geraldine Mitchum, but people called her Gerry, with a ‘G.’ She recorded one album. That was like in the late ‘50s.”

Mitchum’s website has a photograph of his mother featured on a matchbook from Club DeLisa, one of the finest nightclubs on the South Side. “Yeah, she sung on the Chicago jazz circuit, like at the Toast of the Town, and Birdland on 64th and Cottage Grove [Pershing Hotel]. She used to sing down there with Little Wash [tenor man Lucius Washington] and Von Freeman. And she also traveled with Jack

McDuff. I used to go to a lot of clubs to see my mama play in Chicago. They had the Flame, the Sutherland . . . I think they had more jazz clubs on the South Side than they had blues clubs. 63rd Street basically wasn’t nothin’ but mostly jazz, all the way to King Drive—South Park, it was called at that time.

“Fred Below knew my mother, ‘cause he played on the jazz circuit. Below played at Club DeLisa, too. And the Flame, that was one of the more famous places.

“A lot of people knew me from when I was a baby, like Sonny Stitt, Gene Ammons . . . In fact, I was playin’ in New York and we was stayin’ at the President Hotel on 48th and Broadway. I was walkin’ down the street and this man looked at me and he says, ‘Snap Jack! What you doin’ in New York?’ And I said, ‘Who are you?’ He said, ‘My name is Sonny Stitt.’ And I said, ‘Well, how you know me?’ He says, ‘You look just like your mama!’ So that’s how he knew me. And me and him talked for a long time about how he and my mom worked together at all the clubs in Chicago. He had moved to New York at that time.”

Despite all that exposure to jazz, Mitchum was nonetheless destined to discover the powerful pull of blues. “I was layin’ up on my grandmama’s couch one day and a song came on [the radio] called the *Tail Dragger*—which was Howlin’ Wolf. And I think that was it. Even though I’d heard B.B. King and other blues people, when I heard Howlin’ Wolf, he changed how I felt about the blues. And my grandfather, his mother lived on 48th and Indiana, right across the street from Theresa’s. So, when my grandfather was goin’ down there to visit her, he would sneak over to the club. And me and my little brother we would go over and peep down in there and we would see Junior Wells, Buddy Guy, and [James] Cotton, all of ‘em down in there playin’, and Cadillac cars sittin’ out in front. That was my first taste.

“I didn’t know who none of them were. I knew of Howlin’ Wolf, B.B. King, you know, the major blues people, but I didn’t know anything about Junior Wells, Buddy Guy . . . But I got my lesson!

“I got sent to reform school in St. Charles because I wouldn’t go to school. That’s where I learned drums and bugle and I got to march in the Bud Billiken parade right in my old neighborhood. But we couldn’t say hello to nobody or hug the girls or nothin’—we had to get right back on the bus.

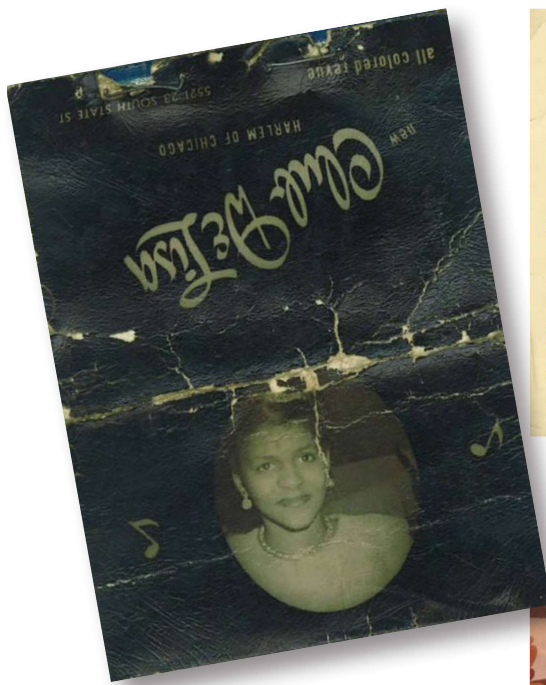
“My brother Top Hat—not Bobby Davis—no, him and my brother Top Hat, they used to fight about whose real name was Top Hat. But my brother, Top Hat, his name was Bertram Robinson, we had the same father but different mothers. Top Hat started out playin’ with the Jackson Five when they were playin’ the talent shows, and winnin’ contests. They used to have talent shows at Cooley High School on the West Side. He was the drummer and they were sneakin’ him in the nightclubs to play. My mama didn’t want him to be travelin’. He was real young like the Jacksons back then. But he had a good career. He used to play with Scotty and the Rib Tips. In fact, I was followin’ behind him.”

But all that was to come later. In the interim Mitchum wound up in the US Army, ultimately serving two tours of duty in Vietnam during some of the heaviest combat of that conflict. He served his first tour with the 101st Airborne “Screaming Eagles” as a paratrooper, and his second with the first 506th Infantry of the 101st Airborne. “I re-enlisted while I was in Vietnam because I thought I was gonna make a career out of it, but life didn’t have that plan for me. I ended up havin’ marital problems at home and . . . you know, I ended up goin’ AWOL. But I didn’t get real punished for it, I got a Article 15 [a non-judicial punishment that circumvents a court martial]. But I went back to my unit and . . . I have a hard time talkin’ about Vietnam . . . I went back to my unit. And I was havin’ mental and all kind of problems because being in a war zone, in combat, it changes you. And you don’t realize what it do to you. Nobody tells you. My brother Larry, he told me I was shell-shocked. I got mad at him ‘cause I didn’t understand what he was tryin’ to tell me. He could tell that I was different, that somethin’ had changed.

You Got to Be There at the One

by Justin O’Brien

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Matchbook cover from the Club DeLisa in Chicago featuring Snapper's mother, Gerry Mitchum.

"I went back during the worst year of the war, during the Tet Offensive. I was in a recon unit. I did see some combat. I was in a recon unit where we went on patrol and we found bunkers and tunnels and weapons and equipment." On his website there are two letters of commendation, one for the Bronze Star, awarded for "meritorious service" in combat.

"I got out in 1971. If I hadn't started playin' music, I probably would have ended up dead or in prison. It saved my life, I believe. It wasn't easy back in them days. When you came back from Vietnam you didn't get no respect, the country wasn't behind you. And you couldn't get your benefits—all that was all messed up . . . And I'm still fightin'. I got problems with my skin from Agent Orange.

"It's part of the story because it led me to where I'm at. If I hadn't fell back on playin' music, ain't no tellin' what I would have been doin'. I think it saved my life. I was going through a lot of changes with PTSD and all kinds of stuff. I started playin' music and I felt that kept me from endin' up in jail, dead, or a drug addict. There was a lot of drugs around there, but I wasn't interested in drugs, I was interested in playin' music. Now, I drank. You know, we drank. If you hang around Lefty Dizz, you gonna drink!

"Right when I got out of the service, my stepmama and my daddy was livin' over on 54th and Lake Park. They lived in a building that Phil Guy was livin' in—Buddy Guy's brother—right next door. I used to go over there and spend time with my brother, and I used to practice with my guitar on the back porch. But at that time my guitar only had



Snapper Mitchum (left) with his great-grandmother Hollie Mae Mitchum, brother Larry Mitchum (right), and a neighborhood child, ca. 1955.



Snapper's mother, Gerry Mitchum, and guitarist George Eskridge, at the Toast of the Town at 70th and Stony Island, Chicago, ca. 1978.

four strings on it. And Phil Guy came out and he seen me there with the guitar and he said, 'Snapper, you could be a good bass player.' I guess I was playin' more like a bass player than a guitar player. He told me, 'If you get you a



Snapper's father, Richard Robinson, while stationed during the Korean War.

COURTESY SNAPPER MITCHUM X 4

bass and start practicin', in about six months you could probably be playin'. I took the guitar to a pawn shop and traded it for a bass. It was made like the one like that guy in the Beatles, Paul McCartney, [had]—with the violin-type head on it. I practiced on that bass, and Phil used to comment on me. Then one day I was watchin' Sly and the Family Stone and the bass player was playin' a Fender Precision. And that's what made me trade my bass for a Fender, and I really practiced hard on it. It took me about seven or eight months. And I'm down there at Theresa's at the jam session and they called me up there and I got to play. And it went from there.

"I went right in there with the bass. I didn't get any real lessons, but with Phil Guy. I started hangin' out at Theresa's a lot. I used to watch 'Big Train' [Earnest Johnson], a big



Snapper Mitchum, Vietnam, 1968.

COURTESY SNAPPER MITCHUM



JIM O'NEAL

Snapper Mitchum (left), with Leonard Gill (guitar) and Bobby King (guitar, behind microphones) at a Bobby King live recording session for MCM Records at Sweet Queen Bee's Lounge, Chicago, October 9, 1975.



JIM O'NEAL

Snapper Mitchum at a Bobby King live recording session for MCM Records at Sweet Queen Bee's Lounge, Chicago, October 9, 1975.



ANDRE HOBUS / COURTESY SNAPPER MITCHUM

Snapper Mitchum, Bobby King, and Junior Wells at Sweet Queen Bee's Lounge, Chicago, 1975.

guy, he wore glasses. He played bass for Junior and Buddy down at Theresa's. So, I used to watch him play and I'd go home and I would practice and practice. Yeah, man! That was my idol—my first bass player after Phil Guy taught me. I started watchin' Train. I felt like he was the one. He knew all that stuff. He was playin' with everybody. Then after that, Herman Applewhite. Train played the bass with the violin-type, upright bass-type head. Herman Applewhite played a Fender.

"I was drivin' this cab out in Robbins, Illinois, and I used to keep my bass with me. And I practiced on it day and night. My fingers would be so bloody I had to put tape on 'em. But it didn't stop me. I started goin' to the jam sessions with my brother, Top Hat, and the next thing I knew I was up on the stage playin' behind Magic Slim.

"Buddy Scott, from Scotty and the Rib Tips, his son, Jerome Scott, he was a bass player and I used to idolize him 'cause he was more of a slap bass player back in them days. He played at Pepper's. We used to go jam there, too. I used to stand there and watch him play. Basically, I would go home and I would remember how he did what he was doin'. He played a lot of stuff: Al Green, the Spinners, you know, more progressive stuff.

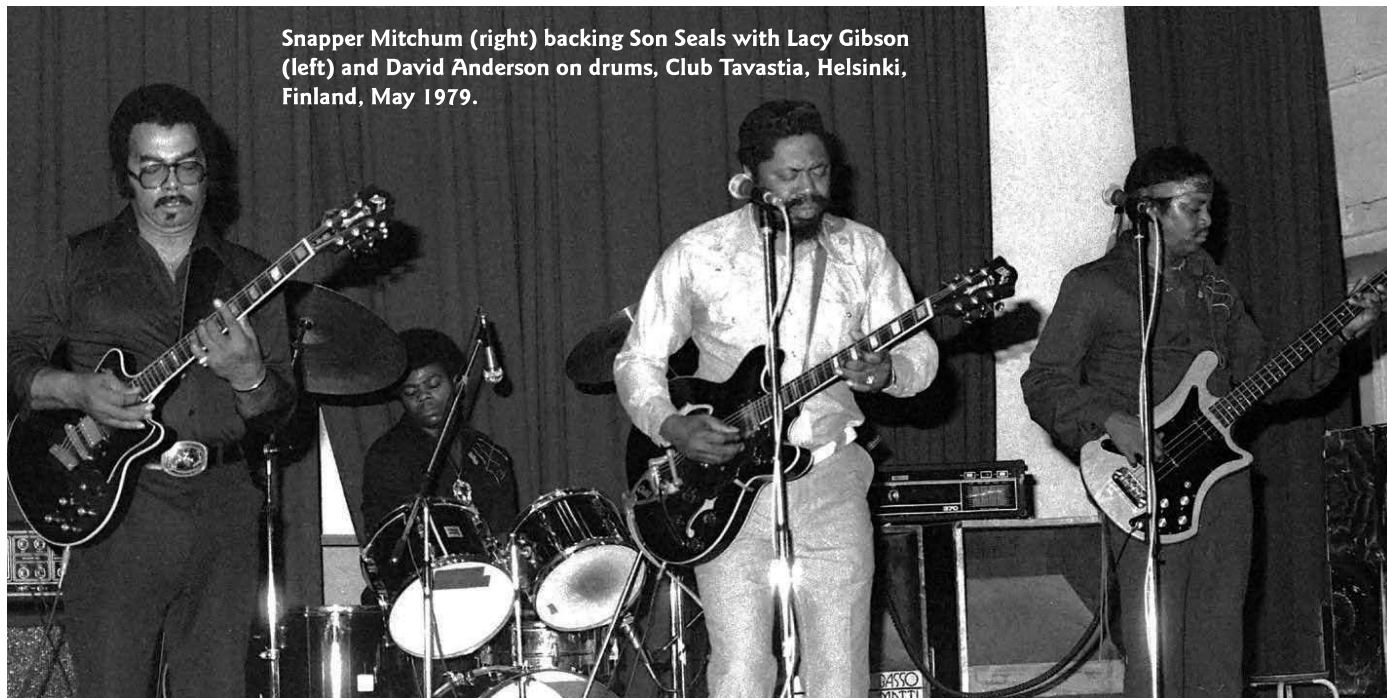
"When I first started playin', I used to pop the strings. I was maybe not one of the first—but I was back there with 'em when they started. And people told me, 'No, you can't play like that.' It wasn't none of the bass players tellin' me, it was the other musicians. They didn't want that funk bass playin'. They wanted that straight, walkin' bass. And all of a sudden it started comin' in, you know, that sound, and the funk that came from it.

"When we [later, with Son Seals] did the *Gentleman from the Windy City* [on **Chicago Fire**, Alligator, 1980], on two songs I did a little slap bass playin', but I didn't do a lot because I didn't want to interfere with Son. But I popped the strings a few times in that one and on another one [*Watching Every Move You Make*].

"Phil Guy was a funk guitar player. Me and him played together and he traveled with me playin'. He liked to play a lot of that "Bad Muther Fuyer" [*A Real Mother for Ya*] Johnny Guitar Watson's style. He had that funky guitar when he played with his fingers, too. He was a chord man.

"I was playin' behind Junior Wells down there at Theresa's. And me and him became the best of friends. He tutored me on a lot of stuff, playin' bass. Junior was like a big brother to me. Even Buddy. You know, Buddy was like far away to me because he was so famous. But he was a good person, too, man. I played with him at the Checkerboard. I remember one night on the stage he looked back and he say, 'Hey, man! Ain't I right, man?' He was talkin' to

Snapper Mitchum (right) backing Son Seals with Lacy Gibson (left) and David Anderson on drums, Club Tavastia, Helsinki, Finland, May 1979.



me. I say, 'Yeah, Buddy, you right!' Somebody didn't come in right, or didn't get the change right, or somethin'. They definitely were that—you can't mess up!

"I used to hang around with [Hound Dog] and Brewer Phillips and Ted Harvey. Then I think Hound Dog shot Brewer Phillips [in 1975]. When they broke up, Hound Dog used me playin' bass with him, me and Sammy Lawhorn and Snake [drummer Roosevelt Shaw]. And we played at a place in Chicago called Minstrels—way up on the North Side.

"I was supposed to play on that [Ann Arbor Blues Fest] with Hound Dog. Well, when we got there, they wouldn't let us play because we wasn't under the contract. But they let Sammy play with Hound Dog. So, I didn't get a chance to play on that one. And that kind of broke my heart. Well, you know, just playin' with Hound Dog was enough. That was a thrill. He'd be sittin' on his amp, or he'd be sittin' in a chair and he'd get his 'coffee.' He'd be sayin', 'Let me get my coffee.' Then he'd look back over there and he'd say, 'You got any?' And he'd stomp his feet and we'd go to playin'. It was so easy to play with Hound Dog. And he would say that I was the only bass player that could keep up with him. He had them funny changes that he made. Sometimes he'd hold it long, and sometimes he'd shorten it. You had to be able to be thinkin' like Hound Dog!"

As much as Theresa's was a productive training ground for him, it was at Queen Bee's where he truly felt he grew, as he had opportunities to play with a greater variety of good musicians and singers. "We first went out there [Queen Bees] to jam. I went out there with Johnny Dollar and my brother Top Hat. We had a band called Dollar and the

Two Dollars More. That was back when I first started playin' and we went out to her club and I didn't have no money, I couldn't get in, you had to pay to get in the door. So, I was standin' out there in front of the club and Queen Bee came out there and asked me did I want to come in. And she let me in. I got up there and jammed with Johnny Dollar and my brother and Fore Superstar [brother of blues musician and educator Fernando Jones]. And from then on, I started playin' in there every night.

"I was in charge of the band at Queen Bee's and I worked there seven days a week. Me and Queen Bee was goin' together at that time. She gave me the job.

"We had different guitar players come through there. I saw Bobby King playin' over at Louise's and I asked him would he come out and play at Queen Bee's with us. And then Muddy Waters Jr., he started comin' out there and hangin' out every time we would play. So eventually we ended up havin' that band: me, Muddy Waters Jr., Bobby King, and Bill Warren on the drums—Barkin' Bill [not to be confused with singer Barkin' Bill Smith].

"These people from France [Marcelle Morgantini and her entourage] came over and they recorded us at Queen Bee's. *Chaser* [MCM Records, recorded in 1975]. *Chaser* and *Old Folks' Boogie*—we played that for a long time. People were dancin' off of it! We didn't stop playin'! That song would last for about 15 minutes! We thought that after they released the CD [originally issued on LP] that we was going to France eventually because they released the album over there, and I don't know what happened."

Bobby King recorded a handful of singles for various small labels beginning in 1962, but *Chaser* was his only appearance on LP before

his untimely death in 1983 at the age of 43. "Bobby King got into a fight down at Louise's on 69th right off of King Drive. He got in a fight with some guy over there and the guy killed him. I wasn't there. I was probably playin'. I was playin' every night at Queen Bee's at that time.

"Pinetop Perkins and Muddy Waters' band, whenever they would come to town, they would come in to play at Queen Bee's. Not Muddy. But Pinetop, wild-eyed Willie Smith, and Guitar Jr.—Luther. And I was the house bass player. I learned a lot of bass lines from playin' with Pinetop. Pinetop was one of them strictly musicians that played by the rules. He didn't change it to go here and go there, he stayed right there. Pinetop was like a grandfather to me. They just all took me under their wing. And most of them knew my mama, from bein' on that circuit."

Son Seals, who'd arrived in Chicago from Arkansas in 1971, had been hitting the South Side clubs for opportunities to sit in and hustle some gigs. It didn't take long for Seals' and Mitchum's paths to cross. "After Queen Bee passed, her daughter took it over. That's when we went out and found Son Seals. Son used to play at this store over on 52nd and Calumet. And Hound Dog used to play there too. I used to go over there and see them, 'cause I lived on 53rd and Michigan—right around the corner. When I was out at Queen Bee's I got Son to come out there 'cause we needed a guitar player. And me and him got together and it went from there. Son Seals started playin' at the club. Son was workin' for me.

"Lacy was workin' with me at Queen Bee's, too, when we all got together with Son. There used to be a club called the Clock, on 73rd and South Chicago, down the street

from Queen Bee's. That's where Lacy used to play. And then he would come down there to Queen Bee's and play, too, sometimes."

Seals was brought to Bruce Iglauer's attention by hipster and ace music scout Wes Race, and very swiftly, it seems, Seals was in the Alligator Records family recording a debut LP, **The Son Seals Blues Band**, in 1973. Four years later, after Snapper Mitchum had gained significant playing time at Queen Bee's with Son, Mitchum was called in to record on a follow-up LP in 1977, the acclaimed **Midnight Son**. This led to an explosion of creativity resulting in two more Alligator LPs in three years' time, **Live and Burning** (1978) and **Chicago Fire** (1980), all with Mitchum on bass. "I didn't play on that first album [**The Son Seals Blues Band**]. I didn't meet Alligator [Bruce Iglauer] until after Son started playin' with me at Queen Bee's. I did a recording on one of

them Alligator Chicago Blues . . . I'm on one with Lacy Gibson [Vol. 3 of Alligator Records' **Living Chicago Blues** series from 1978 and Vol. 5 from 1980]."

"Our recordin' sessions were a lot of fun. And a lot of them songs we made up right there while we were recordin'. We'd be sayin' funny things to each other and somebody taken it and make a song out of it, like *Don't Bother Me* and *On My Knees* [both on **Midnight Son**]. But some of the songs Son would have already wrote and he'd show me the lines on the guitar and I would pick it up on the bass and I would take it from there. And that's how we did most of our rehearsals—we didn't have no recordin' of what the song was gonna be. Son would put the guitar line down then I would put a bass line to it. I think we were a real good studio band. It didn't take many takes for us to do a song

because we were so tight together, no matter who we got in the band, because a couple of them albums were different bands, but we were always tight. Like on **Live and Burning** we had A.C. Reed and Lacy Gibson, and Tony [Gooden], and me and [keyboardist] Alberto Gianquinto—used to play with Santana. We were always a tight band. It seems like we always gelled together."

Son Seals' gruff, growling delivery, pull-no-punches songwriting, varied arrangements, and of course his slashing guitar lines, set him apart from many of his predecessors and appealed mightily to the growing college and blues festival crowds. But in addition to all of Seals' strengths, Snapper Mitchum's solid, dominating bass playing—turned up a notch higher than most other bassists of the day—was perhaps the not-so-secret ingredient that goosed their appeal as a band. Mitchum was a very physical bass player, with little or no dead space in his playing, and of course, he had the funk. Obviously, Seals saw in Mitchum a good fit for his sound. "Well, it was our sound—me and Son's sound, together. The way I played the bass and the way he played guitar. We gelled together. It's the backbone . . . with the drummer. But the bass player's more soul. I was the backbone for Son that we stayed together for all them years. I'm the one stayed with him the longest."

"Yeah, man, I learned my lessons good. Well, I started out with Phil Guy! And hangin' out down at Theresa's, man, you couldn't be in a better spot! The Checkerboard . . . and then when I became the bass player for Queen Bee's, that's when everybody'd come in and they'd use me as the bass player.

"Maybe it came from practicin' to be a guitar player. Maybe my trying to fill in, playing a steady line and keeping the pocket. That's the main thing: no matter what you do, you got to stay in the pocket. Like Buddy Scott told me, 'I don't care what you do Snapper, you got to always be on the one.' And that's what I always kept in my head when I play: you got to be there at the one, no matter what you play or how many lines you play, or whatever, when you get back to the one, you got to be there."

Mitchum proved to be a dependable and adaptable player who could play with just about anybody. Iglauer sent Seals out for extensive touring in support of his releases, and occasionally, because Seals had a tight band, he sent other artists out on the road with them. "Otis Spann's wife, Lucille Spann, she used to travel with us, too. We played behind her. You know, a lot of times Bruce would send people out on the road. In fact, Koko was travelin' with us for a while before she got her band. And Albert Collins, he traveled with us. He was usin' our band. We played all up in California, down in Texas with Albert



COURTESY ALLIGATOR RECORDS

Snapper Mitchum working on the Son Seals album **Chicago Fire**, Curtom Studios, Chicago, 1980.

Collins. So, when Bruce got a new member to his record company, we were the band that they traveled with when they first started out. Fenton Robinson was the only one that never traveled with us.

"We went to Europe two or three times. We had been to Norway a couple of times. The first time we went over there we toured Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Holland, and Norway. We went straight up that coast. We played at the Blues In Marseilles in Marseilles, France. Then we played in London at the Hammersmith Odeon—we opened a show for B.B. King. And one trip we went to France, then from there we went to Italy. We went to Greece and came back across. We rode trains and cars."

In 1978, while on one of those tours, the trip was cut short by tragedy when the train they were taking toward Oslo, derailed. "We was on a train, goin' north into Norway. We was sittin' in the train car playin' bid whist, me and Tony [Gooden, the bassist] and a couple of other people. And the train was rollin' along. Then, all of a sudden, we heard this noise and the train was bumpin' and the next thing you know everybody tried to jump up and run out the door and Tony tried to get out the door but he stuck his arm up and the door slammed on his arm. But we got the door open and we got Tony out the room we was in, in the playin' car, and we got him out in the passageway and down to the end of the train where me and Bruce and Son and them went out through the door. Bruce stayed in the train and I went out through the door to help push Tony out. I went back in the train and Bruce had this aluminum briefcase that he was usin' to hold the door open. And I was crawlin' through the train tryin' to pull people out that were injured and couldn't get out. I was grabbin' 'em and pullin' 'em down through the passageway, glass and everything fallen down through there. I was pullin' 'em down through there and Bruce was liftin' 'em up through the door and Son and Lacy and A.C. Reed, they were standin' down in the water catchin' the people and helpin' 'em to the shoreline. So then after we got all the people out of there, I came up out of the train and Tony was layin' up on the side of hill and he was bleedin'. So, I told Lacy to give me his belt. And I put a tourniquet on his arm to stop the bleedin'. They finally got us and took us to the hospital and gave us all examinations and Tony, he was messed up. He was messed up. He couldn't play drums no more. We got back to the States, he started drinkin' a lot. This happened so sudden, you know, it happened so sudden."

On Mitchum's website there is a harrowing nighttime newspaper photo of the train car that clearly shows their predicament. "You can see the picture of the train layin' in the water. That's

Linda Mensch, Bruce Iglauer, Snapper Mitchum, and Dick Shurman at Buddy Guy's Legends, Chicago, late 1980s.



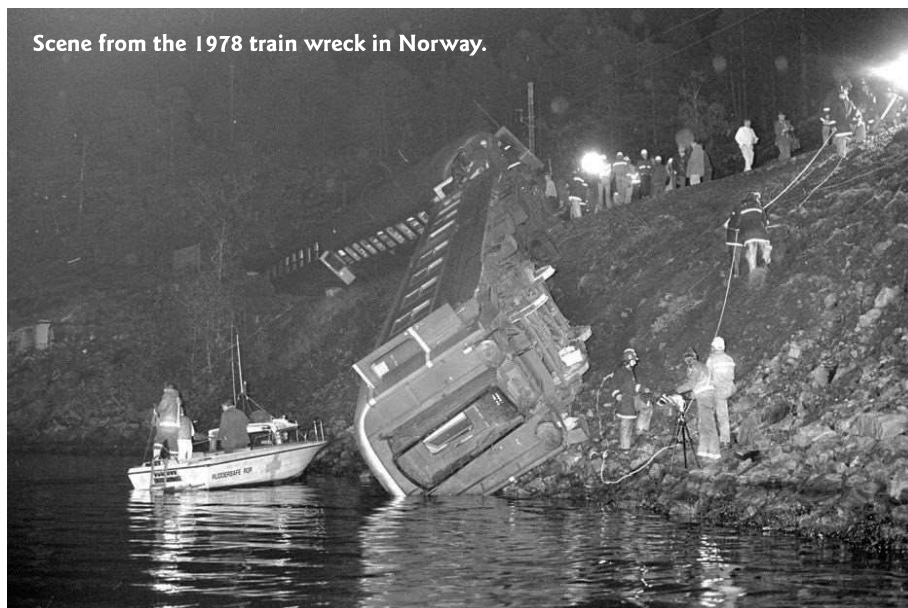
COURTESY SNAPPER MITCHUM

about exactly where it was at when we was tryin' to climb out of it. You see the little door stickin' up at the end of the train, that's where we were pushin' people out. We couldn't get out the other door, it was down in the water." The photo shows the train car separated from the rest of the train and laying nearly upside down, at an approximately 140-degree angle along the sloped embankment, with the very end of the car touching the water. The door he is referencing would have been above their heads, and from the door is a drop of at least six feet to the frigid North Sea.

Iglauer wrote of this event and includes the same photo in his book *Bitten by the Blues* (University of Chicago Press, 2018). His account varies little except in the timing of when the tourniquet was applied to Tony Gooden's arm. The discrepancy is

understandable since the sequence of events rapidly unfolded nearly 50 years ago and may easily be jumbled a bit in a survivor's memory. It is reasonable to think that Mitchum would have applied the tourniquet as soon as possible, as Iglauer describes it. He writes: "Tony had been asleep when the train started turning over. He was thrown from his seat, and the heavy door to his compartment slammed down on his right forearm, cutting it to the bone. . . . Snapper (who had been a highly decorated paratrooper in Vietnam) crawled back to try to slow Tony's bleeding by using Lacy's belt as a tourniquet." He adds, "I called to Snapper, who had the coolest head, perhaps because of his military training. He crawled from compartment to compartment, helping semiconscious people down the length of the car and through the door into

Scene from the 1978 train wreck in Norway.



COURTESY ALLIGATOR RECORDS



Snapper Mitchum and his brother Bertram "Top Hat" Robinson (drums) playing behind guitarist Tony Houston (middle), Columbus, Ohio.

the fjord." Lacy, Son, and A.C. Reed stood in the icy water and worked together to get the others to shore. They rescued dozens of people. They were all heroes. Soon after the event, in his regular *Living Blues* newsletter, Iglauer wrote: "I can't begin to tell you how proud I was of Son, Snapper, and A.C. The train car was still slipping slowly into the water, and both Son and A.C. could have been crushed if it had begun to move faster. Snapper would have been drowned if the car had gone under (so would I, I guess). And these guys put their lives on the line for a bunch of people they had never met, from another country. . . . at least one couple told us we'd saved their lives."

Despite this tragedy, there would be subsequent tours and gigs with the Son Seals band. And in the interim, Mitchum and the band were nominated for a 1981 Grammy Award for *Blues Deluxe*, captured live at Chicago's Navy Pier with the bands of Son Seals, Muddy Waters, Willie Dixon, Koko Taylor, Mighty Joe Young, and Lonnie Brooks, and released on Sonet Records. In addition, Mitchum and Lacy recorded an album, *Switchy Titchy*, that was released by Black Magic Records out of the Netherlands in 1983.

Nonetheless, fate intervened once again

and forced Mitchum to make another difficult, but ultimately honorable, decision. "I left Son, I think it would be either '83, '84. We were on the road . . . down in Texas somewhere. Bruce [Iglauer] called and told me that my mama was sick, and she was in the hospital. And when I got back, she had had an operation, they had put a trach in her throat. Oh, she smoked so much. I had to take care of her. I told 'em that I had to quit the band because I had to take care of my mama. So, I ended up taking care of her for a couple of years, 'til she passed away. And so, I didn't go back with Son. I went to playin' a little bit with Lefty Dizz. 'Cause you know, I hadn't got myself back together yet."

Around 1985 Mitchum decided to move to Dayton, Ohio, to be with Sue, a woman he had met there some years before, and with whom he'd developed a relationship. "I feel like maybe I shouldn't have left Son. But after my mama passed away, I needed a change. He asked me, did I want to come back and play, but I told him I wasn't ready yet. Then I started playin' with Dizz for a while. In fact, Sue came to see me play at the Biddy Mulligan's [in Chicago]. And we got together after that and I came back to Dayton.

"When I came to Dayton with her, she introduced me to a lot of people. She was

managing me and doing my booking. And I met a lot of good people up here. The guy who wrote the music articles for the Dayton newspaper, he asked me to put a band together to play for the first Dayton Blues Festival." Mitchum quickly assembled a band and recorded an album in that first year, *Born in the Ghetto*, issued on Family Man Records. "I ended up getting' recognition right away and I ended up playin' on the first Dayton Blues Festival and through that I met other people and I helped put together the largest blues festival in Dayton, in the park. Me and Sue, my wife, we went to Chicago and got Johnny Dollar, Phil Guy, Lefty Dizz, Hip Linkchain, Muddy Waters Jr. I put together that blues festival and that was one of the biggest blues festivals they ever had in Ohio. Over 10,000 people came to see it.

"So I was bringin' the blues to Dayton. I brought Luther Allison down here to play at a place called Note for Note. We did a show and recorded a CD for the soldiers over in Iraq. We did an album and donated it so they could raise money for the soldiers over there. And Luther was on it."

He and Sue married and he stayed and played in Dayton for nearly 15 years. However, near the end of that period, he and Sue divorced. And when his son back in Chicago took his own life, Mitchum decided to move back to Chicago, remaining there for about 20 years. "I didn't go back with Son. I seen Son when I came back. Me and him hung out together. But I played some with A.C. Reed, I traveled with him to Canada. We played up at the Kingston Mines and other Chicago clubs. Also, I played with a harp player, his name is Jody Noa [Jody Noa and the Sho 'Nuff Blues Band]. He had his own club up there [Pell Lake, Wisconsin]. And me and Top Hat, we used to go up there and play with him. And with Geneva Red, she's a harp player. I'm on one of her albums [*Gettin' Cocky*, Bottle Cap Records, 2005]."

During this period in Chicago, Mitchum was again married. But tragedy struck once more when his wife passed away. He has since returned to Dayton where he is back together with Sue. And he has a residency at a new club, the Twenty-One, run by Jim Jackson, the former mayor, in the nearby town of College Corner. "He's got a lot of paraphernalia about me on the wall. And he's got pictures of all the other big blues artists, like Koko and Muddy and Howlin' Wolf. He loves the blues. He plays the harp.

"I haven't got any big projects going on right now. I'm thinkin' about tryin' to do this book. I just got to get myself together and all that. That's life. Hey, that's all it could be. [laughs] That's what my life was meant to be. I'm still here." LB