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Monterey Blues Festival Brings Out Talent

By [Kevan Carter](#) | OBSERVER CORRESPONDENT

The spirit of Blues legend Robert Johnson rose from six feet under once again to celebrate the 22nd Annual Monterey Blues Festival.



Vocalist Tina Jackson is a rising star among today's blues singers. She performed songs from the gospel, jazz, blues and R&B traditions at the Monterey Blues Festival.

Shemekia Copeland and the irrepressible Buddy Guy. Other famed blues artists included Lil' Jimmy Reed and Eddie Cotton, Jr. The show concluded after three consecutive days of music featuring more than 50 bands. The festival came to a dazzling crescendo with a magical performance by Bay Area crooners, the Whispers.

One of the standout groups was the Southern California based Blues Racket Band. Performing at the Fairground's outdoor amphitheater — the Garden Arena, the five-piece band inspired toe tapping, hand clapping and got the audience to strut their stuff on the theater's grass dance floor.

The Blues Racket Band played spirited dance music from a song list of hit Blues and R&B songs. Lead vocalist, Tina Jackson, in the tradition of great blues vocalists, performed such classics as James Brown's "I Feel Good," Robert Johnson's "Sweet Home Chicago" and Aretha Franklin's "Respect."

The Blues Racket band features guitarist, Drew Hendricksen, bassist, Michael Caro, drummer, Bryan Rosen and vocalist/percussionist, Renda Pettis. The band was recently voted Orange County's No. 1 dance band. They performed at this year's Academy Awards Oscar Party at the Beverly Hills 4 Seasons Hotel and at numerous venues along the Pacific Coast.

Located a stone's throw from the Monterey Bay, the Fairgrounds and Annual Blues Festival has become a tradition among many African Americans who flock to the festival annually to enjoy the serenity, and natural beauty of the Monterey peninsula.

Blues music was born out of the interior of the American south. From the Mississippi Delta to the Virginia coastline Blacks held in the clutches of slavery discovered song to be a way to soothe the oppressive conditions that surrounded them. The Blues were molded from the work songs hymnals and call and response tradition of gospel music.

Blues historian and musician Wynton Marsalis noted in the Ken Burns documentary, "Jazz" that "playing the blues was a way of acknowledging one's pain and the anguish they experienced during the antebellum period. Marsalis noted in the documentary that, "playing the blues was a way to rid oneself of the blues."

Legendary stage and screen actor Ossie Davis, who was also interviewed in the documentary PBS film, talked about the irony so often associated with the blues. Davis recanted lyrics from an old Blues number that went, "I'm going to take my head and place it on the railroad track, but when that train gets near me, I'm going to snatch my damn head on back."

Though some critics of blues music contend that it is fading, don't order the coffin yet; the blues as performed in Monterey, are still very much alive and kicking.

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