

THE BLUES: EPISODE 5

Mystery Train

KEB' MO': Welcome to The Blues, the history of America's greatest roots music from PRI, Public Radio International. Major financial support for The Blues is proudly provided by Volkswagen. Since the beginning, the blues and the open road have gone together. Volkswagen and music do the same. Join Volkswagen in celebrating one hundred years of the Blues.

Hi. I'm Keb' Mo', and together we'll explore the sounds, meet the musicians, hear the history, and travel to the places where the blues continues to make its mark.

If any city can truly be called the home of the blues, it's Memphis, Tennessee.

Today, we'll hear about the early days of B.B. King, Bobby "Blue" Bland, Rufus Thomas, and the colorful characters who walked the boulevard known as Beale Street. This is the Blues and we're boarding the Mystery Train.

GEORGE HUNT: I'm 62 now and I came to Memphis, I was 22. And I've seen many a blues personality stumbling up and down Beale Street and been touched by something, you know, I don't know what he was touched with. But he's been stumbling and rising on Beale Street for a long time.

ROBERT JUNIOR LOCKWOOD: They had a little gambling in Memphis at that time. We had slot machines, hustling girls and pimps, wide open gambling. I seen people coming out with suitcases of money.

LITTLE MILTON: Well I was young then. Who wanted to sleep? You know you was having fun and making money. Who wants to sleep then? When you're young. I couldn't do that now.

GEORGE HUNT: You look at uh... Elvis. Elvis had the opportunity to witness firsthand the blues in black neighborhoods, you know, and that he frequented Beale Street. The only thing that wasn't black about Elvis was his skin tone.

RUFUS THOMAS: If you were black for one Saturday night on Beale Street, you never would want to be white anymore.

SONG: B.B. King, "3 O'Clock Blues"

KEB' MO': That's B.B. King and his very first hit, "3 O'Clock Blues", a number one song on the R&B charts for five weeks in 1952.

I'm Keb' Mo'. We're exploring the music of Memphis, Tennessee in the 1950s. America was beginning to change after the Second World War. In 1947, Jackie Robinson broke the color line in Major League Baseball.

SONG: Count Basie, “Did You See Jackie Robinson Hit That Ball?”

KEB’ MO’: Back then, there was a young black photographer named Ernest Withers. He and Daniel Wolff documented the Beale Street blues scene in their book, *The Memphis Blues Again – Six Decades of Memphis Music Photographs*. Here’s Ernest Withers.

ERNEST WITHERS: In 1947, right after Jackie Robinson’s emergence in the Major Leagues, there was an incident out in East Memphis where a policeman killed a black man that was a lunacy. The town was in an uproar. Commissioner Boyle was the Commissioner of police, called a meeting in the courthouse downtown at night to find out a solution to bring Memphis to a level of calmness between blacks and whites. He said, “Well, we gonna build some more parks and more playgrounds and more swimming pools” more this and that. So there was an elderly black woman that went up there following the men and said, “Huh! We don’t need no more parks and playgrounds These children got enough places to play. What we need is some colored police!” And he said, “That’s a good idea.” He set forth getting the community at large to accept black police. But due to Jackie Robinson going into the Major League, it was an appeal to the general community of America that black and white folk can do the same thing. It was not... it was just a matter of dealing with the climate of the acceptance of the time. For the first month that we came to be black police walking Beale Street, you had thousands of people that came up on the weekend just to see us walking down the street with a pistol and a stick!

KEB’ MO’: In the early 1950s, Memphis was surrounded by 200 miles of farmland. Some 40% of America’s cotton crop was brought to market and sold there.

JERRY RICKS: The Delta starts at the Peabody, right in the middle of Memphis. That’s where the Cotton Exchange is.

KEB’ MO’: Musician Jerry Ricks.

JERRY RICKS: Memphis was the congregating place for the Delta and East Arkansas and West Tennessee for black people to be able to congregate. They could all go to Beale Street, it was all the shops and everything going on. It’s like going to Maxwell Street in Chicago or South Street in Philadelphia, that’s the congregation spot, brings people to light.

PETER GURALNICK: You know Memphis represents a center in a sense to so many rural areas, black and white both.

KEB’ MO’: Peter Guralnick, author of “Last Train to Memphis” and “Careless Love”.

PETER GURALNICK: One of the things about Beale Street is it was just so alive on a Saturday, on a weekend night. You know, it was a place, it was just teeming with life, and teeming with people who were there for no other reason that they wanted to be there. And that’s what the music conveyed.

KEB’ MO’: Beale Street, in fact, was the most famous blues avenue. Big time touring bands played in the nightclubs and theaters. Bluesmen from the Mississippi Delta, after working in the

fields all week, traveled to Memphis on the weekend to play the smaller clubs, house-rent parties, or even just the sidewalks.

RUFUS THOMAS: I worked as a comic with Robert Couch. They called him Bones. And he was funny.

KEB' MO': Rufus Thomas remembers.

RUFUS THOMAS: He was 4'11", 4'11" and funny as he could be. He used to wear the long ties that hung almost to the ground, the big pants, and the great big shoes and the funny hats. But he was a funny--he could walk on the stage and without saying a word, the house would go up, man, in a roar. Funny man, Rufus and Bones at the Palace Theater.

KEB' MO': For many up and coming musicians, the place to get noticed – and maybe earn a few dollars - was the Palace Theatre. The late Rosco Gordon described Amateur Night at the Palace.

ROSCO GORDON: I won first prize on the amateur show at the Palace Theater on Beale Street. Rufus Thomas, he was the MC. My friends and I, we were Morgan Davis wine drinkers. This particular night, we had no money for wine. So, they boost me up to goin' up and, and do a show to get the wine money. So, I go up and I, I win first prize. If you win first prize, that Thursday, you're on the radio. So, everybody sent cards and letters and called and so that Friday I had to go back. And that Monday I had my own show. We was all on the radio - everyday!

KEB' MO': And here is Rosco Gordon with “No More Doggin”.

SONG: Rosco Gordon, "No More Doggin”

KEB' MO': That was “No More Doggin” by Rosco Gordon. The song hit number two on the R&B charts in 1952. During the period between 1951 and 1960, he had four top-ten hits.

PETER GURALNICK: Rosco Gordon had this lazy, rolling rhythm, kind of a very infectious beat that later translated into ska music and was extremely influential in the development of reggae.

KEB' MO': Peter Guralnick.

PETER GURALNICK: He had a small hit, “The Chicken” I think, or “Do The Chicken”. And he got a chicken that he trained to appear with him and he put him in a little tuxedo and uh, would get the chicken drunk before the appearances so the chicken would be as relaxed as Rosco and he would go out there and do his shows. The chicken had a name but I can't remember what it was.

ROSCO GORDON: Butch, my chicken, passed away. He was a moneymaker.

KEB'MO': Here's Rosco Gordon.

ROSCO GORDON: See, during the intermission after the show, my valet would put a cup on his neck, and walk him from table to table. They would fill that cup up two or three times during each show, so, he was the moneymaker.

KEB' MO': Rosco was hanging out on Beale Street at the start of the 1950s. He was part of an informal group of musicians known as The Beale Streeters.

PETER GURALNICK: The Beale Streeters were a loosely assembled group. You had Johnny Ace, you had Earl Forest, you had Rosco Gordon. Bobby “Blue” Bland was just starting out on his own career at the time and he served as, he got his job I think as the driver for the Beale Streeters because he had a car.

KEB'MO': Again, Peter Guralnick.

PETER GURALNICK: We think of so many of them as sort of legendary today. I mean you think of Bobby “Blue” Bland as just one of the last of the classic, supper club, blues singers. But back in those days, these were just young guys just out there scrapping for a job and the enthusiasm, the spirit, the variety of the music that they created remains fresh to this day.

BOBBY BLAND: Blues is based on feeling.

KEB' MO': Bobby Bland.

BOBBY BLAND: Some of the things that I sing about actually happened to me. Maybe you have a girlfriend, and you lose. It's not a good feeling. If I got a lyric that has anything pertaining to sadness, you just go back and think of whatever had happened to you, like what, how you felt at certain different times of your life. It helps me to say things better and have more meaning to them.

KEB' MO': Here he is with “Farther Up the Road”. Bobby “Blue” Bland.

SONG: Bobby Bland, “Farther Up the Road”

KEB' MO': From 1957, a number one R&B hit for Bobby “Blue” Bland, “Farther Up The Road.” The early recordings of Bobby “Blue” Bland are a blueprint for the R&B and soul music that followed. He continues to record and tour today.

You can hear more from our interview with Bobby Bland at yearoftheblues.org/radio.

I'm Keb'Mo'. We are riding The Mystery Train - a look at how black and white musicians started a Blues revolution in Memphis in the 1950s. Up next: How radio spread the word.

PETER GURALNICK: WDIA was the first black staffed station in the country, called itself the mother station of the Negroes. You know, creating a sense of pride and proprietorship. It exerted an enormous influence in spreading rhythm and blues.

KEB'MO': Major financial support for The Blues is proudly provided by Volkswagen. A road trip wouldn't be the same without music and no music is more connected to the American road than the Blues. Join Volkswagen in celebrating one hundred years of the Blues. You're listening to The Blues, from PRI, Public Radio International. (19:55)

BREAK

(20:59)

KEB'MO': Welcome back to The Blues from PRI, Public Radio International. I'm Keb' Mo' and we're exploring the music of Memphis, Tennessee, in the 1950s. This is The Mystery Train.

The most famous of all Memphis Blues musicians is B.B. King. He started to build an audience in 1949 when he became a disc jockey at the first all black radio station, WDIA. He began doing jingles for a tonic called Pep-Ti-Kon. It was the first big break for the young Riley B. King

B.B. KING: When I first went to Memphis, I went to um, the radio station, I can remember that very well. I saw this person in the studio, you could see him from the picture windows from the outside and when the red light went off, I figured he cut his mic off and knocked on the window, and he came to the door and, "Son, what can I do for you?" And I said, "Well, I'd like to make a record and I'd like to go on the radio." So he called a general manager of the station, Mr. Furgeson and Mr. Furgeson looked at me, very wise man, said, "We don't make records, but we might be able to use you, come on in". My first introduction to radio would be advertising Pep-Ti-Kon, which was a new product they was just putting out. So um, that very evening, they put me on, advertising Pep-Ti-Kon for 10 minutes. Thought up a name for me that very evening, the boy from Beale Street, The Beale Street Blues Boy. A little bit later they wanted me to write a jingle. Now, here I am a guy that don't know anything about writing anything, hardly my name, but I came up with it. Pep-Ti-Kon, sure is good, Pep-Ti-Kon sure is good, Pep-Ti-Kon sure is good, you can get it anywhere in your neighborhood. That was the beginning of B.B. King.

SONG: B.B. King, "Everyday I Have the Blues"

KEB'MO': From 1955, B.B. King, "Everyday I Have the Blues", one of his signature songs.

B.B. King was one of many musicians in the Memphis area who became radio DJ's and used the power of the medium to spread their music and help sell tickets for live shows.

But by far most of the music on the radio in the early '50s was not the blues.

UNKNOWN DJ: And now we will introduce our guest act for this evening on the Grand Ole Opry. Bill Monroe and his Bluegrass Boys from up in Deardold, Kentucky. And the number is a hot one. The new Skinner blues. Let her go Bill.

GEORGE HUNT: Like I tell people, the first music that I heard was country and western.

KEB' MO': George Hunt is a visual artist and historian.

GEORGE HUNT: When you get Bill Monroe and Hank Snow, hey -- there was only a thin line between those guys and a black blues man. And if you were in the Delta, you played with each other, black or white, the guys would seek out each other to play the music. Now maybe on Saturday night the white guy go down here to an old joint and play what he call country n' western and this guy go over here and play funky butt blues, you know. But they were twins, you know.

KEB' MO': In the 1950s, local radio stations with regional music were everywhere.

PETER GURALNICK: Radio was all important, not just to Memphis, but really to the development of this vernacular music.

KEB'MO': Music historian Peter Guralnick.

PETER GURALNICK: I mean, radio was sort of like the wild west. There were no set rules, and you had all these creative people involving themselves not just in sound, but in exploring a kind of world of, of music, that the world at large wasn't, had not necessarily been exposed to before.

KEB' MO': The very first star of Blues radio was Sonny Boy Williamson.

SONNY BOY WILLIAMSON: Thank you very much my man. This is going out for Mrs. Palomino and her husband that's down on Franklin Street, yassir.

KEB' MO': Beginning in 1941, he was heard everyday for fifteen minutes over KFFA from Helena, Arkansas. Sonny Boy Williamson's radio program was sponsored by the Interstate Grocer Company, which was promoting King Biscuit Flour.

ROBERT JUNIOR LOCKWOOD: "King Biscuit Time", me and Sonny Boy done that for, maybe 6, 7 months.

KEB'MO': Sonny Boy Williamson often sang and played harmonica with guitarist Robert Junior Lockwood.

ROBERT JUNIOR LOCKWOOD: \$5 a day. At that particular time, the \$5 didn't mean that much, but me and Sonny were making almost \$100 a day playing, 'cause we was on the air.

SONNY BOY WILLIAMSON: That's before we do this number, ladies and gentlemen. Tonight, the big night in Greenwood, Mississippi don't forget that. Yes. We'll be in Greenwood, Mississippi tonight.

CEDELL DAVIS: Everybody back in them days would listen to that show 'cause it was a live program.

KEB' MO': Guitarist Cedell Davis was fifteen years old when he first performed on “King Biscuit Time” with Sonny Boy Williamson.

CEDELL DAVIS: Everybody anywhere in the listening area even if we was out in the field picking cotton or chopping cotton, they'd stop to listen to that on the car radio or whatever. Man, if people didn't know about that “King Biscuit Time” show. It was a really good program.

KEB' MO': Here's the star of “King Biscuit Time”, Sonny Boy Williamson.

SONG: Sonny Boy Williamson, “Do It if You Wanna”

KEB' MO': Recorded in 1951, that's Sonny Boy Williamson, “Do It if You Wanna”. From 1941 until his death in 1965, Sonny Boy was an on-again, off-again performer on “King Biscuit Time” and other radio shows in the Memphis area.

Sonny Boy Williamson was an awesome harmonica player, a great songwriter and a very colorful character. But Sonny Boy Williamson was not his real name.

His real name was Aleck Miller, often called “Rice” Miller. And when he started as a DJ, there already was a Sonny Boy Williamson – a famous Chicago-based recording artist and harmonica master whose real name was John Lee Williamson.

Fans call John Lee Williamson Sonny Boy Number One. His recording career started in 1937. Rice Miller, the radio DJ, is Sonny Boy Number Two, whose first record didn't come out until 1951.

We asked a modern-day wizard of the harmonica, Kim Wilson of the Fabulous Thunderbirds, to help us figure out the differences between Sonny Boy Williamson One and Sonny Boy Williamson Two.

KIM WILSON: Sonny Boy Number One said he was the only “Sonny Boy”. Sonny Boy Number Two said he was the only “Sonny Boy”. In my mind it's clear-cut. The first Sonny Boy is the real Sonny Boy Williamson, John Lee Williamson. Rice Miller, who called himself Sonny Boy Williamson, wanted to capitalize on Sonny Boy Williamson's name. I mean uh, he wanted to make a little money off it. But it just so happens that Sonny Boy Number Two, as we call him, was an unbelievable harmonica player in his own right. The main thing that set these two guys apart was that one was a very much a single note soloist, and that was Rice Miller. Kinda like a [plays harmonica].

Now, John Lee Williamson really was more of a chord kind of player. He used...very rhythmic, really more accompanying himself on an instrument rather than a soloist. It was more of like a [plays harmonica]. You know, that kind of stuff. More chords as opposed to single notes. It has more subtleties.

Both these guys were big influences on the Blues in general. I mean they're icons of Blues music. Sonny Boy Number Two, uh, Rice Miller is, is, was more of a character though. Kind of

a wandering, kinda hobo-ish kind of guy. By all accounts, pretty low down fella, you know. He probably actually became maybe a bigger star than the first one because he was just a wild guy you know, and, and a weird looking guy, you know. Now John Lee Williamson, he was a very handsome guy. That's the difference between Sonny Boy Williamson One and Two. John Lee Williamson and Rice Miller.

RADIO BROADCAST: (Sonny Boy Williamson)

KEB' MO': Sonny Boy Williamson on KFFA, on "King Biscuit Time", held a mirror to rural Black life in Helena.

Eighty miles away in Memphis, urban life in the 1950s, was reflected by the program, "Red Hot & Blue", on WHBQ with Dewey Phillips.

RADIO BROADCAST: (Dewey Phillips)

PETER GURALNICK: Dewey Phillips just captured the minds and the hearts and the ears of Memphis.

KEB' MO': Author Peter Guralnick.

PETER GURALNICK: He just rolled on top of the music and created a kind of feeling that basically reflected the spirit of rock n' roll before rock n' roll itself arrived.

RADIO BROADCAST: (Dewey Phillips)

JIM DICKINSON: At the time Dewey went on the air, there was one black radio station in Memphis, WDIA, playing black music for a black audience. There were four or five white radio stations in Memphis playing white music for a white audience. Dewey was just playing music.

KEB' MO': Record Producer Jim Dickinson.

JIM DICKINSON: He started out his show and he'd say, "Oh-ho, good people." That's what he was doing. He was playing good music for good people, not white music for white people.

KEB' MO': Dewey Phillips started playing Blues in Memphis on WHBQ primarily because of the success the Blues was having across town on a black station.

WDIA was the first radio station staffed completely by blacks.

RUFUS THOMAS: It was 1948 when WDIA went on the air. And I went there in 1951.

KEB' MO': Rufus Thomas.

RUFUS THOMAS: The radio, at that time, didn't pay enough for me to let the day gig go. What I would do, I'd get off from the textile mill, stop at home, change clothes, go across

town...when the first record was finished, I was ready to go on the air, sitting at the microphone. Did that for years, and years.

KEB' MO': Rufus Thomas was a regular on Memphis radio for fifty years. Back in the 1950s, his opening patter was the stuff of legend.

JIM DICKINSON: Memphis radio was playing soul music and jump Blues, but then nobody was playing primitive Blues but Rufus Thomas.

KEB' MO': Jim Dickinson.

JIM DICKINSON: You know, white kids like me, we would pull our cars over and turn up the radio, just to hear him begin.

RUFUS THOMAS: All disc jockeys, and especially black disc jockeys, had a theme song.

CHARLIE MUSSELWHITE: His theme song was "Hootin' the Blues" with Sonny Terry. I thought that was really tough.

KEB'MO': Harmonica master, Charlie Musselwhite.

CHARLIE MUSSELWHITE: I just liked the sound of it.

RUFUS THOMAS: I'd open up, "I'm young, I'm loose, I'm full of juice, I got the goose, so what's the use? We're feeling gay, but we ain't got a dollar, Rufus is here, so hoot and holler."

CHARLIE MUSSELWHITE: Now here it comes.

SONG: Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, "Whoopin' the Blues"

RUFUS THOMAS: The name of the song was "Hoot and Holler", with Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry, and you hear that song coming "Ahhhh! Ooooh! Ahhhh! Ooooh!..."

CHARLIE MUSSELWHITE: Every night you'd hear Sonny Terry going "Who! Hoooo! Heeee! Haaa!"

RUFUS THOMAS: They knew at that moment that Rufus Thomas was on the air.

JIM DICKINSON: That was the truth, the Bible, that he was talking to us.

CHARLIE MUSSELWHITE: You felt like you were right part of this whole scene, you know, 'cause he kinda updates you on what's going on, "Yeah, B.B.'s done got so big now, we gonna have to start calling him 3-B, instead of B.B.", you know. And just stuff like that stuck in my mind from those days.

KEB' MO': Radio disc jockeys started to become prominent entertainers. And a record could bring them even more attention.

Rufus Thomas had his first national hit in 1953 with “Bear Cat”.

SONG: Rufus Thomas, “Bear Cat”

KEB' MO': There's Rufus Thomas and his answer song to Big Mama Thornton's “Hound Dog”. That was a "Bear Cat". “Bear Cat” was one of the first releases on the famed Memphis record label, Sun Records, recorded in 1953, three years before Elvis recorded his version of “Hound Dog”.

Up next, the early Blues of Sun Records.

ROBERT GORDON: Sun Records was best known as the place where Elvis Presley was discovered. Five singles, the ten songs that Elvis released on Sun, man, you put ‘em in a rocket ship, send ‘em to Jupiter, Jupiter people would groove to it. I mean they’re transcendent They’re great.

KEB' MO': I’m Keb’ Mo’. You’re listening to The Blues and this is Mystery Train, the music of 1950s Memphis, from PRI, Public Radio International.

BREAK

KEB' MO': Welcome back to The Blues from PRI, Public Radio International. I’m Keb’ Mo’ and we're riding the Mystery Train - a musical trip though Memphis in the 1950s.

Back in 1950, a young white radio announcer named Sam Phillips opened a small recording studio called the Memphis Recording Service. It later became Sun Studios. These days, Phillips is best known for being the first to record Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, and Elvis Presley. What is sometimes forgotten is that Sam Phillips started out recording black artists.

He made some of the first records for B.B. King, Rufus Thomas, Bobby “Blue” Bland and Howlin' Wolf.

ROBERT GORDON: Sun became a place in Memphis where black people could record.

KEB' MO': This is Robert Gordon, the author of the book *It Came From Memphis*.

ROBERT GORDON: Sam Phillips encouraged them to play what they wanted to play for themselves, not to play what they thought he, a white man, wanted to hear. It was a place where they could go in and be respected in a segregated society.

KEB' MO': Sam Phillips.

SAM PHILLIPS: I knew that these people that never, ever, ever thought they'd have an opportunity to come in for the toughest thing in their life. "I've got an opportunity to do something in music I've always wanted to do, but never thought I'd have and so I can't blow it!" Well, that's the worst feeling in the world for 'em to have, but good God Almighty! I knew they had to feel that way. And somehow or the other, I became the finest psychologist in the world because I knew what they were going through. And I knew if I could get them to do what they felt, that I would hear things that would blow you away.

KEB' MO': A big part of Sam Phillips's success with black artists was Ike Turner. Turner was a talent scout, producer, arranger, and songwriter.

JIM DICKINSON: Ike Turner. He is a very misjudged individual.

KEB' MO': Memphis musician and producer, Jim Dickinson.

JIM DICKINSON: I'm convinced Ike was reaching for white culture. He was trying to spread it out and get across. He is an incredibly positive individual.

PETER GURALNICK: Even today, at the age of 70, just has tremendous, tremendous energy on stage and in the studio.

KEB' MO': Peter Guralnick, author of "Last Train to Memphis" and "Careless Love".

PETER GURALNICK: Ike was a brilliant guitar player, piano player. He played a seminal role in the development of Memphis music and Memphis Blues. I mean, for one thing, he had what has often been called the first rock n' roll record, "Rocket 88".

KEB' MO': Ike Turner remembers how he and Jackie Brenston wrote "Rocket 88."

IKE TURNER: Six or seven of us was all in the car and all the instruments, and we were going to Memphis to record. Then we decided, "Hey, man, you know what? We don't have no songs to record!" So, we decided we would write a song. We didn't know what we going to write the song about. In those days, they came out with Rocket 88 Oldsmobile. So, we started writing a song about the Rocket 88. When we got to Memphis, to Sam Phillips's studios, we had it basically together, but not together. So, we went in there and this lady that was working...It took me maybe 15, 20 minutes to put the music to it.

KEB' MO': What makes "Rocket 88" the first rock and roll record? A big part of it is the distorted sound of the guitar. The amplifier had gotten wet and shorted out. They all noticed it sounded strange.

PETER GURALNICK: And rather than use another amplifier or rather than try to fix it, Sam said "No, that sounds different."

KEB' MO': Peter Guralnick.

PETER GURALNICK: He says, “If you’re not doing something different, you’re not doing anything.” And out of that, he got an absolutely unique sound.

KEB' MO': Some say it's the guitar that makes “Rocket 88” the first rock and roll song. According to Jim Dickinson, it was Ike Turner's piano playing.

JIM DICKINSON: Rock n’ roll piano. I mean rock n’ roll’s about guitars. So, the piano hasn’t been examined the way the guitar has. But Rosco Gordon, Johnny Ace, and Ike Turner are the fathers of rock n’ roll piano.

KEB' MO': Let’s hear the song all the way through. Jackie Brenston and the Delta Cats, "Rocket 88" with Ike Turner on the piano.

SONG: Jackie Brenston & His Delta Cats, “Rocket 88”

KEB' MO': “Rocket 88” from Jackie Brenston and the Delta Cats featuring Ike Turner. The year: 1951. The place: Memphis, Tennessee. The song most historians say is the very first rock and roll record. At the time they called it Blues music. It was Ike Turner's first recording session.

The incredible music that came out of Memphis and Sam Phillips's studio during that time was fueled by the energy of black and white musicians coming together.

Today, that history is often summed up in two words: Elvis Presley.

KEB' MO': Memphis Visual Artist George Hunt.

GEORGE HUNT: He grew up in Tupelo and when he came to Memphis, folks termed what he was doing as rock n’ roll. He was simply doing the Blues because the same stuff that he was doing, stomping and grinding, they were doing out there in them shacks, out there in Tupelo when Elvis was a little boy and he saw it, you know. He had gone through this process and you can’t help that.

KEB' MO': The long term effects of the early electric blues of 1950’s Memphis can't be measured. The combination of blues and country music gave us rock and roll.

The combination of blues and gospel gave us soul and rhythm and blues.

And it all came from Memphis.

RUFUS THOMAS: See, funk is something that Memphis had, that no other place in the world had. That Memphis sound. That thing, that gut-bucket, big bass and big foot. We called that fat back. When we say “fat back” that’s the kinda meat that you put in black-eyed peas and greens, which seasons the good food, that soul food. And when you say that fat back beat, that funky fat

back beat! They say “This thing is funkier than 19 yards of chitlins with onions and sardines on the side...with pickle.” Now that’s funk.

JIM DICKINSON: What happened in Memphis, in the ‘50s, has been described as “racial collision”.

KEB' MO': Record producer, Jim Dickinson.

JIM DICKINSON: Of course, it’s real easy to see the developing youth market, reaching for black culture, but what wasn’t seen in many other places was the black culture, black artists reaching for the white market. I think that’s what you see, what resulted in what they call soul music, which was truly biracial. And that’s what you see at Stax in the ‘60s, but I’m getting’ ahead of the story...

KEB' MO': Musician, Taj Mahal.

TAJ MAHAL: A lot of the Stax music down Memphis, the R&B sound or the soul sound was the result of Beale Street, the crossroads that that was.

JIM DICKINSON: Booker T. & the M.G.’s, you can’t examine them ever playing golf together. They would have never met socially had it not been for the music, if you’ve seen them play.

KEB' MO': Today, the Memphis musical tradition can still be experienced along Beale Street.

Robert Santelli, CEO of the Experience Music Project and author of *The Big Book of Blues*, traveled recently to Beale Street.

ROBERT SANTELLI: I’m walking down Beale Street, where the tradition of music, more music and still more music, lives on every day and every night. It happens from the new Daisy Theatre, just off Fourth Street, to B.B. King’s club, Rum Boogie Café, past Elvis Presley’s Memphis, all the way down to the Orpheum Theatre on Beale and Main. You know, each year since 1980 in this magnificent landmark, the Orpheum Theater, the W.C. Handy Award Show salutes the best of the Blues.

KEB'MO': The W.C. Handy Awards. They are the Academy Awards of Blues. They celebrate the spirit of the music, both old and new.

In 2003, the winner of the Best New Artist Award went to Richard Johnston. Recorded live at this year's W.C. Handy Awards at the Orpheum Theater, here is Richard Johnston, “Keep Your Lamp Trimmed and Burning”.

SONG: Richard Johnston, “Keep Your Lamp Trimmed and Burning”

KEB'MO': Richard Johnston, recorded live at the 2003 W.C. Handy Awards. The Awards honor the best in Blues music and since their start in 1980, they've been held in Memphis, Tennessee. Johnston was chosen as 2003's best new artist.

To hear this recording in its entirety, visit yearoftheblues.org/radio.

Thank you for joining us on our journey to Memphis.

The Blues is a co-production of EMP Radio and Ben Manilla Productions in association with WGBH Radio, Boston. Produced by Peter Crimmins and Matt Bauer. Executive producers: Robert Santelli and Ben Manilla. Executive in charge for WGBH Radio: Robert Lyons.

Major Financial support for the blues is proudly presented by Volkswagen. Ever since Blues music first surfaced in Clarksdale, Mississippi, it's traveled America's highways to become apart of our nation's history. Join Volkswagen in celebrating one hundred years of The Blues.

Support for this program comes from this station and Public Radio International stations nationwide and is made possible in part by the PRI Program Fund whose contributors include The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

I'm Keb' Mo' and this has been The Blues: Mystery Train.

ANNOUNCER: P-R-I. Public Radio International.