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Today's Chicago Blues



Synopsis

Illinois Woman's Press Association Award Book Award - 1st Place - General Nonfiction Come on Baby, Don't You Want to Go? Chicago boasts more landmarks in blues history than any place else north of the Mississippi Delta. More blues musicians live and work in Chicago than in any other city in the world, and more clubs devoted entirely to the blues thrive here than in any other metropolitan area. Only in Chicago can you hear live blues music seven days a week, 365 days a year, by musicians who helped create the Chicago blues sound--a lusty, amplified style built on shuffling rhythms, electrified slide guitar, wailing harmonica, and gritty vocals. The passion and intimacy of this celebrated American art form draw a half a million or more people to Grant Park each June for the largest free blues festival in the world. Natives and visitors alike know there is no better party music than the rollicking, soulful, swinging tempos and melodies of the blues for drawing you in, getting you moving, and reaching deep into your soul. Today's Chicago Blues brings together everything fans will need to know about the blues in Chicago. A more in-depth look at the city's blues scene than typical guidebooks offer, this up-to-date resource offers both newcomers and longtime devotees a handy and informative way to enrich their experience of this celebrated musical genre. Come on--immerse yourself in the historical and cultural context of this powerful, emotional, sensual music, and see for yourself how Sweet Home Chicago is moving the legacy of the blues forward.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Today's Chicago Blues is a guide book that is well worth checking out. In eight chapters Ms.

Hanson covers not only the Blues venues in our Windy City but dedicates her book to informing the reader of the whole Blues experience Chicago has to offer. The book is steeped in history and well-researched facts. It also includes both vintage and current photos that spice up the pages nicely. It is a complete guide on many different levels. Both a visitor new to the Blues and a seasoned Blues Fanatic can enjoy this great book. . . . Never have I read such a great guide for musicians to go out and get a chance to play and learn and JAM. Get your axe and get in gear. . . . Chapter eight is a comprehensive alphabetical guide to Chicago's biggest treasure, our Blues artists. This chapter is worth the price of the book alone. . . . Today's Chicago Blues is a great book for any Blues fan and the author has done a high-quality job in putting a wealth of solid information into one book. Go out and grab this gem. --Dave Katzman, Buddy Guy's Blues Letter

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An absolute must . . . This well researched and affectionately produced guide is an engrossing read and the author clearly loves her city and blues music. --Dave Drury, Blues Matters!

Karen Hanson's new book is a travel guide, a history, an encyclopedia and a CD-buying guide, all in one--and all about Chicago blues. --Robert Loerzel, Daily Southtown

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Karen Hanson was a busy suburban mom when she discovered the Chess album, The Best of Muddy Waters, in a discount bin at the mall record store. She played it continuously in the stereo of her minivan for a year and a half. That's how she got hooked on the blues. She now works as a freelance journalist in the southwest suburbs of Chicago. As a serious blues fan, Karen has profiled blues artists and reviewed CDs for several blues websites and publications. She has also hosted online blues chats and forums. She teaches writing and literature at DeVry University in Tinley Park. Karen currently maintains a Chicago blues blog where she discusses all things blues (TodaysChicagoBlues at Blogspot).

This is one good book! I used it to see the gravesites of famous blues musicians like Muddy Waters, Little Walter, Howlin' Wolf and Otis Spann. I found the original home of Muddy Waters where many/all blues musicians hung out and played the blues. This book was a big help for what I wanted to see in Chicago!

This book is a fairly comprehensive and encyclopedic glossary of Chicago blues artists and clubs. The descriptions of clubs and festivals are mundane and factual, and for the most part they don't try too hard to capture the essence or soul of the blues through descriptions of live events. While the artist directory (featuring 80 or so musicians) does make some effort at painting the scene's many colorful characters through artist spotlights and anecdotes (e.g. Eddie "the Chief" Clearwater discovering his trademark headdress at a friend's house party), the description of the Chicago blues festival is particularly inane ("bring... if rain seems possible, an umbrella") and like the rest of the book reads more like a tourist brochure than a critical review or a narrative description. If that's all the book is aiming for, that's understandable. Unfortunately, though this book was just published in 2007, it is already becoming a bit dated- many of the clubs (particularly the smaller bars) have closed down and a third of the listed artist websites are broken links. Interestingly, it's still got a better track record than most websites I could find and I'd actually find this material to be useful if it were still 2006 or the content of the book were moved to the web and kept up to date. That said, if you're new to the Chicago blues scene, this is worth skimming (I actually read most of it straight through and found it tedious)- if and like the previous reviewer noted, even the most seasoned blues fan would learn a few things.

This book is different than other books about Chicago blues. Its journalistic style covers a lot of ground in less than 250 pages. It is contemporary in the sense that it captures the Chicago Blues scene today, not as it existed fifty or even five years ago. "Today's Chicago Blues" serves a dual audience. First of all it is a "must have" for out-of town blues fans who want to maximize their trip to the Blues Mecca known as Chicago. The book not only contains a detailed guide to the many blues venues in the Chicago area, but it also includes little known items like the location of grave-sites for blues legends like Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Little Walter, and Jimmy Rogers. Hanson also reveals the addresses of blues landmarks like Muddy's residences, the site of the old Chess Records studio now been restored by the Blues Heaven Foundation, the historic Maxwell Street Market, and the Leyland Hotel in Aurora. A visitor from out of town would benefit greatly from the encyclopedic treatment of everything from Blues Fest to the local radio stations that play blues to the blues jamming venues for visitors who want to bring their ax. Of course, the author gives extensive biographical treatment to the blues musicians who keep the great music alive. But "Today's Chicago Blues" is not just for out-of-towners. Even the most devoted Chicago based blues fan will learn little-known facts and blues history. For me I was astounded to learn that WOPA's legendary blues radio tradition continues today at 1490 AM dial (the same frequency that broadcast

Big Bill Hill) with host John Gorny from midnight to 5 am on Monday's. In addition to the facts and history, there were countless blues bars and juke joints listed by the author which I never knew existed. And maybe I'll drop Hubert Sumlin an email from the address that Hanson gives along with her biography of the renowned guitarist. Greg Freerksen, host Blues Edition WDCB Public Radio, Glen Ellyn, Illinois

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