



**Big Walter Horton, my favorite harp player**

## THE INTERVIEWER

By Michael Erlewine ([Michael@Erlewine.net](mailto:Michael@Erlewine.net))

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That first Ann Arbor Blues Festival in 1969 changed my life. I was 29 at the time and that event became one of the most important in my life, a pivot point, where I turned from whatever I was doing at the time, more toward what I became and still am today, an archivist of popular culture. As they say, "Who Woulda' Think it?"

If there is one of those times where we feel like we are living in our own dream, that first Ann Arbor Blues Festival was that. Imagine.

Suddenly, in one place, were almost all of the heroes in my recent life, the great blues players, assembled in one place, with their all their sidemen. Not only was the general public (read White people) introduced all at once to most of the great living black blues players, but equally (and more important), those scores of blues players, their sidemen, and families were assembled together with in what turned out to be a kind of celebration.

So, as the public was overcome by this profound blues music for the first time with that many blues players present, there's was somewhat of a celebration and reunion going on with the blues players themselves.

It was epoch and cosmic, IMO. And there I was, not one of the university-folks who planned the festival, but the on-the-ground guy who knew some of the players and ended up in charge of "hospitality," which means providing all these players and their families with food

and drink, and “drink” was all about alcohol in those days. My family and I were very popular serving these folks.

I was there with my brother Dan, who was equally interested in all this, and also our other three brothers, Steven, Phillip, and Tom, plus our dad. We served the booze out of my dad’s station wagon and my dad spent most of the time hanging out and drinking with folks like Roosevelt Sykes, Big Mama Thornton, and some of the other blues greats.

As for my dad, I seldom had connected all that much with him about whatever I loved, but we connected that weekend through introducing him to all these players. It was, so to speak, a bit of the divine, a taste of heaven on Earth as far as I was concerned.

There is so much I could tell you and probably should, those few of you who are transported by the music and life wisdom of these great black blues players. What I can do here is show you some of the photos that came out of that event, many by the great photographer Stanley Livingston.

And hidden in that event, like a seed, was my future as an archivist of popular culture. I never saw it coming, but I was always into organizing and documenting what I most loved, and I loved the blues and those players!

After that first Ann Arbor Blues Festival in 1969, came the second blues festival in 1970, which was more of the wonderful same. And then, after the University stopped sponsoring the festival, there was a year of no festival, (1971) and then the festival was reinstated by music promotor Peter Andrews (who brought a lot music to Ann Arbor) and poet and blues-expert John Sinclair,

with the “Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festivals,” which were held in 1972, 1973, and unsuccessful festival held in Canada in 1974.

Andrews and Sinclair expanded the venue to not only include blues, but also jazz and Rhythm & Blues, with performers like Ray Charles and Miles Davis.

I was also on-site for some of those, handling hospitality and doing even more interviews, this time with audio and video.

Well, the long and the short of it is that from those seminal blues festivals, both the Ann Arbor Blues Festivals and the Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festivals that followed, I became aware of how precious and fragile that time was. And I came out of those festivals with an intense desire to protect and preserve our country’s musical heritage.

This manifested some years later with my founding the All-Music Guide ([allmusic.com](http://allmusic.com)), which today is the largest collection of music data on the planet, millions of pieces of information all organized. Of course, I did this assisted by an incredible team, that eventually numbered (before I sold it) of 150 full-time review and computer staff, and over 500 freelance writers, all working together.

And later, my company, AMG, founded the All-Movie Guide ([allmovie.com](http://allmovie.com)), which is one of the two largest film databases, and the All-Game Guide, which was eventually abandoned after I sold the company. I also founded the first major Concert Music Poster site called, “Classic Posters ([ClassicPosters.com](http://ClassicPosters.com)), which is still going today, and other collections, etc.

I went on to interview scores of rock poster artists, some rock players, and so forth. I have been busy these last years divesting all of these archives so they are not swept into memory anytime soon. These include:

My Rock Concert Poster data has been donated to:

University of Michigan's Bentley Historical Library

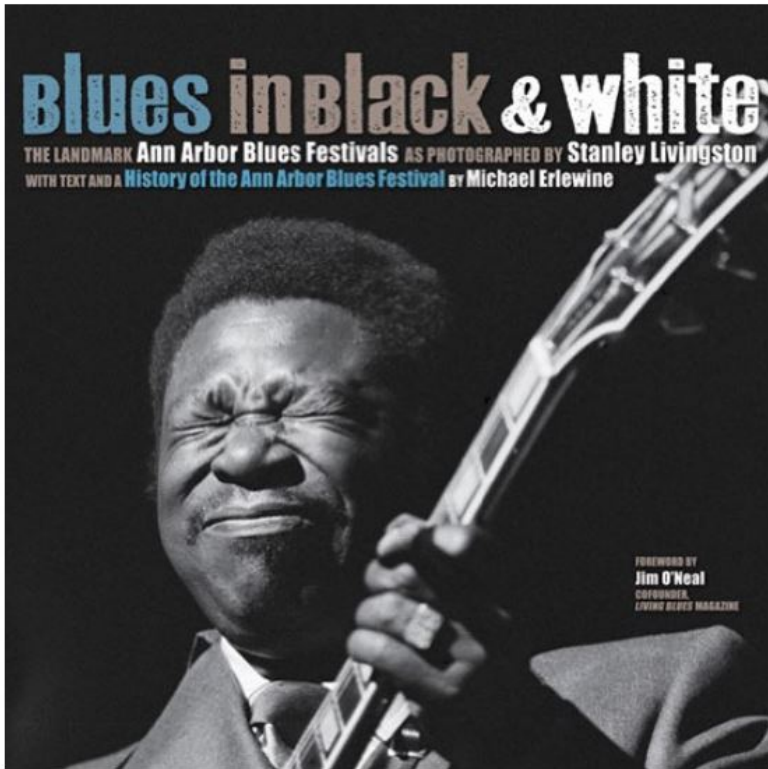
The Haight Street Art Center (non-profit) in San Francisco

My collection of music CDs is now at the Michigan State University, some 800,000 CDs.

My collection of astrological books, magazines, and so forth are now part of the permanent collection of the University of Illinois.

A large collection to Tibetan Buddhist teachings, thousands of tapes, are now at the KTD Monastery in upstate New York.

And I am busy distributing many databases on music, astrology and other disciplines as we speak.



*I provided the history and text for the award-winning book "Blues in Black and White: The Landmark Ann Arbor Blues Festivals."*

[https://www.amazon.com/Blues-Black-White-Landmark-Festivals/dp/0472116959/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?dchild=1&keywords=blues+in+black+and+white&qid=1608228983&sr=8-2](https://www.amazon.com/Blues-Black-White-Landmark-Festivals/dp/0472116959/ref=sr_1_2?dchild=1&keywords=blues+in+black+and+white&qid=1608228983&sr=8-2)

Here are some photos of me as an interviewer.





Left to right, My father Ralph Erlewine, Roosevelt Sykes, Big Mama Thornton, and Big Joe Williams. Check out the beer cans under their chairs. You know they were having fun.





My interviewing Howlin' Wolf with our camera crew.



With Koko Taylor



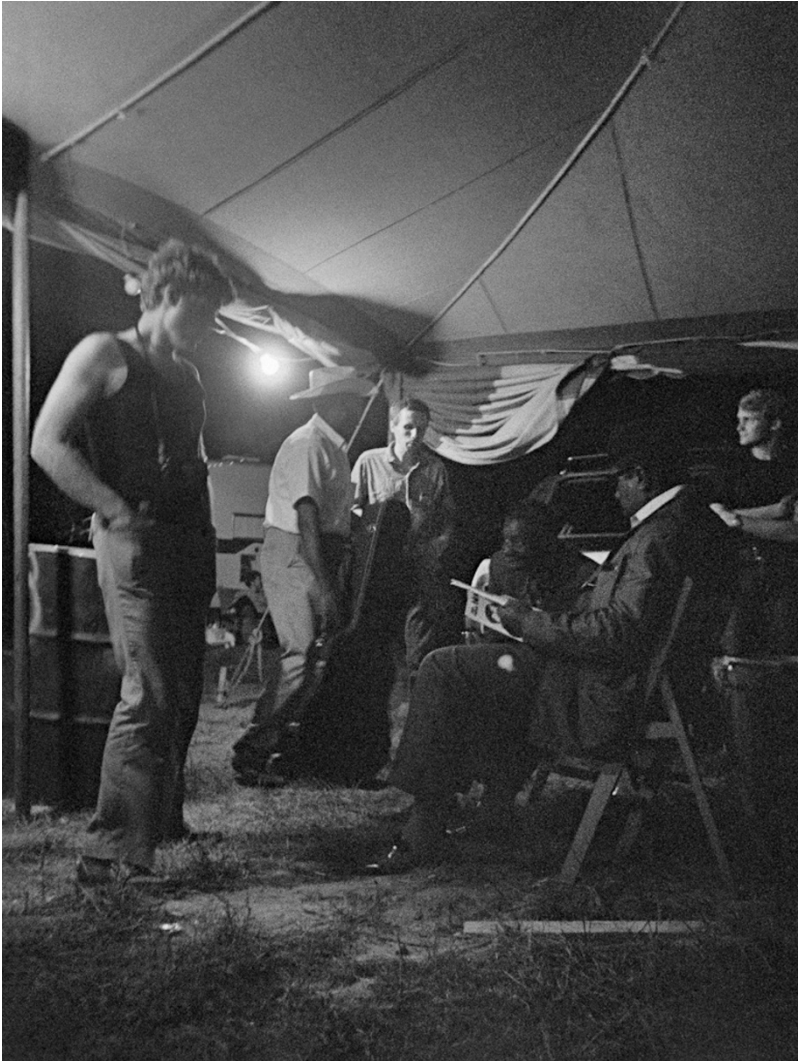
With Lightning Slim



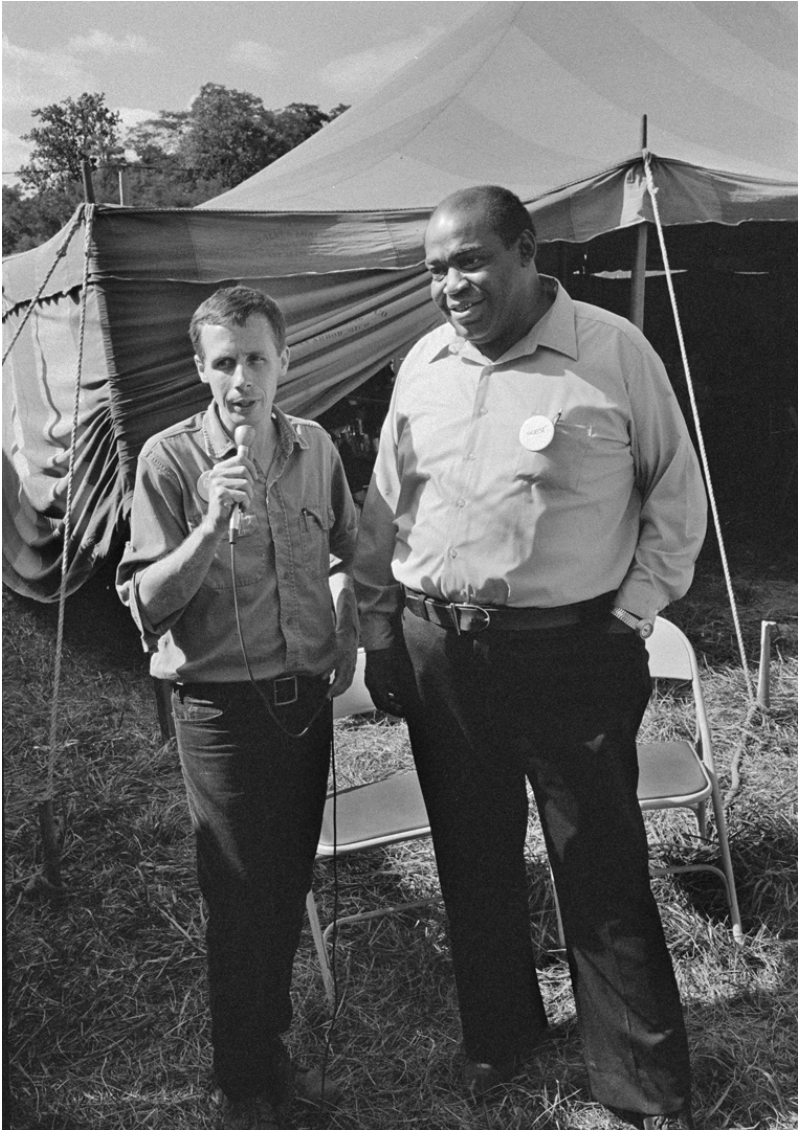
With Muddy Waters



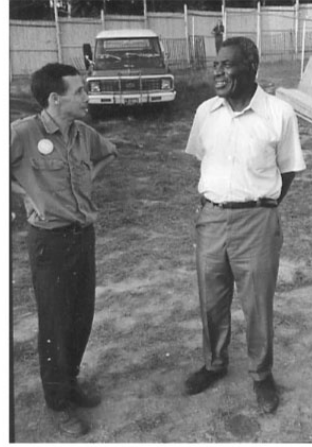
With Johnny Shines (left) and Robert Jr. Lockwood (right)



In the food tent, with left to right, David Loup, Robert Pete Williams, Michael Erlewine, Lazy Bill Lucas, Johnny Shines (sitting) and my brother Phillip Erlewine.



With Willie Dixon



Michae Erlewine / Howlin'Wolf

## More Howlin' Wolf





Left to right: Michael Erlewine, Johnny Shines, Dan Erlewine