

CONCERTBÜRO ANDY LÖSCHE

www.concertbueroeloesche.de

proudly presents...

Larry Garner

Larry Garner was comfortable in the 9-to-5 routine of commuting to his day job, and making a good salary working for Dow Chemical. On his drive home one night, he was forced to take an alternate route. "There was an accident on the interstate, and I took a detour to avoid it," remembers Garner. "I drove by this place that had a sign outside on wheels, with a couple lights that said, 'Blues Jam Tonight.' I went in, and they said to be back at 10 that night. I went home and told my wife about it. She said, 'You know you've got to go to work tomorrow.' I went anyway, played, and got home at 2:30 in the morning. That was Tabby's Blues Box."

The scene at the legendary Baton Rouge blues hotbed was a marked contrast to the occasional weekend gigs Garner was playing at the time. It was the mid-1970s, and Garner had just returned from an 18-month tour in the army. "There were no gigs," he remembers. "It was all disco. There were occasionally American Legion gigs or weddings or rent parties. I played in my garage. I took a job with Dow Chemical, and I rarely played in public."

Garner started moonlighting for the first few years he played out at Tabby's Blues Box. He met such Baton Rouge bluesmen as Silas Hogan, Whispering Smith, Arthur Kelly and Rafal Neal. He occasionally played in New Orleans at Rhythms on Bourbon Street, or with Bryan Lee at the late, lamented Old Absinthe House. But eventually he couldn't keep burning the candle at both ends. He recalls hanging out at Tabby's one night with Kenny Neal, who'd just finished touring. When Neal pleaded with him to stick around for another drink instead of getting ready for work in the morning, Garner tried to explain. "He said, 'You got to quit that job.' I said, 'I know, but I still got to go to work in the morning.' I left, but Kenny saying that stuck in my head. I had to quit."

It was a chance for Garner to play the music he'd loved since his early childhood. Growing up near Baton Rouge in the small town of Oaknolia, Garner heard the music coming from the church near his house. "There were traveling preachers coming through, and I heard that, and I listened to WLAC in Nashville on Friday and Saturday night," he says. "I started playing guitar because I had an uncle, George, who taught me. He was a paraplegic, and he played like Jimmy Reed. I learned through him, and started playing at the church and behind a gospel group that played on the radio."

"My parents didn't want me playing the blues," Garner continues. "They thought it was the devil's music — then I guess the juke joint a quarter-mile down the road was the devil's recruitment office. I never went into the juke except during the day, when it was a store."

Garner continued playing music during his military service, and playing in army bands — while stationed in Korea — steeled him for the life of a full-time musician. Leaving Dow Chemical was initially tough for him, but now he has a devoted following throughout the country and across the Atlantic Ocean. "I'm on tour all the time," he says. "I go to Europe twice a year. In Europe, they like the authentic stuff. They hear guys playing the blues, but when I come in, they come right up and say, 'Thank God — a real blues band.' We take it for granted here. They're really appreciative there. I'm also on the road here all the time," says Garner. "I have a 1996 van. It's got 296,000 miles on it, and I bought it new. You do the math."

An early self-released cassette of Garner's songs led him to a record contract with London's JSP label. After his 1993 JSP debut, he recorded the classic *You Need to Live a Little* on Verve/Gitanes. This CD has tunes such as "Keep Four Cars Running," where a father laments about the expenses of heading a large household, and the hilarious "The Preacher Man Stole My Woman." His recent efforts include *Baton Rouge* (Evidence) and *Once Upon the Blues* (Ruf). Garner's original songs mark all these records; he rarely plays other people's music. "I get inspiration from every day, talking to people, watching TV, listening to the radio, seeing things happening around me that put an extra thought in my mind."

In tunes like "Virus Blues" or "If She Tells You No," listeners can tell that Larry Garner is paying close attention to what is happening and putting it into songs — which is what good blues performers have been doing since the music danced from Africa into America. Garner keeps it dancing out of Baton Rouge.

Larry Garner & Band:

Larry Garner – guitar / vocals
Raphael Wressnig – piano / organ
Shedrick Nellon – bass
Michael Aures – drums

Brandnew album: **Here Today, Gone Tomorrow** (DixieFrog)