

Gary Kendall 'It's A Blues Life'

It started at the northern end of Highway 61, in Westfort, a working class neighbourhood in Fort William, Ontario, Canada, now part of Thunder Bay. **Elvis Presley** on The Ed Sullivan show in 1956 and **Muddy Waters, Willie Dixon** and **Sunnyland Slim** on the CBC documentary "The Blues" ten years later. Music icons on a black and white television screen combined with a favourite pastime of scanning the dial of an old radio, late at night in a basement bedroom, searching for exotic music from the Deep South. This is how **Gary Kendall's** journey into the world of the Blues began. When other teenage boys went to weekend dances to meet girls, he stood off to the side watching the musicians on the bandstand. At age sixteen, six months after acquiring his first pawn shop electric guitar; he jumped at the chance to join a band called **The Countdowns** as the bassist. None of the other young musicians wanted the bass players job, Gary just wanted to be in a band and after making \$20 at a Saturday night dance playing instrumental rock n roll the road map for his future occupation fell into place..

When the mid-sixties brought the British Invasion, it was **The Rolling Stones** that caught his ear and their music encouraged him to dig a little deeper and buy records by artists who were considered to be the first generation of the Blues. He joined a band called **The Shameful Minority** with long time friend, guitarist **David Smyth**. The record collection now included **Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Elmore James, Willie Dixon, B.B. King, Little Walter, The Paul Butterfield Blues Band** and many more.

In 1968, Gary Kendall moved to Toronto, the city he now calls home. By 1971, with **The James Hartley Band**, he was playing the legendary **Grossman's Tavern** and other blues bars in the Spadina & College neighbourhood where he lived. The **Downchild Blues Band** was at the top of the local scene and he quickly became friends with all the band members, brought together by a mutual respect for the blues.

In 1974, playing in a basement bar, The Meet Market, beneath the legendary **Colonial Tavern** with his own band, **Dollars**, a friendship was struck with Muddy Waters guitarist, **Bob Margolin**; a musical connection that continues to this day. Bob arranged for him to sit in with Muddy and the band. The privilege to play with one of his heroes is a strong and important memory that has stayed with him throughout his entire career. . A few months later the basement bar brought in **Sunnyland Slim**, an artist first seen on television with Muddy Waters back in 1966. He was thrilled when his band was asked to back up Sunnyland and **Bonnie Bombshell** for a week.

In late 1979 the opportunity to join **The Downchild Blues Band** became a reality. The chance to play with old friends in one of his favourite bands seemed like a

dream come true. He stayed until 1983, recording four albums, *'We Deliver'*, *'Road Fever'*, *'Blood Run Hot'* and *'But, I'm On The Guest List'*.

From the mid-80`s to the early 90`s, Gary stayed off the road, holding down a house gig at Toronto's, **Black Swan Tavern** with **The Kendall Wall Band**. A group he formed with ex-Downchild drummer **Cash Wall** and harmonica ace **Jeff Baker**. The revolving KWB guitar chair was held by **Richard Smyth, Teddy Leonard, Kevin Higgins and Chris Burgess**. Their **Saturday Afternoon Blues Matinee's at the Swan** became legendary. (More information on The Kendall Wall Band, their recording and documentary can be found at www.kendallwallband.com)

In those days touring acts came to Toronto for a week to play at **Albert's Hall** and most of those artists came over to the Swan to do a guest spot on Saturday afternoon. That gave KWB the opportunity to play with **A. C. Reed, Pinetop Perkins, Eddy Clearwater, Tinsley Ellis, Little Willie Littlefield, Chubby Carrier, Bernard Allison, Eddie C. Campbell, Lefty Dizz, Eddie 'Clean Head' Vinson, Eddie Shaw, Carey Bell, Fenton Robinson** and many more. This also led to KWB being used by venues like **Albert's Hall, Pop The Gator, Blues & Cues** and **The Bermuda Onion** as a back up band for **Luther 'Guitar Junior' Johnson, Snooky Pryor, Big Jay McNealey, Honkin' Joe Houston, Eddie Kirkland, Phil Guy** and **Cash McCall**.

In 1995, Gary Kendall returned to his position as bassist with the Canadian music institution, **Downchild**. Since then, they've released *'Lucky 13'*, *'Come On In'*, *'Live at The Palais Royale'*, *'I Need A Hat'*, the Juno Award winning *'Can You Hear The Music'*, *'Something I've Done'* and the *50th Anniversary, Live At The Toronto Jazz Festival'*.

When not on the road with Downchild, he can be found playing the blues and working under his own name with **The Gary Kendall Band**. GKB has released two recordings, **Dusty & Pearl** and **Feels Real Strong** on his 47 Records label. In 2021 47Records will release two EP`s, the remixed/remastered **Dusty & Pearl Revisited Volume One** and the compilation, **Instrumentalz**.

Gary Kendall received The Toronto Blues Society's **Blues With A Feeling Award** in 1993 and has twenty-two nominations as The Maple Blues Award's **Bassist Of The Year**. He has been presented with the **Bassist Of The Year** award in 1997, 1999, 2000, 2002, 2005, 2007, 2012 and 2013. In 2002 his hometown of Thunder Bay honoured him with the **Thunder Blues Award** and The Thunder Bay Blues Society's **Keeping The Blues Alive Award**.

Gary Kendall has worked on recordings as a bassist and on occasion as producer* on recordings by **Chris Murphy** (*Blowin' The Horn** and *I'm A Happy Guy*), **Little Bobby & The Jumpstarts** (*Tickets In The Glove Box*), **Maria Aurigema** (*Take Me & Long Way Home*), **Peter Schmidt & Shane Scott** (*Blues Approved*), **Brian Blain** (*Overqualified For The Blues & I'm Not Fifty Anymore*) **Ray Edge** (*Soul Connection**) **The Maple Blues Revue** (*Live At Twisted Pines**), **Son Roberts** (*Tell That Story*),

David Vest (*East Meets Vest & Roadhouse Revelation & Devestatin` Rhythm**), **Tobin Spring** (*Collective Blues Agreement*) **Braithwaite & Whiteley** (Blues Country), **David Owen`s** (*Livin` Life**), **Rootbone** (*The Long Road Home*) **The Mighty Duck Blues Band** (*Duck Soup*) and **Judy Brown** (*Say It**). * *Indicates a producers credit*

In 2012, Gary Kendall dug back into the old and almost lost recordings of **The Kendall Wall Band** and released **The Way We Was**. A documentary on the recording process and the history of the band accompanied that recording.

Since 1999 he has held down the prestigious position as Musical Director/Band Leader at the annual **Maple Blues Awards** ceremony in Toronto. In 2021 the Covid-19 pandemic cancelled the live version of The Maple Blues Awards. The Toronto Blues Society rose to the occasion by organizing a virtual edition. Gary Kendall continued to work with the MBA planning committee as musical supervisor to produce the four nights/four city's version of the popular and important awards event.

The Hornby Island Blues Society has welcomed Gary Kendall to their annual Blues Workshop/Blues Week as the bass instructor four times. This event has become a very inspiring and important part of his career.

A popular sideman, he continues to work with **The Swingin Blackjacks**, **The Mighty Duck Blues Band**, **The Hogtown Allstars** and **Big Groove** as well as never turning down numerous freelance opportunities that continue to be offered.

Whenever and wherever you find him, G.K. will be layin' down a solid groove and playin' the blues.

www.garykendall.com