

## **Terry “Harmonica” Bean**

Delta blues

Pontotoc, Mississippi

“I can’t let the blues die. I don’t want to let it go,” says third-generation Mississippi bluesman Terry “Harmonica” Bean. While bringing a youthful vigor and excitement to this oldest form of blues, Bean’s commitment to the Delta blues legacy shines through and lends his playing a timeless power.

Beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, African American musicians in the Mississippi Delta region transformed the call-and-response vocal forms inherited from slaves’ work songs and field hollers into a new format where the interplay was between the individual singer and his guitar, and the blues was born. Delta blues—noted for its raw, passionate vocals and equally emotive slide guitar and harmonica playing—reflects both the hardships of black life in the Delta, and music’s power to both express and transcend daily struggles.

Born in 1961 to a sharecropping family of 24 children in Pontotoc, where he still lives, Terry Bean grew up experiencing both the hard life of work in the cotton fields and the sweet relief provided by the blues. His father Eddie Bean was a skilled guitarist who had played with greats like B.B. King before settling down; the elder Bean hosted house parties where young Terry honed his skills on harmonica and guitar in the company of his father’s blues-playing friends.

As a teenager, Bean turned his attention from music to baseball. While his pitching skills attracted scouts from several professional teams, a motorcycle accident ended his hopes for a professional career. In his mid-twenties, after attending the 1988 Delta Blues Festival in Greenville, Mississippi, Bean rededicated himself to the blues. Because his father and the other older-style blues players in his community had all died by that time, he began traveling across the state each weekend to play harmonica in the bands of great elder Mississippi bluesmen like James “T-Model” Ford. He also sought out and played with other notable blues artists of the previous generation including Son Thomas, Willie Foster, Lonnie Pitchford, R. L. Burnside and others.

Bean will perform at the festival as a solo artist, singing and accompanying himself on harmonica and guitar, and stomping his feet for percussion. Winner of the 2007 Mississippi Delta Blues Society Competition, Bean has performed at clubs and festivals throughout the South, and as far away as England and Italy.