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HOMETOWN

Keith Williams, a mainstay musician on Burlington's Church Street

BY MYRA MATHIS FLYNN, FREE PRESS CORRESPONDENT • WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 2010

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New Haven's Keith Williams is tough to miss with his signature hat and burly white beard. You can hear him cranking blues out of local bars on Church Street.

How did you choose your instrument, or did it choose you?

I would say that initially I chose the guitar. I was born in Rutland and back in the late '50s and early '60s my uncle, Bob Laird, organized an annual variety show at my elementary school and he played the guitar. I remember one year, I must have been 7 or 8 years old, watching him play and sing and deciding then that I would learn to play the guitar. I guess I was about 13 when I finally got a guitar and started to teach myself to play it. Over the years, I have tried many other instruments, with various levels of success, and have always come back to the guitar -- so I guess it really chose me.

What's your favorite genre to play?

I really enjoy playing Delta Blues as well as other styles of acoustic blues. Some people don't enjoy the blues (or maybe they just cannot understand the blues), but as I play and watch the folks that are listening, I can see the ones that the music really connects with. The blues is more of a feeling than a sound, and sometimes it only takes a note or two before you really start to feel it.

Where do you play?

Mostly I play with my long time harmonica playing friend Peter Lind. This summer, we have played a lot at the local farmers markets in Burlington and St. Albans as well as the Westford market. We enjoy playing at small restaurants and clubs such as 3 Squares Cafe in Vergennes and Half Lounge on Church Street. We have also played a few festivals, and you can often find us busking on Church Street in good weather.



Courtesy photo

Keith Williams, who lives in New Haven, often performs in the Queen City.

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Who are your influences?

My primary influences are the old blues players such as Robert Johnson, Blind Willie McTell and Lightnin' Hopkins. There are some contemporary acoustic blues artists that I really admire such as Vermont's own Scott Ainslie, as well as Rory Block, Dan Stevens, Robin O'Herin, Catfish Keith and Doug McLeod.

Do you have a family, and if so, what do they think about you being a musician?

I do have a family. I have 5 children, 11 grandchildren and one great-grandchild. I think they like that I'm a musician though they don't all appreciate the type of music that I play. One of my daughters lives here in Vermont, and she will often bring two of her kids out to hear us when she can.

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