

Hawkeye Herman Live in Concert — The DVD

By Harry (doc) Babad ©2008

Introduction

Over the years that I know Michael Hawkeye Herman both as a performer and more recently as I friend, I've watched him in various different roles.

He's played blues music at 3-Rivers Folklife Society [3RFS] concerts and at the 3RFS sponsored Tumbleweed Music Festival [TMF] while I sat in a front row seat. I've often sat enraptured at his day after a concert Blues workshops, often held at John & Micki P's home or to a packed house in the biggest room in the Community center during a **TMF weekend**. [Hawkeye just quietly pickin' before the crowd rolls in.]



Now it's not that I have any pretensions, when attending the workshops and concerts, at learning the riffs, runs, fingering styles and rhythms of the blues. No I learned a long time ago, despite owning an easy to play classical neck guitar [...a

pre-world war II Goya called a *Levin*], that I have neither a sense of rhythm nor the coordination to do anything approaching listenable. Rather I get as close as the seats allow for me to both hear and watch the Hawk perform, sing the old songs, the tunes he's written, and watch him play the music all over the neck of his guitars. But best of all listen to him tell the history of and the tales about the makers of Blues Music and his life as a student and player.

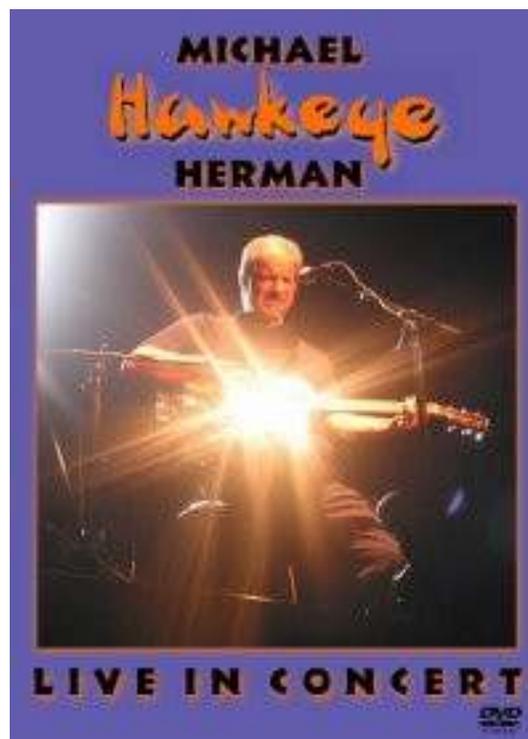
Therefore, when I got my hands on Hawkeye's 2007 *Live in Concert* DVD the challenge was whether I would get the same sense of thrill of seeking "Hawkeye" alive from the DVD. [Oh out of fairness, I am a Michael Hawkeye Herman fan and own --- I hope --- all of the albums he recorded as autographed CDs. Now I'm not especially a Blues Music fan although I've collected CDs ranging from Ruth Brown, Billie Holiday and Bessie Smith to Ma Rainey and; from Robert Clay, Jessie Fuller and Muddy Waters to Robert Lockwood, Jr.

I don't often after that first listen turn back to these original plays. Instead, in addition to replaying playing Hawkeye's albums, I find myself return to the Jazz and other contemporary vocalists who kept the blues alive in the hearts of so many aficionados. Folks like Mose Allison, Miles Davis, Roy Eldridge, Diane Schurr, Grover Washington Jr, and Jimmy Witherspoon, to Ruby Presnell, Ann Rabson, and Maria Muldaur.

So with great trepidation, I played the DVD first on the 22" inch screen of my Macintosh, and then again in part on the larger 36" wide screen of a LCD television set. I also listen with the screen blacked out, with headphones, the way I usually listen to the Hawk's and other CDs.

The Album (DVD)

This dynamic and entertaining two-hour DVD [Topaz DVD 0200] consists of two 50-minute concerts filmed in 2005 and 2006. The DVD also includes a ten-minute PBS-TV affiliate documentary about the BBC Radio in London requesting that Hawkeye compose a hurricane blues song ("Katrina, Oh Katrina"). The song was aired on the BBC's most popular news program, "BBC Today," in October of 2005, and was heard by over 7 million listeners in the UK. – 2007.



Many of the songs listed below are performed on the DVD, and these and more are to be found on You Tube. But don't go that route; the DVD performances are so much richer that *You Tube* can show, that it's a shame to deprive yourself of the richer experience. Better yet take a trip and listen to Hawkeye at the concert venue closest to you... the schedule in on his website.

Grinning In Your Face	Rocket to Chicago
Hawk's Worried Blues	St James Infirmary Blues
Katrina, Oh Katrina (Hurricane Song)	The Great River Road
New Hero Blues	The Prodigal Son
Nobody Know You When Your Down and Out	The Signifyin' Monkey
Ramblin on my Mind	When You've Got A Good Friend
	Your Mind is On Vacation

Songs on the DVD — One strangeness about this DVD; I could not find a listing, anywhere, of the cuts that the Hawk played or sang. Alas I did not recognize all of them, but I should have. *Songs I like, that I missed that were not included, but are found on the Hawk's CDs.*

Give Me a Grandma Every Time	Letter To My Baby
I Used To Ride That Train	Route 66
I've got the World on a String	The Great Flood of '93

The Good, the Bad and the Beautiful

I was delighted in listening to the DVD and watching Hawkeye perform that how much of his heart the Hawk poured into his songs. Although I've sat in the front row, it not like looking at Hawkeye's face, watching him mouth some of the more complex riffs and see the beads of sweat on his forehead as he puts himself into the music. Here is a performer who not only loves his music but also reaches out to you, the audience, to share its heartaches and joys.

For those of you who want to learn the blues guitar, the DVD serves a rich purpose. The camera gets down and close so you can see the fingering the Hawk uses for all of instrument accompanied songs be they on the six-string acoustic guitar or the slide guitar. For this alone, the album is a



great buy. In a few place the microphone stand in the first concert gets in the way but that is no problem in the second concert tape.

I have two related problems with the 2005 session on the DVD; I am significantly hearing impaired and even with a combined amplification of both a hearing aide and a souped up volume controls on my computer, I missed most of the monologs that the Hawk used to introduce his songs. Now I'm not a stranger to this material, having heard it at some of this concerts and workshops, but I felt disappointed not to get to re-enjoy this material. This could have been easily solved had the album been set up for closed captioning, but alas it was not.

Horray, that was not a problem with the 2006 session, every word was crystal clear.

Never the less, Michael, please do so on your next DVD, the little bit of extra effort would make many with much older ears than mine even happier, seeing the words to your narratives, and not just to the songs themselves. You gotta see, lowering your voice to pull in the audience between songs works fine... makes it right personal, unless you're an *aural* dropout like me.

The DVD of these two live concerts were easy to watch on my monitor but were just a bit grainy on the large screen TV. This however did not detract from the music and the songs. I also found, in this age of easy to use DVD software, some of the fades between songs in the 2005 session were a bit distracting and could have been edited out without detracting from the feeling of a live performance. Despite these flaws this is a DVD that I plan on giving to several friends who aspire to play the blues; since they live in parts of the US where the Hawk neither performs nor give workshops and a lesson from the DVD is the least I can do to help.

I can't resist quoting Tom Peterse of Victory Review [December 2007] who notes: "Hawkeye is a master storyteller, too, and much of his show is chatting and spinning yarns over some chords, like a long, streaming talkin' blues *especially in the 2005 concert*. He's erudite and very funny, with a droll delivery and an expressive mug, but under the fun there's also a passionate social activist. His rap is laced with political barbs and wry commentary." But *doc* sez it never gets heavy so tune in.

Almost the Last Word

I fully agree with the folks at now alas defunct **Blues Access** that 'The only thing better than hearing this live albums, and watching his DVD, is seeing Hawkeye Herman in the flesh in concert or at a blues music workshop. Whether adding his own spin to blues classics or offering his own songs, Herman is a one-man history

of blues, a noteworthy guitar player and inimitable educator communicator.'
[http://www.bluesaccess.com/ba_home.html/]

Between these two concert gigs, there was more duplication of songs than I'd have liked, but there were enough differences in their renditions to make them interesting to watch and hear.

With the release of the DVD, *Live in Concert* an even wider audience will come to see, hear and appreciate Hawkeye's versatile blues repertoire, exceptional musical talent, and compelling artistry as a blues storyteller, musician and historian. As both a music fan and a science fiction lover, I have one regret. No one has yet to develop a gadget that would allow me to be present in the eyes and ears of a young person, at a Blues in the Schools Concert, who gets to hear the Hawk for the first time. What a revelation to those fortunate young people!



More Links — Michael Hawkeye Herman and Blues Music:

Hawkeye's Website — <http://www.hawkeyeherman.com/>

Hawkeye Herman's Blues Bibliography —

http://mvbs.org/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=118

The Blues Foundation — <http://www.blues.org/>

The American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress —

<http://www.loc.gov/folklife/>

The Blue Zone — <http://www.fortunecity.com/tinpan/eno/946/music/zone.html>

Jon Spencer Blues Explosion Lyrics and Biography —

<http://www.musicianguide.com/biographies/1608004515/Jon-Spencer-Blues-Explosion.html>

Blues Bibliographic Database of Artists — <http://bluesnet.hub.org/gorgen/>

A Brief BIO

Hawkeye Herman, as noted in an article in <http://showcase.netins.net/web/wbranchc/hawkeye.html> "has definitely carved out a spot for himself in the contemporary acoustic blues/folk field, and has earned a reputation as one of the most accomplished artists in the genre. As a music educator, Hawkeye has taken his love of blues music to students of all ages, from pre-school to university campuses through his enthusiastically received "Blues in the Schools" programs, which he initiated in 1980. He has taught guitar for over 30 and more years, and has presented blues and slide guitar instructional workshops at major folk and blues festivals as a part of his frequent concert touring schedule."



Hawkeye & Willitte Herman at '98 Blues Foundation KBA Awards banquet in Memphis.

A prolific writer and teacher, "Hawkeye has also contributed articles to Living Blues, Blues Revue, Kansas City Blues News, Mississippi Valley Blues News, and many other blues related publications. Hawkeye is a member of the Board of Directors of the Blues Foundation, in Memphis."

PS:

...And the Hawk will be doing a 3 Rivers Folklife society concert on March 1, 2008 at the Battelle Auditorium [Check: - <http://www.3RFS.org/>] — you all come.
Doc_Babad.