

BSCP PROUDLY PRESENTS JOHNNY RAWLS

AT OUR ANNUAL MISSISSIPPI RAILROAD

By ANDREW KEHE

With a chill in the air, soul blues legend Johnny Rawls put on a smokin' show at the Blues Society of Central Pennsylvania Christmas Party a few years back.

Just think how much soul blues sizzle can come out of his Fender Stratocaster on a summer afternoon.

On July 21 at 2 p.m., Rawls, a Blues Music Award winner in 2019 and for 17 consecutive years a BMA nominee, will be turning up the heat before a BSCP audience old and new when he headlines the annual Mississippi Railroad show at the Mechanicsburg Picnic Grounds.

The show is free to BSCP members. Annual \$15 memberships can be purchased at the door. Bring your own food and beverages.

Rawls had the dance floor jumpin' in 2016 when he performed at the Hummelstown Fire Hall, and the anticipation is he'll kick it up a notch for the MR show. There is no taking it down, except when the mood calls for it.

"I don't play slow blues, but every once in a while I'll play something with a little less energy," he likes to say. "People are not going to pay their hard-earned money to hear something that ain't jamming, you know what I'm saying?"

So, no "slow" blues. And don't bother shouting out a request for Stormy Monday, or any other staple for that matter. Johnny Rawls music is Johnny Rawls original.

"I'm separating myself from being a cover band," he once told Blues Blast Magazine. "I'm an original recording artist and I play my songs, man, my songs."

It's an attitude that has served the 67-year old Mississippi native well for the past 51 years, since playing professionally as a teenager backing such artists as ZZ Hill, Little Johnny Taylor, Joe Tex and the Sweet Inspirations. He's cranked out enough original material to produce 15 albums since his first in 1996.

His penultimate release "Waiting for The Train," earned a 2018 BMA nomination for Best Soul Blues Album, and with his latest release "I'm Still Around," Rawls broke through in May with the BMA 2019 Best Soul Blues Album award. He regards his latest effort - his first on the Third Street Cigar label - as his finest work ever.

Winning is not an uncommon occurrence for Rawls. Multiple times he's earned top recognition from BMA, Blues Blast, Living Blues Critics Poll and W.C. Handy.

"Johnny Rawls proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that both he and old-school soul blues are still as warm, vital and entertaining as they have ever been with this release," wrote Blues Blast critic Marty Gunther. "It's upbeat throughout. Johnny wrote all ten tunes here, and they're brimming with life and attitude."

About "Waiting for the Train," an album that reflects on mortality and a love of life, Lain Patience of Elmore Magazine wrote: "There's absolutely nothing to criticize here, and album that's pretty near impossible not to like. Yet another positive winner from Rawls, a guy who is still out there turning in genuinely remarkable performances and working flat out at the top of his game."

"I sing soul," Rawls told the Palm Beach New Times. "I stand out because I do original songs that have a good beat to them. It's a different side to the blues. I take a lot of time and effort to write songs so they don't sound like they were just thrown together. In order to stand out, you have to write great songs."

Mississippi Railroad was conceived in 2005 by Dale Wise and Dave Groninger, who after traveling to Clarksdale Miss., wanted to expose to Central Pa. blues fans the sounds and "true blues artists" of the Mississippi Delta. The Mississippi Railroad debuted at the 40 & 8 Club and has drawn top Mississippi Delta artists annually ever since.