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## Curator sings praises of the blues

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## Curator sings praises of the blues

Curator harmonizes love of music and history at Blues Archive

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It comes as no surprise that Greg Johnson, blues curator and associate professor at the J.D. Williams Library, originally planned to be a musicologist.

The sought-after instrumentalist plays trombone, guitar, Celtic harp, tin whistle and the bodhran drum with various local ensembles. Johnson is also a longtime bassist for the L-O-U Symphony Orchestra and the Tupelo Symphony Orchestra.

Johnson's love for music, particularly the blues and blues history, landed him a job at the Blues Archive more than a decade ago.

After earning a Bachelor of Music and master's degree in library and information science from the University of Southern Mississippi in 2000 and 2002, respectively, Johnson said he jumped at the opportunity to work at the University of Mississippi.

"Maybe it was luck or just great timing, but I was looking for a job where I could pair my love of music and history, and the university was looking for someone with a library of science degree with knowledge of the blues," said the Suqualena native.

Johnson developed his love of the blues alongside his dad, Joe Johnson, who was an avid listener of the "Highway 61" blues program on Mississippi Public Broadcasting. But once Johnson acquired the job as blues curator, he realized he needed to learn a lot more about the history, sociology and musicology of the genre.

"We didn't study a lot of blues during my undergraduate years," he said. "Once I got this amazing job, I had to really learn a lot more, which involved a lot of reading and listening."

Johnson's lifelong passion makes it easy for him to share his insights with fellow blues researchers and archivists, and especially with individuals new to the blues.

"Many new listeners have an assumption the blues are sad," he said. "While, historically, blues came from depressing circumstances, it's not all sad. In fact, a lot of the blues is about having a good time. It's about rising above the sadness. It's about singing so you can move on."

What's more, to aid new blues aficionados, Johnson joined Ed Komara, Crane music librarian for the State University of New York at Potsdam, to co-author *100 Essential Blues Books* by Scarecrow Press (publication pending). The manuscript, which is still in the editing phase, examines the most important books of blues scholarship and how they have informed an understanding of the genre. Komara was a music librarian/blues archivist at UM from 1993 through 2001.

When not studying, researching, collecting, archiving or listening to the blues, Johnson performs traditional Irish and Scottish music with girlfriend Shaundi Wall of Oxford, a singer and percussionist.

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