

Hill Country Picnic 2010

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Note: Dexter Burnside was present for this interview.

[0:00:28] Garry says he doesn't know exactly why the Hill Country blues sounds the way it does, because it was around before he was, but he feels that timing makes Hill Country blues different from other genres like Chicago blues. He explains that Hill Country blues is played with more soul than other types of blues. He goes on to say that the color of the artist doesn't matter when you are playing Hill Country blues, if you feel it, you can play it.

[0:02:35] Garry explains that artists left Mississippi in the past because it was easier to "get known" if you left for a major city like Memphis or Chicago. Yet, he asserts that Mississippi is to "thank" for pulling an artist through "hard times" and giving the artist a distinctive sound. He asserts that the "only good thing" from Mississippi is that you get "soul" from growing up there, because there is so much "hard times and struggle." Once these artists went to Chicago, they already had the "soul" and were talented musicians.

[0:03:45] Garry doesn't believe that Northern Mississippi's relative isolation with respect to the rest of the state mattered a tremendous amount in the formation of a distinct Hill Country sound. He asserts that the Hill Country sound comes from the people who play it, and not from the location. Everybody who picks up a guitar has a different soul and feeling and nobody plays the same. Therefore, he believes that it is "what you got inside," and not where an artist is living and playing that matters when it comes to creating a distinct sound.

[0:04:57] Garry says that the Hill Country blues took so long to catch on because it was "still a struggle in Mississippi," and that it takes a long time to get recognized when you're in Mississippi. He's glad that they got recognized when they did, yet, he laments that it is a struggle even today and the music is still not "all the way out there [in public awareness]." He believes that it might have taken a while to catch on, because there has only recently been substantial interest in the Hill Country blues.

[0:06:01] Garry feels that artists should practice and try to get better and then more young people and African Americans will listen to blues music. Yet, he says that you have to hope people listen, because can't "make" anyone listen to blues regardless of how well you play. "They gotta want to come for you to get them out there." He says that an artist's job is to do the show so the audience will come back. Along those lines, he says that you can't give a "speech" to an audience, you need to do "advertising" and talk to people. This is the way that he feels artists can attract a more black audience. He says that eventually the music will "catch on" for blacks, but until then, artists need to stay "strong" and try to do better "until they come out." Once blacks do come, blues artists need to "keep them there coming back" and the new audience members will tell their friends.

[0:07:10] Garry asserts that blues artists don't need to make a conscious effort to add hip-hop and funk elements to the music (in the hopes of attracting a younger audience), because the newer

generation of blues artists is already adding these elements out of love for these different kinds of music. Garry says that while he plays Hill Country blues, he adds hip-hop and funk elements to his music. He feels that this will inspire future generations to do the same and take older music like that of Muddy Waters, R.L. Burnside, or Junior Kimbrough and “add a little twist to it.” He says that this will not change the character of the music and will attract a wider audience to blues music.

[0:07:49] Garry interrupts a question about the important Hill Country blues families to include the “Dickinsons” alongside the Kimbroughs, Burnside, and Turners.

[0:08:25] Garry talks about how he was influenced by his father, R.L. Burnside, but also by other musicians who would come over to his family’s house. He discusses how Jim Dickinson and Otha Turner were family friends. Thus, Mr. Dickinson and Mr. Turner’s children and grandchildren would often come to the Burnside house. He also says that Kenny Brown would often come over. Garry says that the Burnside “owe... a lot” to these other North Mississippi families and individuals, because they have helped influence each other and have kept the blues “alive.” He says that the Hill Country blues is all “we do” and “all we know [here he includes the Kimbroughs].” He feels that all these individuals and families have “come together.”

[0:10:00] Garry says that the race of the audience does not change the way he plays (Dexter agrees with this saying that it doesn’t matter if the person is “black, white, green, purple”). Garry asserts that it doesn’t matter whether he is playing for “one person or one thousand people, I’m gonna play the same way--from my heart.” He hopes that blacks who come and see him will tell other blacks how good the music is, so more blacks will come to his shows.

[0:11:03] Garry believes that his father stayed in Mississippi, even after he got famous, because he had a family to raise and take care of. He says that R.L. was, “thinking of us...instead of himself.” Garry rhetorically asks, “why should he move because he has money?” Garry says that R.L. stayed in order to show his family that “just because you got money, doesn’t mean you gotta spend it [to leave], because you raised like this [i.e., they were raised properly].” Thus, Garry feels that R.L. didn’t let “money change you.” Garry says that R.L. always came “back home [Dexter agrees].” Garry asserts that by playing in North Mississippi juke joints, Junior Kimbrough also stayed home and “let people come to him.” Thus, Garry feels that R.L. and Junior had the same mentality in caring more about “their families than themselves.”

[0:12:00] Interview ends.