

Local stars give festival blues boost



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Like a young woman knocking on a two-timing door, the diverse shades of American blues broke through suspect skies of the first two days of the 28th Chicago Blues Festival.

With budgets and sponsorships down, the city had to rely on local bookings with a save from Mississippi. The Magnolia state sponsored the Juke Joint Stage at the south end of Grant Park along with a tourism booth that was handing out goodie bags with harmonicas and Mississippi Blues Trail maps. By Saturday evening the discerning blues fan saw Chicago drummer Sam Lay (Paul Butterfield, Howlin' Wolf, Bob Dylan) bring his double shuffle to life in spirit and song. Jackson, Miss., guitarist Dexter Allen was Saturday's ringer, blending a plugged-in version of Bill Withers' "Use Me" with more traditional fare like "Hooked," an uptempo spin off of Bobby Rush's "Night Fishing." Allen was Rush's lead guitarist.

Despite the misty weather, attendance was much better on Saturday than Friday night when the midway was surprisingly desolate and pockets of empty seats filled the Petrillo Music Shell during the headline tribute to Robert Johnson.

But Saturday's early bird got the musical worm.

Songwriter Bob Jones is one of the city's lost treasures. An unoffi-

cal tribute to his legacy opened the fest at 11 a.m. Saturday. The ribald revue was a wake-up call worthy of last call at the old Burning Spear. Ronnie Hicks and the Masheen Company were the fine house band, and a world of colorful artists spun on and off the stage.

Miss Brown Sugar was dressed in a bright red gown while dealing Ruth Brown's "Mama He Treats Your Daughter Mean." She was followed by Jessi Terrell (no relation to singing boxer Ernie) who covered the Jones hit "Don't Get Off on Me," perfect for the Beach Music dance floor in the Carolinas. Finally, it was Chicago soul legend Cicero Blake who perfectly phrased his saucy hit "Dip Your Dipper."

Jones has written more than 500 songs, most of them Southern Soul hits for the ailing Artie "Blues Boy" White, Tyrone Davis and the late James Carr (Jones booked him into his last Chicago gig at Rosa's Lounge). Jones, 78, is back from a serious bout with diabetes and he made a rare appearance as a performer. Wearing a canary yellow pants suit he sat on a stool and sang his ballad "Old Fashioned Lady." It was so early in the day, the crowd was filled with older dudes and fancy ladies instead of young people. Blake amplified the intoxicating mood by dedicating "Hey Mr. Bartender" to "the bartenders and the whiskey drinkers" — at 11:35 a.m.

The Masheen Company is steered by powerful saxophonist Ayako Minami who supplied the necessary lilt to Jones' danceable material. She is one of the city's up and coming players. I saw her a few weeks ago as a member of the band that put the groove behind calypso legend Mighty Sparrow at the Old



Town School of Folk Music. Jones is so obscure the festival program wrote that he was the Hawaii-born Bob Jones who was lead guitarist for the '60s pop group We Five. Chicago's Bob Jones is worthy of a local tribute album (Bloodshot; Numero



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