



John Junia Jones

JUN 21, 1941 - SEP 15, 2015



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John Junia Jones Jr., 75, of Decatur passed away on Tuesday, September 15, 1915 in Decatur. There will be a memorial service in Chicago at a later date. Moran & Goebel Funeral Home is in charge of local arrangements.



Tribute Wall

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Al Hall posted:

Used to play music with Johnny at the Attic in Detroit where he had an apartment upstairs. He was the best of all of us. The best voice, harp playing and a smooth guitar. RIP, Yard Dog.

January 29 at 12:52 PM



TD

Tom Duncanson posted:

I wonder if anyone knew the quiet man in glasses with the gentle voice, buying groceries in Kroger, was one of the very few people in Decatur, Illinois to merit his own wikipedia page? I suppose, almost never, and that is the way Johnny wanted it. I met Johnny "Yard Dog" Jones in 2001 or early 2002 through blues music. That isn't much compared to knowing a man as family for a lifetime, but not nothing; and Yard Dog needs to be remembered a little bit as a musician and friend of music. Johnny Jones was an exceptional harmonica and guitar player, and an excellent songwriter. He told me Little Walter had given him his first harmonica in an East Saint Louis juke, Johnny's mother had forbidden him to go near. One of his aunts dated Albert King. For most people who talk about the blues today, those last two sentences are almost impossible to digest—what a world East Saint Louis must have been, and now that world is long gone. Johnny's first organized music was in the family gospel group. He played in several other gospel bands in Chicago, and eventually made his way to the blues. His blues music really took off when he moved to Detroit. Johnny made a living as a welder, but he couldn't be held back in music, sharing the stage with the most talented Detroit players of the late-70s and 80s—Bobo Jenkins, the Butler Twins, and others. I asked him how he knew he had made it in the blues, and he said it was at a big show at an ice rink near Detroit—he had played great—and the women in the audience were trying to pull him down off the stage into the crowd. The headliner that night was none other than Muddy Waters, and backstage Muddy joked, "You better watch out, Bobo, Johnny's gonna get all the shows around here." If Muddy Waters said it was real, it was real. In 1996 Earwig Music released "Gonna Worry". The album was named the Living Blues magazine critics' Contemporary Blues Album of the Year in 1997, and was the basis for Johnny winning the W.C. Handy Award in 1998 as the Best New Artist in the blues. He was fifty-five. For a few years Johnny played fulltime, touring in North America and Europe. His harmonic play was melodic, beautiful, always under control. His guitar work went back to an earlier period in gospel music that had been overlooked by the many guitar players who were copying each other—it was something genuinely unique in the blues in the 1990s and still today. Some of his songs, like "Don't Leave Me Broken Hearted," will be played for many years to come. For Johnny Jones, keeping a band together and touring was tough; a perfectionist, the road was not perfect, and made him anxious. He retired to Decatur to be near family, played in church some, and flirted with coming back to the blues. In the early years of the 2000s Yard Dog helped the then very young band I manage, Kilborn Alley, more than could ever be said. Among other things, he expected excellent play from them and wouldn't tolerate that old "lumpy lump" music. I had quite a few conversations with Johnny, I wish more. He was really funny, in a knowing and critical way. He talked about his family a lot, with great love. He drew me out on my family. We had some shared worries. And there were some things we didn't have in common, like cleaning chitlins for Thanksgiving. But what are friends for, if not to make our world a little bigger, with a little more harmony? Tom Duncanson

September 21 at 4:22 AM



Memories only last if you share them

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