

## **BLUES POWER: AT THE SALOON**

(Liner notes by Applejack Walroth)

Just like the blues itself, the Blues Power band has been around for a long time, in one form or another. Singer / harmonica player **Applejack Walroth** and guitarist **Ron Butkovich** have known each other since about 1965. Our third founding member was the late great world-class saxophonist, flautist, and arranger **Hart McNee**. We three spent our formative years in Chicago, and were very fortunate to come of age during a very exciting era in Chicago Blues history, when so many legendary and near legendary blues stars called Chicago home, and the blues permeated the air waves, records, and clubs. We loved being able to plunge deeply into the amazing blues world existing there at our doorstep - what a rich and irreplaceable firsthand experience it provided us!

(pictures below are from the Chicago era)



Little Nick Trio, Applejack on bass (behind dancing man) on Maxwell Street, circa '64-65. (Photo credit: James Newberry, Chicago History Museum)



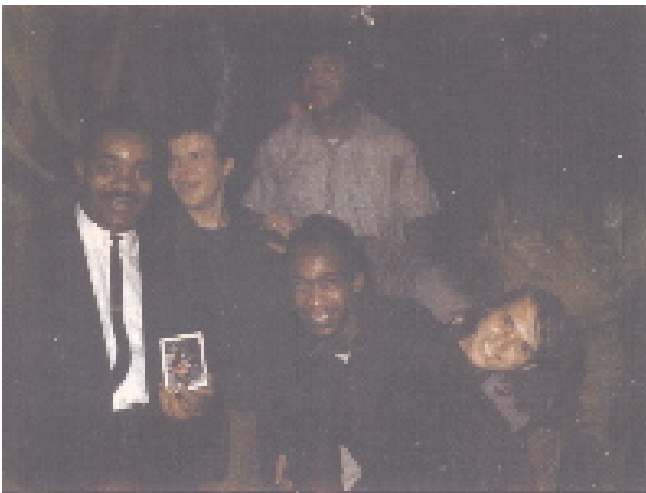
Applejack Blues Band, flyer for Poor Richard's gig, July '67 (created by Don Wilson & Pete Amft)



Applejack Blues Band  
rehearsing in basement of Jazz Record Mart  
circa 1966 (photo courtesy of Bob Koester)



gig at Theresa's Tavern, on the south side.  
circa 1966 (by unknown club photographer)



Sam Lay band, including Applejack (at Mother  
Blues club, north side) – August, 1967

Members of the **Applejack Blues Band** Members varied, but usually included Ray Parrish on 2<sup>nd</sup> guitar, Buddy Wilson on bass, Ira Kamin on keyboard, and sometimes the legendary Phillip Wilson (not related to Buddy) on drums.

One by one, Ron, Hart, and I migrated to California in the later sixties, and of course we brought our music with us; we were all in and out of various bands, always staying in touch. Eventually, we formed the Wild Stolichnayas as the backup band for Michael Bloomfield in 1979. After Michael passed away in 1981, we began playing at **The Saloon** in North Beach, San Francisco, and renamed ourselves Chicago Blues Power, although that name eventually evolved by popular demand to the more ‘universal’ moniker Blues Power. We’ve always utilized saxophones as part of our sound, having enjoyed hearing that format live from bands like those of Otis Rush and Buddy Guy in Chicago, as well as the many fine soul bands of the sixties and seventies. I believe we pioneered something special in our signature sound of harmonica lines integrated with the saxophones, which stands as one of our trademarks. In playing any particular song, we generally have some guiding riffs that we use, but may also improvise lines ‘on the spot’ as the inspiration comes to us. I am a strong believer in improvisation. We don’t use a keyboard since the spectrum is already filled up nicely – anything more seems to clutter up the sound.

People always ask me who my favorite harmonica players are. All of the Chicago harmonica players (and their country predecessors) are my favorites: Snooky Pryor, Grace Brim, Little Walter, Big Walter, both Sonny Boys, Jimmy Reed, Howling Wolf (yes), John Wrencher, Dusty Brown, James Dalton, Jazz Gillum, Billy Boy Arnold, James Cotton, and Junior Wells to name a few. In regards to the blues torch, Junior once told me “Somebody has got to carry it on!” so we are doing our best to honor that!

My favorite singers are the originators of their own sound and style, folks like Lightning Hopkins, Sleepy John Estes, St. Louis Jimmy Oden, and Roosevelt Sykes for example. That’s why I like to write original material myself. But even when I am ‘covering’ someone else’s song I may tend to ‘freestyle’ some of the lyrics. Since I love to improvise, you may never hear me sing any song the same way twice.

Generally, the best place to hear Blues Power is **The Saloon** in San Francisco's North Beach, where we play most Sundays of the year, from 4 to 8 PM. **The Saloon**, now legendary, is San Francisco's oldest bar, and has been around since 1861!

Besides myself, our current personnel are:

**Johnny Ace** (bass) is a San Francisco – Bay Area legend who really needs no introduction. Johnny well understands the art of playing ‘in the pocket’ and with that all-important blues’ feel’ without which it ain’t the blues. Johnny hails from New York City, where we met in 1969 at the Café Au Go. We’ve been friends ever since.

**Rick Sankey** (drums) understands the blues feeling too. Of course he does – he’s from Chicago! Rick provides the perfect blend of technical versatility and unshakable delivery.

**Ron Butkovich** (guitar) has developed a gutsy, uniquely personal, yet finely honed style that is all his own. When his solos catch fire, watch out! As you may have detected, Ron and I have known each other for the longest of anyone in the band.

The current version of the **North Beach Horns** (our sax section) appearing on this recording are **Terry Forgette**, baritone sax, **Michael Peloquin**, tenor and alto saxes, and **Doug Rowan**, baritone, tenor, and soprano saxes (special thanks to Doug for writing out many of the horn arrangements heard here). Terry hails from Chicago too (where else!), and, as of this writing, Michael has returned to the Bay Area after a recent Chicago stint.

Guest artist **Lonnie Walter**, a Blues Power alumnus, plays the congas on the song “Woman, Woman”.

## Shout Outs:

First of all, a world of thanks to our significant others for believing in us. Many thanks to all of the loyal fans who have supported us over the years! Very special thanks to Myron Mu, the proprietor of The Saloon, for giving us the musicians' dream come true: a long term steady gig. Without Myron, there would be no Blues Power CD – besides providing the venue itself and the recording equipment, he was also the recording engineer! The entirety of this CD was recorded at The Saloon. (Some of the songs were captured during performance of a live gig, while the remainder were done in closed session). Additional production support was provided by yours truly.

We respectfully dedicate this recording to our former band mates and members, may they rest in peace:

Michael Bloomfield - guitar

John Chambers – drums

Hart McNee – baritone sax

Jim Overton - drums

Gino Skaggs – bass

And of course we thank all the musicians still living who are former members of Blues Power, and all of our past, present, and future music friends worldwide.



**Blues Power** at the time of recording: Back row (standing) left to right: Johnny Ace, Doug Rowan, Terry Forgette, and Applejack Walroth. Front row (seated) left to right: Michael Peloquin, Ron Butkovich, and Rick Sankey (photo by Scott Palmer).

For additional related information, please visit [jaxpage.com](http://jaxpage.com) (the website of Applejack Walroth)