

## **"Everyone's a winner at the IBC" - Michael "Hawkeye" Herman**

Each year, the International Blues Competition brings the expanding world of blues, from traditional to contemporary, as well as the future of the blues, to Memphis. IBC entrants are encouraged to play their own kind of blues in their own kind of way, to share good times together, and help celebrate the music. New blues directions and new horizons are encouraged, appreciated, and abound.

I've enjoyed being an IBC judge every year since 1998. I've seen the IBC grow from a one-day event with limited regional scope, to an event that lasts almost a week and brings together blues fans and musicians from all over the globe to share and celebrate the music we love.

Over these years, there are many happy blues musical stories that I've seen unfold at the IBC, from superb performances in the clubs to excellent after hours jams, informative seminars and workshops, to an ever-increasing inclusion of activities and opportunities for school-aged children, to socially picking up the thread of friendship with longtime fellow 'blues warriors,' and the meeting and making of new friends from around the world.

An example of the 'power' of the blues community that the IBC brings together, as a blues musician/blues educator, I've been fortunate to have frequently toured in Europe over the past ten years. When asked how my opportunities to tour in Europe came about, my answer is truthful and direct, "A cup of coffee at the IBC."

A number of years ago at the "Keeping the Blues Alive" (KBA) Awards luncheon, an annual aspect of the IBC gathering, I took an open seat at a table, asked the fellow next to me if he would like a cup of coffee since I was getting one for myself, and he said yes. We started to chat and got to know each other. He was from Europe representing a festival he founded and was looking to expand his event by providing his blues festival, and his community, with blues education and Blues in the Schools programs.

I had been presenting Blues in the Schools programs since 1978, and was the recipient of the Blues Foundation's KBA Award for lifetime achievement in blues education in 1998, and when I introduced myself to him he said, "YOU are the exact person I have been looking for!"

Within the year I was performing and teaching at festivals, concerts, and in schools in Europe, and being introduced to new audiences and new blues friends overseas. I have returned to Europe many times since, and this chance meeting with a fellow I happened to sit next to has, over the years, resulted in a longtime and cherished friendship. All of this good fortune because of a "cup of coffee" at the IBC.

As another dear friend and mentor, the late great Oakland blues musician, "Cool Papa" Sadler, would frequently say, "The blues don't know no color." No matter where you go in this world you'll find the blues. People everywhere have got the blues. And the IBC brings this global blues community together annually to share, honor, and celebrate the music, its history, and musicians young and old, of the past, present, and future.

I congratulate the Blues Foundation on the amazing growth and success of the International Blues Competition, and the wide spectrum of 'blues opportunities' that the event provides and nurtures.

That's why I so frequently say, "Everyone's a winner at the IBC."

- Michael "Hawkeye" Herman