

# WEEKEND

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## Chicago's go-to Guy

BY JEFF JOHNSON

**B**uddy Guy professes to feel honored at being the first recipient of the Great Performer of Illinois Award. And when the Chicago blues kingpin is told what it entails, he's more thrilled.

"I'm beginning to learn more about it, now that you're telling me about it," he said by phone last week during a rare off day in Montreux, Switzerland. "I didn't really know what it was... that's gotta be a great honor."

For Guy's further edification, Lois Weisberg, the city's Cultural Affairs commissioner, explains, "The staff at the Cultural Center made the selection. I think we chose Buddy Guy because he's a person who's known not only throughout the state but throughout the world. We'll be hard-pressed to keep up the quality of nominees after Buddy."

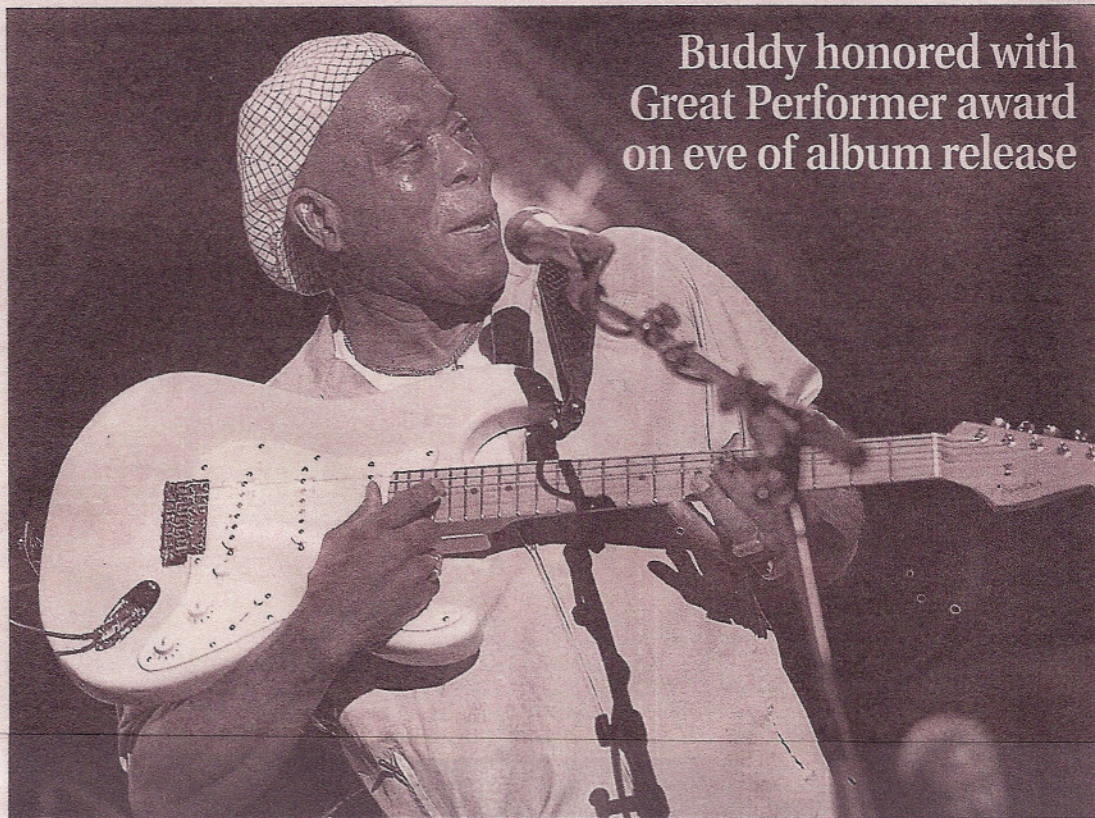
She also praised Guy for his ownership of Legends, his South Loop nightclub; his ability to attract tourists to Chicago, and his cheerful participation in projects like a city-sponsored virtual Chicago blues tour.

Guy, in recognizing the great blues artists who came before him, "Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Magic Sam, Sonny Boy Williamson — the guys who taught me," points out, "There are a lot of other great Illinois musicians, not just bluesmen. This award is for every one of them."

It's easy being humble if you're a guy from Lettsworth, La., who grew up working in the cotton fields from sunup to sundown. Not even five Grammys, a Rock and Roll Hall of Fame membership and a record 23 Blues Awards have swelled his head.

On this day, though, his foot is swollen from gout, and he's feeling his age (he'll be 72 on July 30). It's more than a minor inconvenience with an exhausting tour schedule and a new album to promote. When the grind gets him down, he reminds himself that he's got it good.

"I came up on a farm," he relates. "We didn't have machines, just a mule and a horse. I see guys running on treadmills nowadays, but we didn't need no treadmill. We followed that mule and horse all day for our exercise. My dad died at 56. "I used to work days. I'd look at



Buddy honored with Great Performer award on eve of album release

Buddy Guy, shown onstage earlier this month at the Montreux Jazz Festival, will play at Ravinia in August after a pair of Chicago stops this weekend where he will appear but not perform. | GETTY IMAGES

the clock like it was standing still. Now I'm enjoying every minute of what I'm doing."

He'll receive his Illinois award during a tribute concert beginning at 8 p.m. Sunday in Millennium Park. Admission is free, on a first-come, first-served basis. And while guitarist Jimmie Vaughan and vocalist Lou Ann Barton will be among the artists performing in his honor, don't expect Guy to be plugging in his Fender Stratocaster. He has an Aug. 28 date at Ravinia with Jonny Lang, and he won't bite the hand that feeds him.

"If I play over there I can't sell my tickets to Ravinia, and I've been selling out there for the last three or four years," he explains. "I try to

treat everybody right, and I hope everybody will treat me the same way. If I had a gig paying me a million dollars, I wouldn't turn my back on you if I had a signed contract already."

Fans who want to get an early earful of "Skin Deep," which comes out Tuesday on Jive-Silvertone, may do so at a release party from 3 p.m. to 2 a.m. Sunday at Legends, 754 S. Wabash. Harpist Matthew Skoller is headlining at 9:30 p.m., with a \$20 cover. Guy will drop in for the celebration.

The title track, Guy says, is based on a boyhood concept about how people of all races are the same inside. It seems the owner of the plantation on which Guy grew

up had a son, Craig, about his age.

"When he turned 3 years old, he would get the little toys my parents couldn't afford," Guy recalls. "He played on little wagons and tricycles. At night, they'd let us stay up late, and we'd shine a flashlight through our hands and they'd look like they were the same color, so we'd say we both had black blood and white blood. At 11, we couldn't play together no more."

They reunited as adults, and Guy notes that his old pal has no qualms about drinking from his cognac glass, something once unheard of in the South.

Guy's "Skin Deep" guest stars include Eric Clapton, Robert Randolph, Susan Tedeschi and Derek

Trucks. They're among the artists who answer the musical question posed by the album, "Who's Gonna Fill Those Shoes?" And let's not forget 9-year-old Quinn Sullivan, shown jamming with Guy at [www.myspace.com/quinnsullivan8](http://www.myspace.com/quinnsullivan8).

"They love the blues," says Illinois' musical statesman.

### GREAT PERFORMERS WEEKEND

Sunday's concert tops off a three-day Great Performers of Illinois festival beginning at 5 this evening with a concert by Aurora's Skandalo Musical, a duranguense group. Millennium Park will be the site of free entertainment throughout the weekend.

[jjohnson@suntimes.com](mailto:jjohnson@suntimes.com)