



SANJOY Narayan

download central

Women blues musicians have always fascinated me. Here are three contemporary favourites

MANY BLUES musicians of the early twentieth century USA battled poverty and extremely hard times through much of their careers. A lucky few lived to savour the sweet taste of success but many died in penury. Robert Johnson, one of the greatest ever bluesmen, born in 1911, toiled in logging and turpentine camps in Mississippi through much of his youth and died prematurely at 27, allegedly killed by a jealous husband. Blind Lemon Jefferson, another of the early greats who lived from 1897 to 1929, in his early career played for change in a tin cup that he carried around, using what he collected to look after his family.

Even those, like Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf, who became stars in their lifetime saw stardom come pretty late into their careers, spending their early years struggling to make ends meet.

That was then. Even now, there are contemporary blues musicians who have had to fight the odds before emerging as performers and recording artists of repute. And there are remarkable stories of blues people out there that you may not have even heard of.

One such is Candye Kane. I heard Kane for the first time a couple of years back on an excellent blues podcast called *The Roadhouse* that is released on the web every Saturday and was electrified by her powerful voice and rambunctious lyrics. Later, I got the back story. Born into a dysfunctional family – her mother taught her to shoplift when she was a child – she began making a living as a soft-porn star and stripper, gracing the covers of sleaze magazines such as, ahem, *Juggs*. Brought up in East Los Angeles, Kane also ran with some of the notorious gangs in that area before venturing into music, starting with anarchic punk rock bands and then meandering into the blues.

That's her real forte. Impressed by one of her songs on the podcast, I went and bought a digital version of her 2005 album, *White Trash Girl*, which blew me away. Earlier this year, Kane, now 43, was diagnosed with cancer but a few weeks ago I was relieved to read that she had recovered and that she was back touring.

If Candye Kane is outspoken (she openly flaunts her bisexuality) and her songs like *Estrogen Bomb* or *Big Fat Mamas Are Back in Style* are quite in your face, Ana Popovic is quite the opposite. Born in Belgrade in Serbia, Popovic is just 32 but has already made a huge name for herself in the world of blues. Not an easy task for a Serb whose initiation into the blues was through her father's enormous collection of records.

Popovic began her first band when still a teenager and soon began touring outside of Serbia. I heard her first when I downloaded a track on the Internet called *Jaco*. It was a tribute to the late great American bassist, Jaco Pastorius (remember him from *Weather Report*?) whose life was ravaged by drugs and dementia. Since then I've bought a couple of Popovic's albums, including 2007's *Still Making History*, which showcases her versatility. Unlike rock musicians who tend to come



When Women Sing The Blues



WORKING GIRLS

Candye Kane (left), Ana Popovic (above) and Sue Foley



with an expiry date – although old codgers like the *Rolling Stones* and quite a few others are still trying hard to extend their tenure to a point where they seem like laughable caricatures of their youth – blues musicians tend to mature with age. And I think Popovic has a long and rich career ahead of her.

Musicians like Popovic are examples of how blues as a genre is hugely popular outside of the US, the country of its origin. Like Popovic, another blueswoman, Sue Foley isn't American, although she's from nearby. A Canadian guitarist and singer, Foley, 40, is from Ottawa where she began her career at 16. Writing and playing since then, Foley sent a demo tape of hers to Clifford Antone, a Texan blues record label owner and, more important, a mentor of another late great blues guitarist, Stevie Ray Vaughan. Her career took off soon after and today Foley is based in Austin, Texas. I'd recommend buying her 2006 album, *New Used Car* as well as checking out her latest, *Time Bomb*, on which two other women blues players, Deborah Coleman and Roxanne Potvin, collaborate.

Women blues musicians have always fascinated me. From the really early greats like Bessie Smith and Etta James to today's contemporary singers. In fact, for the past couple of years I have been searching for a 46-song compilation titled *Men Are Like Streetcars: Women Blues Singers, 1928-1969*. Alas, it is out of print and even my desperate forays on the web have not yielded any digital version of it. Meanwhile, if you want to sample the music by the blueswomen mentioned here, *Download Central's* web version has them all. As usual.

(To stream or download the music mentioned in this column, go to www.hindustantimes.com. And send feedback to downloadctrl@gmail.com)

Reuters



NEVER SAY DIE

Rolling Stones' frontman Mick Jagger