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Buddy Guy fan gets own shot at glory



Bradley Cook took this photo of Buddy Guy, which is on the cover of Guy's latest CD, "Born to Play Guitar," being released July 31.

BY JOANNA BARTLETT

For The Register-Guard

JULY 31, 2015

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When Bradley Cook went to see Buddy Guy — a musician he'd never heard of in the early '90s — he didn't know it would change his life.

"I had no idea he was the influence behind Jimi Hendrix, Stevie Ray Vaughn, Eric Clapton and all these other great guitar players," Cook says. "I fell in love with the music of Buddy Guy from that moment on and started seeing shows any time he came to Oregon."

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Ten years later, while Cook was volunteering as a DJ on KRVM 91.9 FM playing old school blues, he received a backstage meet-and-greet pass for a Buddy Guy and B.B. King show. When Cook said he longed to see Guy more often in Oregon, Guy told him to come out to his club, Legends, in Chicago where he plays every weekend in January. Cook said he'd be there.

"He thought I was kidding," Cook says.

He wasn't kidding.

The following January, Cook showed up at the Chicago club. "Buddy was sitting at the bar with a couple of friends," Cook says. Guy asked how Cook knew him, "so I explained the story. And that's when I started taking pictures of Buddy Guy."

Cook didn't know much about photography. But he had good seats. He showed up at the club at 6 a.m. to get in line for the evening's show and made friends with the person ahead of him who not only shared his front row center table but introduced Cook to the band and to Guy.

One of the shots from that night turned out well enough that when Guy came to Oregon a few months later, Cook printed it and gave it to him to keep.

The two repeated this process, with Cook upgrading to better cameras, taking more pictures and giving them to Guy.

"About three years ago, I decided to really step up my game and bought a Nikon D7000 and went to Legends with that and did a shoot," Cook says.

When Cook got back to town, he enrolled in an introduction to photography course at Lane Community College.

"He wanted to learn how to get control over his camera," says David Stone, photography instructor at LCC. "It's tricky situations he's working under. He's got to use the stage lights or the flash and figure out how to be in the right place to get the right composition. I think he's done a pretty good job."

After taking the class, "I had a better understanding of what I was doing," Cook says. "Since then I've been learning more and more."

It's paid off. When Cook showed Guy some recent photos this spring, Guy set some aside and said he wanted to use them on his new album, Cook says.

"Then he started giving me advice on how he wants to be photographed in the future."

Cook thought perhaps Guy was just being a nice guy. But a couple of months ago, he got the call they'd chosen one of his photos for the album. When he saw the album cover — a photo of Guy playing guitar with his teeth — "I about cried right there on the spot," Cook says. "Tears welled up in my eyes. It's such a dream come true."

It's not just having his work featured on the album of a blues legend, Cook says. "It's the whole history of the blues. It's a fading genre. When it comes to Buddy Guy, he's the last man standing now. He's the only one that can honestly carry the tradition on."

Guy's album, "Born to Play Guitar," releases today, the day after his 79th birthday and Cook's 14th anniversary at KRVM.

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Bob Calder • 11 days ago

Sounds like a job well done. Photography is a compilation of talent and timing. Knowing what you are looking for and making the effort to be in the right place at the right time. Everybody thinks they can buy a camera and call themselves a photographer. You can certainly take pictures, but unless you make this same type of commitment to investing the time and treasure in both gear, technique and understanding composition, you are just another guy with a camera. Very impressed by the way he went out to Chicago to take "The Shot". Well done.

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