

Chicago Blues Guide

YOUR COMPLETE GUIDE TO THE CHICAGO BLUES SCENE

Mary Lane Interview

Mary Lane has been singing the blues for over 60 years with little recognition. Now at age 83, it's her turn to be a star.

By Eric Schelkopf



Mary Lane. Photo: Collin Susich

Chicago blues veteran [Mary Lane](#) is finally getting the attention that she deserves. The 83-year-old, one of the last blues musicians to make the Great Migration from the rural South, is squarely in the spotlight these days. She is the subject of a new documentary on her life, *I Can Only Be Mary Lane*, and on **March 8**, *Travelin' Woman*— her first album in 20 years — will be released on the newly launched, Women of the Blues record label, to coincide with International Women's Day. *Travelin' Woman* was produced by Grammy-winner Jim Tullio and features appearances by all-star musicians like Billy Branch, Corky Siegel, the late Howlin' Wolf sideman Eddie Shaw, guitarist Dave Specter and saxophone legend Gene "Daddy G" Barge.

There will be a screening of *I Can Only Be Mary Lane* at 8 p.m. **Feb. 21, 2019** at [FitzGerald's](#), 6615 Roosevelt Road, Berwyn, followed by a performance by Lane and the No Static Blues Band. Tickets are \$10 in advance and \$15 at the door, available at [ticketweb.com](#). Lane also will perform at 9:30 p.m. **March 9** at [Buddy Guy's Legends](#), 700 S. Wabash Ave., Chicago, as part of a CD release party for *Travelin' Woman*. Andre Taylor will open. Tickets are \$20, available at [buddyguy.com](#). I had the chance to talk to Lane about the documentary and the new CD.

Mary Lane sings at Buddy Guy's Legends

Q – The documentary on your life, *I Can Only Be Mary Lane*, actually premiered on your 83rd birthday last November at Buddy Guy's Legends. Was that pretty special to you? It was. Every birthday is special to me. I'm 83 years old. **Q – I know you haven't worked with him, but Buddy Guy is a friend of yours, right?** He used to be around with us when I would perform at Theresa's Lounge with Junior Wells. I've known Buddy for a long time. **Q – So the fact that a filmmaker wanted to make a documentary about you, was that humbling, that someone wanted to put you in the spotlight like that?** It was great. Jesseca Ynez Simmons was making a movie about the city's West Side blues circuit and everything. She got in contact with me.

I think she did a great job on the film. She got a lot of the people I used to work with – like Junior Wells and Howlin' Wolf – she got all that on the video. **Q – What would you like for people to come away with from the documentary?** I would like for people to know that I've been out here trying to do my best. The blues is the only thing I know.

Q – And you have a new CD, *Travelin' Woman*, that will come out on March 8 on the newly launched Women of the Blues record label. This is only your second album. Your debut album, *Appointment With The Blues*, was released in 1997 when you were 62 years old. And now you're 83. Is this album long overdue, you think? I know it is, but it's a race out here. People that could help you don't help you because they don't believe in you.

But it doesn't bother me. I go out here and I sing and I do my job. And some people appreciate it and some may not. I just keep on going until I can't. **Q – The CD is called *Travelin' Woman*. Is that an appropriate title you think for the CD?** Well, I did do a lot of traveling, but now I really don't like to travel. I went to Paris with Jimmy Johnson for 29 days. Then I went to Canada with Mississippi Heat for 13 days.

Mary Lane was inducted into the Chicago Blues Hall of Fame in 2017

Q – Speaking of traveling, you are one of the last blues musicians to make the Great Migration from the rural South. What were those days like performing in Chicago? When Howlin' Wolf came up here to the city, I got back involved with him, because I was working with him down South. Then I worked with him for a while in the city. **Q – What was it like working with Howlin' Wolf and did he have any good advice for you?** He told me that it was going to be a struggle out here. He would say, "Whatever you do, Mary, don't let people take advantage of you, because they know you are just starting out and everything." **Q – As far as this CD, what**

were you looking to do? I'm looking for it to bring me some money, that's what I'm looking for it to do. It took me almost two years to get it together. Jim Tullio, he came up with the music, but I had to come up with all the lyrics to fit the music that he had. I like the CD.

I tried to come up with lyrics that were reaching out to people and lyrics that were saying something about things that happened in my life and things that I want to happen in my life. That was my goal and I did it. It's up to the people to buy it or like it. There's nothing else I can do about it. **Q – There are some people who are saying you should get a Grammy award for this CD.** I don't know about all that. I don't care if I get a Grammy. As long as it's out here and people are buying it and it can put a dollar in my pocket, I appreciate it. I want to get a little enjoyment out of what I did before I leave here.

To buy the CD, visit [cdbaby](#)

Interviewer Eric Schelkopf has covered the arts and entertainment scene in Chicago for over 35 years. Visit his informative blog at: <http://www.thetotalscene.blogspot.com/>