

This January, like Januaries past, Guy's guitar—voluminous, distorted—and his voice—disarmingly gentle—will envelope the club. As band leader, he'll direct his rhythm section and the audience while playing a custom-made Fender around the stage, at patrons' tables and booths, out on the ice-covered sidewalk and in the washrooms (either one). As a demonstration of physical improvisation, the moves are solidly in the moment yet infused with episodes from way back in the 73-year-old blues hero's personal history.

"We used to have the battle of the guitars on Sunday afternoons with the late great Magic Sam, Otis Rush, Matt Murphy," Guy said, as he sat warm and relaxed in his upstairs office at Legends. "The winner would win a bottle of whiskey, and at that time I didn't even drink. They would outplay me in all kinds of ways, but every time they got ready for Buddy Guy, I had to do something different to get some attention."

Two feet of snow on the ground and a 100-foot guitar cable in those pre-wireless years helped Guy beat his friendly rivals. He recalled telling someone to "plug this cord and amplifier in, and bring my guitar to the car in the snow." I came in the door playing solo and I had snow up to the top of my boots. Whoever had the whiskey said, "Give it to him."

Guy hardly raised his voice as he related this story, one of many that marked his path from sharecropping in Lettsworth, La., to international acclaim. That whiskey prize speaks loudly enough: recalling a long-ago community of musicians that he's determined to keep rebuilding; combining technology with showmanship and, perhaps most importantly, Guy's determination—which includes making the most from 24 inches of the cold white stuff.

Nowadays, Guy's tenacity and spirited originality have led to musical accolades along with more palpable bounties, slightly more than 50 years after he cut his first record ("Sit And Cry" on Artistic). His 1993 memoirs (written with Donald E. Wilcock), *Damn Right I've Got The Blues: Buddy Guy And The Blues Roots Of Rock-And-Roll*, narrates the challenges that shaped these scores. There was also his 2005 induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, as that institution cited his ties to Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf alongside his influence on Jimi Hendrix and Eric Clapton. Three years after that, Guy released what may be his most personal album, *Skin Deep* (Silvertone), which delves into his thoughts on race and not-so-secret affinity for a deep groove. In a couple months, he'll hit the recording studio again. This spring, he'll move his club in Chicago's South Loop a few blocks north to a building he purchased. The new Legends will be slightly bigger than its present location, enough to fulfill Guy's ongoing mission: keeping the meaning of "blues" expansive and continually showing new generations how much there is to learn throughout a lifetime.

Buddy Guy: on a blues mission



"You can watch someone and see how they work and run their business," singer Shemekia Copeland said eight days before marrying Guy's bassist, Orlando Wright. "In blues you have to be patient to wait for your time to come around. Buddy's done that—a lot of times people get frustrated and walk away, and that's what he told me not to do."

For Guy's new venture, that business plan includes jazz, which he'll feature in early evening sets on Sundays. It's a music that he's investigated for a long time—going back to his rendition of Bobby Timmons' standard "Moanin'" for Chess in the mid-'60s.

"In Europe, George Benson and I would go on the same stage," Guy said. "Count Basie, Lionel Hampton—we'd be on the same stage a lot of times. George would come by here and we'd jam. Jazz is being treated just like blues: We had a jazz radio station here and it went out. So I'm saying, 'Wait a minute, I got to throw something the other way if I can.'"

That Guy's musical vision remains far more comprehensive than rote 12- and 16-bar shuf-

files should be as recognized as his signature single-note feedback-driven guitar screams. Live and on disc, he'll cover Otis Redding and Marvin Gaye (including the latter's "Trouble Man" on *Feels Like Rain* in 1993). Over the years, Legends has hosted such singers as Johnny Adams and Syl Johnson, both of whom felt more than comfortable in r&b. At the same time, Guy is also aware that there has always been a number of self-identified purists who expect blues musicians to adhere to set boundaries. Soft-spoken, Guy clearly called out that contingent, in part, for being far removed from the culture that gave rise to the blues.

"Well, that came on us," Guy said about being pegged as a blues, or anything, artist. "[Before that] we didn't have anything written about us, we just had the word of mouth in this circle we had back here. Then the British got it, the whites started coming and the Rolling Stones and Eric Clapton had to tell white America who we were—that's when we started getting questions and answers. Then they started 'Chicago blues.' Then it got to the point it