

# Blues guitar's big Mack attack

Nigel Mack found blues instead of Beck

By CAM HAYDEN

One of the bright young lights on the Vancouver blues scene is working in town this weekend. Nigel Mack is at the Blues on Whyte Pub at the Commercial Hotel through Saturday night, and he plays the Sidetrack Sunday evening. This past week I got him to drop by the CKUA studios to co-host an hour of the *Friday Night Blues Party* and talk blues.

"It's always been part of my musical mosaic," he told me. "Growing up in Saskatoon at my house, we had lots of jazz—guys like Zoot Sims, Coleman Hawkins and Duke Ellington. Then, when I was about nine years old, my dad came home with a record called *Straight Up* by Downchild, and he told me to listen to that. So this foundation was laid. Then I had one of those experiences that make you wonder if there hasn't been some intervention from above. I went to a second-hand record store and bought a copy of Jeff Beck's *Wired*. When I got home and opened it up, a Bobby "Blue" Bland album came out, I put it on, and that was it."

Mack plays both guitar and harmonica and cites players such as Duane Allman, Ry Cooder and Elmore James as influences. A preponderance of slide players, I noted.

"I feel more comfortable on slide. There are a lot of great players like Albert King and B.B. King that I think are wonderful, but I feel more at home on the slide."

After putting in stints fronting a Southern-rock cover band, Rough Mix, and four years studying visual arts at the University of Saskatchewan, Mack moved to Vancouver in 1988.



Nigel Mack ► He who is forewarned is four-armed...

"In fact," he said, "the whole band just packed up and moved to Vancouver in '88. We hung together for a while, but all the guys have gone their own way now. By 1991 I had another band together and we made a cassette. My big break came when Professor Eddie Lusk heard the tape and, at the urging of a friend from Vancouver, he brought me out to Chicago to play during the Chicago Blues Fest of 1992. We played a club from 1 to 3 a.m., following Magic Slim. A tough act to follow, but we did OK, and that opened a lot of doors throughout the midwest and into the south for us. In fact I've dedicated the latest CD, *High Price to Play*, to the late Eddie Lusk."

After putting out that live cassette, Mack decided to try a CD. That CD is a bit of a surprise for a first effort by a

is that it includes all original songs, no covers and that Nigel not only wrote the songs, he sang them, played harp and guitar, produced the recording and is his own publicist and manager. The recording is a great listen, with slow blues, hot harmonica grooves, boogie tunes and insightful lyrics.

**IES**  
**EVUE**  
 k • Blues  
 • Until  
 Sidetrack  
 r. 15

What's it like being a one man band?

"A lot of times I felt kind of overwhelmed by the whole thing. Especially producing the CD, because you can't ever stop thinking about it. If you take your eyes off it for a minute, it'll get away from you. There's nobody else to go to, you can't lean on anybody, because everybody's leaning on you. I did get some help from a great guy by

10 • On! Brandon Entertainment April 1998

## Triple-blues threat

Nigel Mack and the Blues Attack will be making their third Brandon appearance in the last three years on Monday, March 30, when they play at SUDS on the campus of Brandon University.

Mack's slide guitar and smoking harp have earned him raves from his hometown of Vancouver right through Illinois and Missouri. The Minneapolis *Twin Cities Reader* calls Mack "a slide guitar wizard," while *Scope*, from Champaign, Illinois calls him "a triple blues threat."

Mack says his band does everything from Mississippi Delta to uptown funk. "Some people will limit themselves to one particular style," says Mack, who cut his teeth sitting in on sessions with Winnipeg's Big Dave McLean. "But I like to have a full menu to pick from, to satisfy my creative demands, and the demands of the audience."

And if you like the show, don't be afraid to pick up Mack's CD, *High Price to Play*. The disc features twelve original tunes by Mack, with plenty of his masterful slide guitar and harmonica playing, a hot rhythm section, cool horns, and some mean Hammond organ—everything the blues should be. Fans of the blues will not be disappointed. **on!**

photo: Victor Dezo

Barrett, who has worked at Muscle Shoals and Nashville. He is a man who can bring out the best in you."

With his head firmly screwed on, Mack is a player we'll be hearing a lot more from in the future. Make sure you check him out this weekend.

To hear the full interview with Nigel Mack, along with music from *High Price to Play*, tune into the *Friday Night Blues Party*, Friday the 13th.

Cam Hayden hosts *Alberta Morning Monday* through Friday from 6-9 a.m. and *The Friday Night Blues Party* from 9 p.m.-midnight on the CKUA Radio Network, 94.9 FM and 580 AM.