

## Living Blues — Living Blues #234

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Bobby Patterson is red hot again. His 2014 CD, *I.Got.More.Soul!* [Omnivore Recordings], had him performing at both Lincoln Center Out of Doors and at South by Southwest this year. Patterson was recently interviewed on NPR, is gigging regularly in the United States and abroad and is getting radio play along with much younger neo-soul artists. A remarkably accomplished blues, soul, R&B and gospel artist, Patterson is thrilled to be back on stage and introducing his music to new audiences.

Sitting down to talk in his hometown of Dallas, Patterson's stories careen and stack up rapidly. This small, wiry man with a big persona never loses the thread and, every once in a while, he raps a little. Laughter comes easily, even while talking about the many disappointments he has faced working in music for so many years.

Born March 13, 1944, Robert Carl Patterson is just beginning his seventh decade. He is an accomplished songwriter, singer, multi-instrumentalist, radio DJ and an A&R man who has shopped records for a long list of artists. Patterson also has produced big names like Fontella Bass, Little Johnny Taylor and Ted Taylor, and he eventually established a record company to get his own music out.

Along the way, Patterson has worked stages with music royalty and helped many blues, gospel, R&B and hip hop artists advance their careers. After a nearly 40-year hiatus as a performer, in the late-1990s Patterson got back to doing what he loves the most—recording and performing his own songs.

Patterson's more than two dozen 45 r. p.m.'s appeared on labels including Future, Jewel/Paula, Jet Star, Granite, All Platinum, Big Bidness, Outta Sight and his own label, Proud. Most of these recordings came in the 1960s before he moved into the production and promotion side of music. He made one LP for Jewel, *Just.a.Matter.of.Time* in 1971, and only returned to recording in the late 1990s. *I. Got.More.Soul!* Is his fourth CD. Patterson has seen many of his 45s re-released multiple times, and they frequently show up on compilations, which have never earned him any money. He says that, despite not being paid, they have kept his music alive in Europe where he has always had an audience.

The new CD shows off Patterson's seemingly endless energy and his expressive voice. It includes songs he originally wrote for Bobby Bland and Fontella Bass, and he says that he plans to record other songs he wrote for artists, including Albert King, when he gets back into the studio.

“There used to be a place called the Empire Room over in North Dallas. Back then, there was the Zanzibar, the Delmonico; and people like Joe Tex, Ike and Tina Turner, Ray Charles used to come by all the time and play there, and my dad used to go. So I went there in the late-1950s with my dad one time, and this guy pulls up in this white Cadillac, with a white suit, had a white guitar, white boots. He stepped out of that Cadillac, and I said, ‘Daddy, what does he do?’ He

said, 'That's T-Bone Walker.' I said, 'Well that's what I'm going to do right there.' [laughs]

I was born and raised in East Dallas. I'm Dallas' pride and joy, your baby boy, grew up on the corner of Spring and Troy. I didn't have any brothers or sisters. I'm one of a kind and shock the mind. [laughs]

There was a church around the corner from my house when I was growing up. They had a full band. The preacher played the trumpet, and they had bass guitars. It was a Holiness Church. They had guitar and drums and tambourines, and I'd stand outside the church and listen to them. That wasn't my church. But, Holiness churches are pretty entertaining. [laughs] People jumping up on chairs and stuff like that!

When my aunt died, she left me an upright piano and an old busted-up guitar with four strings on it. So I start trying to play the piano and I never could master it. I just wasn't interested in it. And, I started fooling around with this old busted-up guitar, and I learned how to play honkytonk on that.

My mom and dad wasn't musical. My mom wasn't musical at all. My dad used to take me to the cafes and stuff and sit there while I would play because I was too young to be in these places when I started playing. He loved the music.

I remember I did a TV show. It was something like American Bandstand. I think it was [called] Upbeat. It was out of Cleveland. They taped it, and I came back home and I told my mom and dad, 'I'm going to be on television.' I was 16, 17, 18 years old—I forget. I said, 'You all got to watch me on television.' So, when they played the thing back, we all got around the television and watched it. When it was over—my mom always wanted me to sing gospel music—I said, 'What do you all think?' My dad said, 'Why don't you go get a real job.' [laughs] He didn't think the music business was a real job. [laughs]

As I got older and started doing the record business and stuff, I bought him a truck and house and everything, and he still didn't think it was a real job. [laughs] He still asked me, 'When you going to get a real job?'

I remember when I was about 14 I got up and sang at this little club called the Gold Mine right up the street from my house. My daddy took me up there, and somebody walked up and stuck a dollar in my hand and that reaffirmed the Cadillac. I been doing it ever since. It's just a gift that you have. You develop stuff over the years.

In school I used to get in all the talent shows, and I would sing Chuck Berry and Little Richard. As a high school kid I had a band called Robert Patterson and the Royal Rockers. Every time I would sing, the girls that wouldn't talk to me started to talk to me. So that kind of interested me. And I just kept going.

[Most people] don't know I grew up on country music. All day on Saturdays, I used to sit and watch Buck Owens, Porter Wagoner and different country artists, one country artist after another from 11:00 in the morning to 12:00 at night. I love the writing. I love Joe Tex. Joe Tex was like

that. They say something. And in most of my songs, there's a little humor in there. Country music says something so I adapted that idea [to my music].

We lived in the city, [but it was really] in the country. We rented a house from Miss Jessie. We paid \$14 a week for rent, and my dad couldn't come up with that half the time. It was real hard. Our bathroom was on the back porch. It wasn't secured in. The cold would come in the wintertime, and it would get hot in the summertime. I call it hard times. [laughs] Try to take a bath out there when it was 30 degrees or something like that.

My dad did whatever he could [for work]. He was a freelance guy—just odd work. He poured concrete for a long time. And he hunted rabbits and squirrels and anything that moved. He had five greyhound dogs. He used to go out and kill the jackrabbits. And we had one nail where you stick that rabbit up there and gut it, and the blood would drip down. I was in England in 2000. They wanted \$35 for just a rabbit leg. And my daddy used to get them for nothing. [laughs]

I went to college for two years, and then I dropped out. [laughs] I was going to the University of Texas. At the time it was called Arlington State. I went to college to study music. I had friends who were excellent musicians. We used to have these sessions at Woodman Auditorium. I played drums. I really wanted to play [well]. I played drums for two years in college but couldn't read the notes. I had an instinct. I was already playing out in the clubs to make my money to go to college.

I was trying to learn all this stuff, and I was seeing that everybody that was making money in music didn't have no degrees. They didn't have no college education. This business is not based on how much you know. A lot of it has to do with being in the right place at the right time.

I heard James Brown go, 'Hey!' and he was making all the money. I thought, 'Oh, man, I'm going to college for four years and this guy is going, "Hey!" That's what I want to do.'

I used to play a lot of fraternity parties. I was doing mostly cover stuff when I first started. We was just imitating other people. We didn't have no record of our own.

When I first came out we were using the process thing [on our hair]. My drummer used to use lye and potatoes, [laughs] and all my hair came out. That kind of ceased to be my thing after that! But we went through the whole thing—Chuck Berry and Jackie Wilson had the conchs. We went through that whole phase. I used to have a show I did, an hour's worth of James Brown. I did an hour's worth of Beatles. We put on wigs. [laughs] We had to come up with ways to entertain people, so we had to come up with shows.

When I started making records for Jet Star in 1966, we didn't have a promotion department. We hired one guy that was an ex-DJ, and he was our promotion man and that was it. So that's why if you listen to my records and you read any of the press on me, they'll tell you my 45s was so good, but they never got to the status they should be. I always hit the charts, but I would go to maybe the 30s and fall back. We didn't have nobody to work the records.

The first record I ever cut, this guy, he said, 'I'm going to cut a record on you.' He saw me at the

Beachcomber. That first record I cut was I'm Walking the Floor Over You [Future Records, 1963]. It had Beautiful Brown Eyes on the back side of it. It was a country song. We went in the studio. It wasn't hard for me. That's what I wanted to do. It was just a little local record, Texas and Louisiana. [Patterson made one other 45 for Future—Dear Debbie b/w Tell Me How, 1958].

So I was going to Arlington State, and me and John Abner got to be friends. He said, 'I'm going to get my daddy to start a record company.' Boy did he start a record company. He started Abnak Records. We had the Five Americans, and I had my own label called Jet Star.

My first years with Jet Star Records, we were on a salary. Every dime that came in went to the company. Motown had that setup too.

Abnak Records and Jet Star, I was over there for about six years. And then I was over at Stan's [Lewis] Jewel Records in 1968 maybe for about three-and-a-half years. Then I went into record promotion.

On some of those records I cut back in the '70s, I'm playing everything on there except the horns. I'm playing the drums, bass, the guitar and the piano. There was no drum machines back in those days, so what I did, I'd sit down and play the song all the way through on the drums, and I come back and put the bass in there. Then I come back and put the guitar in there. Then I come back and put the piano on.

When I was with Jet Star, we used to do tours with the Five Americans and Jon and Robin [who also recorded on the parent label Abnak]. When the British invasion came, we played a lot of shows with them. We opened up for Herman's Hermits one time and Manfred Mann—I can't remember all of those groups. That was the first time I ever got hit up the side of the head by a teddy bear. Those teenyboppers, they'd throw the teddy bears.

I remember we did a show with Bobby Sherman. He was a young white guy. He had a TV show called Here Come the Brides. And, he had a hit record one time. When you got a hit TV show, it's easy to get a hit record. His whole band quit him. And the old man called me one day and said, [laughs] 'You want to do a show with Bobby Sherman?' I said, 'Yeah.' It was a reverse situation. We were an all black band with Bobby Sherman. [laughs]

When I was with Jet Star we played for all kinds of audiences. When I started with Jewel Records I did a lot of the chitlin' circuit—Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma. We played a lot in the Southwest—very seldom did we get on the East Coast. It was black audiences. The chitlin' circuit is all that way.

We had an old 98 Oldsmobile that we drove so many times it went down the road sideways. [laughs] So, when you see a truck coming, you better get over. [laughs] We didn't have no busses and stuff like that.

I never had that one big record where you could say, 'Oh, that's Wilson Pickett. He had Funky Broadway.' Or, 'That's James Brown. He had Papa's Got a Brand New Bag.' But, I made a lot of good records.

My biggest hit was probably TCB or TYA. That did pretty good. That was on Jet Star. How Do You Spell Love was on Jewel. John Abnak had a lot of money. He spent a lot of money on promotion. For every record I came out with, we had full-page ads in Cash Box and Billboard, but a lot of my records never got to where they should have been because we didn't have a promotion department.

The album I recorded in '71, Just.a.Matter.of.Time [Jewel/Paula, 1972], that album has been released at least five times, especially in Europe, on different labels. I never seen a dime. I'm not bitter about it. Even though Stan Lewis [Jewel/Paula] has never paid me, I love him like a brother.

I quit [playing music and recording] for a long time. A lot of the stuff I did back in the day [as an artist] I wasn't getting paid for. So, I did record promotion, A&R, anything you can do in the record business. I swept the floor. I did radio for 15 years.

I've been fortunate enough, when I left Stan Lewis, I came back to Dallas, and I started working one record [as a promoter]. I've lived in Dallas my whole life [except] I lived in Shreveport for three years when I worked for Jewel. That was back in 1970. It was like going back in a time zone. In the office I had at Jewel Records, when I'd come out the back door this guy still had the sign that said, 'Colored Entrance' and an arrow pointed around to the back. They were so backwards.

That one record I worked became two, three and at one time I must have been working 25 to 30 records from all different labels like Philadelphia, Columbia—they even had a man working an area, and they would hire me as an independent to work the same record because I was good at it.

I started doing that. Started making a paycheck every week. I got comfortable with that. That's how I could leave the stage because I didn't take performing that seriously. I've been fortunate enough to stay in music one way or another all my life.

I did record promotion and the record business. I was A&R director for Jewel Records. Then when Malaco started to get large I used to work Malaco as an independent. When the rap came in, I had Profile [Records]. I got some gold records from my work with LL Cool J and Run-D.M.C. I helped a lot of artists out. I left the stage for 40 years. But every now and then I would do a gig.

I say that I have a master's degree in the record business. I say that not arrogantly. I've learned so much. I've dealt with radio stations and record companies for like, maybe 40 years. I was offered to run the black division at [record companies] like RCA, Malaco, Atlantic, all the majors. I was offered a job. I took a trip to California to just see what the offices would be like, but I knew I wasn't going to take it because I wanted to come back and do what I am doing now [performing] for the last stages of my life. I enjoy making people happy and people enjoy themselves. That's what I know.

I just fell into being an A&R guy. I got that one record. I had stayed out of work about two years before that. I was waiting for something to happen. Then I started working records, and I was getting good, and money was coming in. I was working the Bee Gees. This was about '73 or '74. I started learning about the record business. The business is more important than the music. A lot of people don't know that. They think a record is a hit because it sounds good but somebody's got to get it to the point where it can be heard, and that's what I did.

I have so many stories about putting records on the radio. Every guy was different. Some guys you have to go to church with. Other guys you have to go to the club with. Some other guys—that's all I can say. [laughs] You find out what a guy's into, and you've got to please that area of his life and get to be a friend, and there's a lot of means.

You have to get the record on the radio by any means necessary. [laughs] I'd bring records in my car, but you got a hundred other guys. They got 20, 30 records with them. So you got maybe 2,000 or 3,000 records coming into these Djs every week. They're only playing 30 records. I had a lot of ways of doing it. [laughs]

Fontella Bass was one of the artists at Jewel Records. Stan called me one day and asked me to produce a record on her. I used to produce some gospel groups, too. I did the Brooklyn All-Stars and the Violinaires. So Stan called me one day and said, 'I need two albums on this gospel group.' I said, 'How long do I have to get two albums?' 'Two days.' So I got the group in the studio and I said, 'Do you have any material?' One guy said, 'I do [sings] "Oh Jesus."' [laughs] I said, 'Anybody else have a song?' Another guy started to sing, "Oh Jesus, oh Jesus." [laughs] We just cut Oh, Jesus over and over and over. [laughing] They didn't have no material.

At Jewel Records, I [became] the producer, the A&R man, musician—I played on all those songs, and then I got on the road and promoted them for \$200 a week. Another artist we had at Jewel Records—I produced a record on him—Ted Taylor. He was a great big tall guy, about six foot three, real light skinned. I had a good feeling about Tommie Young [female soul and gospel singer from Dallas]. I wrote an album on Tommie Young, *Everybody.got.a.Little.Devil.in.Their.Soul*, I did that on Tommie Young in 1970. I did Roscoe Robinson and the Montclairs.

I loved producing and working with artists. Each artist was different. I wrote and produced. I did [a record] on the Montclairs. It was a great record. A lot of this stuff has been released over in Europe for the past 25, 30 years.

I've always had people skills. I enjoy people. I was on KKDA in Dallas for years until 2012. I don't care who they are, what color they are, where they come from. I'm a people person. We are all created equal. Everybody's got a talent. I just happen to be in the music business. So I don't look at myself as if I'm some kind of star because we're all going to go out the same way—without nothing. [laughs] That's the truth.

You had to come up with the material for the artists. Like, I did an album on Little Johnny Taylor. He was from Arkansas. I did a whole Album on Little Johnny Taylor I'm proud of. I did a song in 1972 called *Strange Bed with a Bad Head*. That was on Ronn Records. I did Artie

“Blues Boy” White on Malaco.

I was an all around guy who could do more than one thing. Everybody’s not thrilled about that. They would kind of like, try and keep you in your place. You’re the A&R man, the promotion man. You’re over here.

I was always writing songs. Albert King did some of my songs. He did What the Blues is All About. The Fabulous Thunderbirds did How Do You Spell Love. Now Jeff Tweedy with Wilco [as Golden Smog] recorded She Don’t Have to See You [2006].

My songwriting is one of my strongest suits. I put words together. It’s like a baby. You start from scratch. You write the song. You perform it, and it develops into a real live song. I just have that gift, and I want to use my gift to make people happy.

I put a lot of thought in before I write a song. I don’t just write a song to be writing a song. I try to say something in my music like, I’d Rather Eat Soup with You than Stay with Somebody Else. That comes out of the book of Proverbs. Most people don’t understand what that means.

There’s a lot of preaching going on. But, we need teaching. Teaching changes things. I study the Bible. I don’t read it. There’s a difference. So, I studied for umpteen years ever since I was a kid. I have an honorary doctor’s degree in theology. That’s probably the thing I’m proudest of outside of music. It’s from Trinity Seminary in Dallas.

[The way that] I can write songs and put words together, it’s God’s gift. Everybody’s got a gift. You got to find out what your gift is.

All my songs have a message. I write about something. My songs have meaning. I’m more of a ballad writer I think. I just have to say something.

Now back in the day [recording on 45 r. p.m.’s] it was hard to get a message in two minutes and 15 seconds. But, I can tell a story in two minutes and 15 seconds from beginning to end. A lot of people can’t do that. They tell a story, and it’s left hanging.

I did James Brown’s TV show Future Shock one time, and I was looking at the playback, and James come in there and said, [imitates voice] ‘That you brother?’ He said, ‘Good job, good job.’ I had the record laying down on the console—Don’t Be So Mean. And he picked the record up, and he turned it over, and he ran out and got him a pencil and paper and wrote it down. The next time I heard the song, I heard, ‘Don’t be so mean, but you sure is clean.’ Those were my lyrics. So sometimes people borrow it just enough for the song for their use. They don’t borrow the whole thing.

I was right in the middle of the first rap record that was ever created. Joe Robinson and Sylvia Robinson owned this company called All Platinum Records, and [their son] came in while we were doing business and said, ‘Mama, Mama, these boys were rapping at school, and you’ve got to hear this.’ She said, ‘I’m making a deal. Can’t you see I’m doing business?’ ‘You’ve got to hear this. The school’s going crazy.’ She said, ‘Tell them to come in tomorrow.’

So they came in, and they rapped. After the record hit, they changed the name of the company to Sugar Hill. That was the Sugarhill Gang. I busted that record. It was on acetate, 12 minutes long.

Joe said, 'See if you can get a response to this record.' I took it out to a club, and I got a friend of mine to play it. I said, 'Play it again.' He said, 'Man, I played it, and nobody wants to hear that shit.' I said, 'Play it again.' A few people got up on that record. I kept harassing him, so he played that record a third time, and when he played it a third time the dance floor was just packed. I called Joe and I said, 'Man, you've got something here.'

I [ended up] working with [rappers] Kool Moe Dee, Run-D.M.C., LL Cool J. Record companies love it because it's a cheap music to produce.

The music business is still a job to me. I didn't get caught up in it. I still don't take it that seriously. This business will kill you— drugs, alcohol, women. I've done some of everything. I've experienced some of everything. But I didn't let nothing get the best of me.

It's all because of my foundation with common sense and [the] Bible. A lot of people look at it like a religious tool, but it's just like the handbook to your car. If you buy a Ford, there's a handbook that will tell you what's going to happen if you do this, that or the other. That's the way the book is to me, and it kept me out of a lot of trouble.

I left Malaco in 2000. My mom developed Alzheimer's and started to fall, and I took care of her for about two years. Being an only child, I had to take care of her. Then my mom passed away. Right after that, I started getting these offers to [perform] in Europe. I started working in England, then all over. They got into my music way back 30, 40 years ago. They took all my singles and made Cds out of them.

I been over there lots of times and Amsterdam, Wales, Scotland. The people there know me. It was like I never left. I'm better now, better with age.

I had made a CD called The.Second. Coming [1997]. I put it out myself, and then Ichiban Records picked it up. I did two or three more albums on my record label [Proud Records]. I'd.Rather.Eat.Soup was picked up by Big Bidness [Mardis Gras Records, 1998] out of New Orleans. I cut a live album [Live. At.the.Long.Horn.Ball.Room, 2002]. This stuff never reached its potential because it was with companies that didn't have any promotion.

I was playing one night, and Zach [Ernst, guitarist and producer] asked me if I wanted to come down to Austin and record something. What we did, we got together with some of the old songs that I wrote for other people that I never did for myself like Hard to Get Back In. I produced that on Fontella Bass back in 1971. We recorded that with me singing it. Two of them was Bobby Bland songs.

The new record is one of the best things I've ever done. I don't say it's the best, because all of them are good. I'm one of a kind. I shock the mind. I put good music in your behind. [laughs]



It's the first time I did a record in a studio that was big enough to walk around in. The last studio I cut in, the vocal booth was in the bathroom. Now if somebody had been in there before you, you were in trouble. [laughs]

We've been working with a horn section, and we doing stuff that the people say, 'Man, this is real R&B music.' These guys nowadays, you get a drum machine, people don't want all of that. They want natural. They want somebody up there playing drums, horns and stuff. We have a real soul music show. What they call soul music now is done a lot with computers. They do it for economical reasons. It's cheaper to make a record with a drum machine than it is with a real drummer.

We had a lot of fun doing this record. It's selling, and people are coming to my shows. If you're going to be an entertainer, look like an entertainer. I like clothes. I like attire. The way they do it now they call it being real. They come out and charge \$200 or \$300 for a ticket, and you stick your butt out. That ain't happening with me.

I've learned so much. It's called 'need more.' When you [grow up poor] and you need more it makes you do a lot of things. There's 50 million people in line behind you.

I'm on a mission to raise your condition— not to be the cook, but to own the kitchen. I'm trying to set a pace in this rat race. That's why I'm on your case, all in your face. Peace. [laughs]"