

## Cephas & Wiggins - Richmond Blues (2008)

Written by bluesever

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01 - Richmond Blues 03:59 02 - Going To The River 05:04 03 - Keep Your Hands Off My Baby 04:00 04 - Black Rat Swing 03:35 05 - Mamie 04:12 06 - Crow Jane 03:03 07 - Dog Days Of August 04:12 08 - John Henry 05:39 09 - Pigmeat Crave 03:35 10 - Prison Bound Blues 05:23 11 - Key To The Highway 03:27 12 - Going Down The Road Feeling Bad 03:37 13 - Careless Love 05:51 14 - Great Change 03:49 15 - Reno Factor 03:18 16 - Step It Up And Go 02:57 Acoustic Guitar, Vocals – John Cephas Harmonica, Vocals – Phil Wiggins

In Richmond Blues, guitarist-singer John Cephas and his harmonica-player partner Phil Wiggins personify the century-old blues sound of the Piedmont, the Appalachian foothills running from Richmond to Atlanta. Drawing from roots of ragtime, ballads, country, old-time string band, rhythm and blues, and more, Richmond Blues is a musical roadmap of the Virginia Piedmont tradition. While Cephas calls it "part of my heritage, part of my soul," their sound is at the same time distinctly modern, a kind of "urban acoustic blues."

This recording is part of the Smithsonian Folkways African American Legacy series, co-presented with the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. --- [folkways.si.edu](http://folkways.si.edu)

Piedmont Blues is the rather lesser known cousin of Delta Blues, and while the Mississippi players went to Chicago and generated electric Blues, the Piedmont artists gravitated to the New York club scene, inspiring a generation of post-WWII protest singers, including a kid called Bob Dylan, and a whole different kind of music. Cephas and Wiggins were an acoustic duo who

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picked up the banner of Piedmont Blues in the 1980s and revitalised it with their own dramatic compositions.

Guitarist John Cephas was born in Washington DC in 1930 and sang in a Gospel group as a kid and picked up some finger-style guitar from an aunt. He learned about his Virginia heritage from his grandfather and, after service in the Korean war, John played mainly for fun, but when the Folk/Blues revival came around in the early 60s, he began performing professionally as 'Bowling Green John', a reference to his Virginia roots. John's guitar style was reminiscent of Blind Boy Fuller and the Rev. Gary Davis, but he also used his clear tenor voice to sing Folk and Delta Blues songs too. John met harp player Phil Wiggins, another native of DC, born there in 1954, at a jam session at a Smithsonian Folklife Festival in the mid 70s. They played together in a band called The Barrelhouse Rockers, headed by old-school Alabama pianist Wilbert 'Big Chief' Ellis, who ran a liquor-store in DC.

John played on 'Big Chief's album with Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee and Tarheel Slim in 1977, and when the Chief went to the Happy Hunting Ground later that year, John and Phil continued as a duo dedicated to spreading the Piedmont style. When Terry & McGhee finally ended their acrimonious partnership, Cephas and Wiggins were left as the prime performers of classic Piedmont material, but they also wrote a lot of deep and affecting songs of their own. They took a while to get noticed, but their 1984 album 'Sweet Bitter Blues' included several live tracks which gave an insight into the powerful stage performances they had developed. The duo became very popular on the Festival circuit and their 'Dog Days of August' won a Handy Blues Award in 1986.

They continued to release critically acclaimed, award-winning, good-selling albums for the next two decades. John's accomplished finger-picking was complimented by Phil's rich-toned chording when his harp was backing up, and his inventive solo lines lent a special magic to their work.

In 2008, Cephas and Wiggins released their 13th and final album, 'Richmond Blues' on the Folkways label. John passed away in early 2009 after a short illness at the age of 78. ---  
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