



# BENNY TURNER

## BIOGRAPHY

A veteran musician of more than 60 years, Benny Turner has played everywhere from the Chitlin' Circuit, to Europe, Japan, Australia, and all points in between. Born in Gilmer, TX on October 27, 1939, Benny and his older brother, blues legend Freddie King, learned to play guitar from their mother, Ella Mae (King) Turner and her brothers Leon and Leonard King. While Freddie was captivated by the guitar and wanted to be a performer, Benny enjoyed the music and the opportunities to share it with the brother he admired and adored.

After the family moved to Chicago in the early 50's, Freddie went in one direction and Benny pursued other opportunities. While best known today as a bass player, Benny played guitar during many gigs in the early years. A last-minute request to sit in with Freddie's band at the Squeeze Club gave Benny his first introduction to playing bass, with some "on-the-job training" at its finest!

During the late 50's Benny played guitar with gospel group The Kindly Shepherds and was also playing bass with Freddie at legendary Chicago clubs such as the Squeeze Club and Walton's Corner. Benny met R&B singer Dee Clark at Walton's Corner and was invited to join him on the road. Within days, his first exposure to touring began at The Apollo Theater in NY and continued at The Howard Theater in Washington DC and The Regal Theater in Chicago. Benny then met Leroy Crume and Richard Gibbs of the Soul Stirrers and was invited to join their tour. At that time, electric bass was unheard of in gospel music, but the group's manager, Jesse Farley, recognized his potential contribution and hired Benny. That pioneering move laid the groundwork and inspiration for the gospel music of today, in which bass guitar plays an integral role.

By the mid-to-late 60's Benny returned to Chicago. He continued to play locally and made a handful of his own recordings for the One-Derful and M-Pac! Labels. He re-joined Freddie on the road, and the band played at major festivals and on the same bill as artists including BB King, Solomon Burke, Eric Clapton and even opening for Grand Funk Railroad at Madison Square Garden. While at the Montreux Jazz Festival in 1973, members of Freddie's band sat in with Memphis Slim, and Benny plays bass on the recording of that act, "Memphis Slim – Very Much Alive and in Montreux."

In December 1976, Benny lost his band mate, best friend and big brother after Freddie's untimely passing at age 42. Completely devastated by the unspeakable loss, Benny spent the next two years as a recluse. Finally, Chicago bluesman Mighty Joe Young approached him and Benny gathered the courage to face the stage again. One of the highlights of their time together was appearing in the 1981 film "Thief" while playing live at The Wise Fools Pub. After eight fantastic years on the road together, Mighty Joe had to stop touring due to health issues, and Benny planned his next move.

Heading to New Orleans was a significant turning point for Benny. He met Marva Wright, "Blues Queen of New Orleans", and served as her bandleader and bass player for more than twenty years. In 2010, Marva passed away and Benny lost a cherished friend and bandmate once again.



Benny returned to the studio to produce and record three albums. In 2014, "Journey," an album of all original work, was released in homage to his musical history. Embraced by the soul and blues communities alike, "When She's Gone" (dedicated to Ella Mae King Turner) was released in February 2016 and is a collection of 6 original reissues from his first album, "Blue and Not So Blue," (now out of print) and 4 blues standards. The opening track, "I Can't Leave" won an Independent Music Award in the blues song category, and the entire album received strong worldwide airplay and charted on both the Living Blues magazine and Roots Music Report charts.

2016 was a double milestone year for Benny, marking his 60th anniversary as a musician and 40 years since his brother's untimely death. In honor and observance of both events, two very special items were released: "Survivor-The Benny Turner Story," his long-awaited autobiography "as told to" Bill Dahl (July, 2017), and "My Brother's Blues," a CD in tribute to some of Benny's favorites of Freddie King's songs (September, 2017).

Typical of the plight of the sideman, Benny's talents and career accomplishments were too long unrecognized. In 2017, that changed. Benny received the 2017 Jus' Blues Little Milton Lifetime Bluesman Award, was inducted into the Chicago Blues Hall of Fame as a Blues Master and was honored in his hometown of Gilmer, TX on his birthday, which was proclaimed "Benny Turner Day." 2018 continues on that high note, with his nomination for a 2018 Blues

Music Award in the Instrumentalist - Bass category, an Independent Music Award nomination for "My Brother's Blues" in the Tribute Album category and a Global Music Award Silver Medal for Outstanding Achievement for "My Brother's Blues." He was also honored as the winner for Most Outstanding Musician (Bass) in the 25th annual Living Blues Awards, Critic's Poll.

In 2019, Benny celebrated his birthday in style as a headliner at the Inaugural Lone Star Blues and Heritage Festival in Grapeland, TX, just down the road from Gilmer where he and Freddie spent their childhood. Life has come full circle for this talented bluesman!