

Little Mike Biography (Long)

Queens native Little Mike grew up in the very competitive New York City music scene. He started playing harp at age 14 and took up piano two years later. His first brush with the blues came while hearing John Lee Hooker at Carnegie Hall and later listening to a Paul Butterfield record. After that Little Mike couldn't get enough. If a blues show was in New York City, Mike was there, especially when the Chicago players came to town. His favorite was Muddy Waters. "I used to go and see Muddy anytime he was within 150 miles of New York," he said. "He is easily the biggest influence on the band and my playing. And if it's not Muddy himself then it's the great guys he always picked to play with him, like Pinetop Perkins and Otis Spann on the piano or Little Walter and James Cotton on harp."

Another musician Mike greatly admired was Paul Butterfield, who would regularly come and see Mike's band perform. He liked their old "Chess sound" and took Mike under his wing. Mike says, "He helped me become less of a blues purist, and more of a music purist. Paul opened up my playing and taught me to put my blues in other music forms, to make it very personal." Other influences cited include Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, The Rolling Stones, Jimmy Reed, Eddie Taylor, Sonny Boy Williamson, and Walter Horton.

After leading a series of bands as a teenager, Mike formed the Tornadoes in 1978. At age 22, Mike was leading one of the busiest and toughest blues bands in New York City. Whenever a visiting blues artist came to town and needed a band, Little Mike and the Tornadoes usually got the call, backing artists such as Walter Horton, Otis Rush, Bo Diddley, Lightning Hopkins, and Big Mama Thornton. Mike's reputation led to the band's touring as the backing unit for blues legends such as Pinetop Perkins, Hubert Sumlin, and Jimmy Rogers.

Little Mike and the Tornadoes proudly describe themselves as a "working class band" that plays blues with a rock 'n' roll edge. "We all come from working class families and tough, working class neighborhoods," says Mike. "Working class people have always been our biggest supporters."

Music luminaries who have sat in with the band include Robert Cray, Jaco Pastorius, Kim Wilson, Jorma Kaukonen, James Cotton, Los Lobos' Cesar Rosas and David Hidalgo, Stevie Ray Vaughan, and Taj Majal.

In 1988, Mike played on and produced Pinetop Perkin's first domestic release, "After Hours". The following year he did the same for Hubert Sumlin's "Heart & Soul". Both recordings are available on Blind Pig Records. In 1990, Blind Pig released the first solo album by Little Mike and the Tornadoes, "Heart Attack", which Mike also produced. It features all original songs and guest appearances by Perkins, Sumlin, Butterfield, Ronnie Earl, and Big Daddy Kinsey. The album thrust the band out into the spotlight, where they began to tour almost non-stop across North America and Europe, establishing themselves as true road warriors. Little Mike's success led to a 1992 follow-up release entitled "Payday". The material is once again all original and draws upon Mike's blue-collar upbringing and experience. Says Little Mike, "It's the best thing I've ever done. Best writing, best playing, and best producing. I think I'm finally getting the hang of this."

From there Mike moved on to record Flynn's Place on Flying Fish records, then Hot Shot on Ichiban and "[Forgive Me](#)" on ElRob Records. Also released independently was a live release from Paris, France, as well as a collection cut with his most recent touring band featuring Troy Nahumko, Chris Brzezicki, and Cam Robb, that features special guests Sonny Rhodes, and Jim Mckaba. 2014 saw the release of Little Mike and the Tornadoes critically acclaimed "[All The Right Moves](#)". Additionally, during the summers of 2014, 2015 & 2016 Little Mike toured throughout the southeastern U.S. as well as touring Southern Europe.

How better to follow up on the acclaim and success of the back to back to back releases of "[Live at the St. Augustine BLUZFEST](#)" with special guest Zora Young; dovetailed with Zora Young with Little Mike and the Tornadoes "[Friday Night](#)". Followed by "[Genuine Blues Legends](#)" with Pinetop Perkins & Jimmy Rogers, than to release the hard chargin' "[How Long?](#)", in August 2016. " This recording includes original tunes as well as a few blues classics, with a nod toward the more modern approach as well. As usual, the songs are pure high energy as well as deep down in the alley. You can hear Pinetop Perkins in Mike's piano playing and James Cotton in his harp playing"

Mike continues to perform throughout Florida, and Tour the United States, Canada and Europe and performs more than 100 shows per year.