Since an earlier article ("Lee Kizart Recalls the Delta Blues", B.U. May 1970, pp. 9-10) on Lee Kizart was published in BLUES UNLIMITED and a record of his music appeared ("The Blues Are Alive and Well" Transatlantic XTRA 1105), a number of requests have reached me for further information about Kizart, his music and life. A second record is out, to accompany my book "Blues From The Delta" (Studio Vista) and more of his music is featured on the album.

The following interview was recorded during the summer of 1967 in Tutwiler, Mississippi, and contains a number of details about Lee's life and music which have not appeared in print previously. I recorded Kizart on both guitar and piano in Tutwiler.

Lee Kizart's Tutwiler Blues

WF: What do you call that piece of metal on your finger?
LK: A slide.
WF: What do you call it when you go up and down the guitar with the slide?
LK: Well, it's just like you playing with your natural hand, you know. This slide make a different sound to just flat picking with your hand. This slide give you a better alibi. That's all it is. Everybody just can't play with that. They'll play with they naked hand, you know.
WF: Where was your home originally?
LK: My home is at Clendola. That's where I was raised at.
WF: Did you learn the guitar down there?
LK: That's where I pretty well learned it.
WF: Who taught you?
LK: I learned everything I know myself. I used to tune pianos, overhaul them, build them, everything it is. I had a whole store over here and I left out and went to Aberdeen, Mississippi.
WF: You going to Texas now?
LK: Going to Dallas, Texas.
WF: You going to be playing music there?
LK: That's what I'm thinking of. I'm goin' start playing when I git there. I love to play the piano. I just can't sing too good behind the guitar. I never did, I sing mostly with piano and drums. I sold all these white ladies pianos. All around here.
WF: But I don't know nobody round here that's got a real good piano. We'd have to go to one of these schools to git a piano.

(We moved to the local black high school in Tutwiler and the remainder of the interview was taped during his performance there on the piano. (WF)

WF: Lee, do you have a name for the style you're playing? (He had sung "Hello, Miss Good Looking").
LK: Well, swing (swing).
WF: Where did that kind of music come from?
LK: I learned that myself.
WF: Does anybody else play swing?
LK: They don't know that. They don't know none of my recording. I ain't took it after nobody else. I took it from myself alone.
WF: You had one of the songs you called a 'funny song'?
LK: Yeah, I played that I 'C' sharp.
WF: Did you write these songs, Lee?
LK: I never have. I just sit down and think them out and, you know, you've got to know how to play the piano for to expand your music, your song between your notes.
WF: Is swing the same thing as boogie-woogie?
LK: Well, it's rhythm all right enough, but it's not boogie woogie.
WF: What's the difference?
LK: Well, it's some difference in it. You see, boogie woogie is swing music too in one consent. Ev'rybody swing dance to it and do the twist too. Now I got a twist I'm goin' comin' with now. This twist is my make all right enough. Don't nobody play it like me. I don't play like the other fellow. I don't try to play like no-one for that reason. It's in 'F' key.

(plays "Twist, pretty baby, twist.")
WF: Now when you playing in a dance-hall, is that what you usually play for dances?
LK: Why shore!
WF: What kind of dance do you do to that?
LK: They swing dance.
WF: Any other kind?
LK: Any kind.
WF: Are there different kinds of swing dances?
LK: Yes Sir. They got all different. They twist some and they swing, the young folks do. Then they boogie woogie and stuff like that. And rhythm. Two-four downbeats, with shuffles.

I never read no music. I was looking...
over a show here, ain't been too long ago. It was a colored guy, he didn't read music, but those foreign peoples was playing with him. They come in and that man told him to play a number. He played a number and that man didn't know nothing about him, and he didn't know nothing about him. But now the way that man blew that clarinet right with him, aw man, they just had one swell time.

'Course, I don't read no music. I can't read and write as far as that's concerned. But I know this (the piano). I know this. I know it's good and better all over the world because it's peoples hadn't done nothing but just took their training and went to school direct. But I've got some stuff I can put to them and he can't do it. He ain't gonner do it like I do it, and I won't do it like him.

Let's say he play it in middle 'C'. I play it in 'F'. If he play it in 'F', I'll turn round and I'll play it up here. I do that to stay from him all the time. That's kind of like Dave Mimi. He's a white man. That's true enough, but now he didn't read music. But he was as good a player as it was. I think he dead now. But if he play in 'B' key, all right, you play it in 'B' flat, or you can come back and play it in 'G'.

Just like this Nashville boogie woogie with that guitar and drums in it. Here the way it go. I play that a little different, to let the people know and see that it's just like it is out of the studio in Nashville.

(he plays the 'Nashville Boogie Woogie' which is the theme song on Station W.L.A.C. in Nashville, Tenn.)

WF: Is that W.L.A.C. with John R. and the Horse Man?
LK: That's right.
WF: Can you play that song they introduce their program with? ("After Hours")
LK: See, it's got a guitar in there that takes it off. But for the background, I can play the background on the piano. But I can't play the guitar part of it. You know, one man ain't no whole show on nothing. Now here some old blues I used to play way back along in twenty-five. I been playing piano a long time, This is done in 'B' flat and in 'F'. That's the main thing about piano. I can't read, I took my lessons to start off going to school. Well, I just threw it away after I learned to play over-the fellow that had the lessons. You understand me? But it's good to have your lessons.

I learnt a lot of white kids around here. That law (policeman) that brought you to me, he'll tell you I learnt them all how to play. I set down and I say, "You do what I show you to do. Take these four keys, see."

I give them a beat in those four keys, then I make them change and go higher in 'B' flat, then I make them come back to middle 'C'. Then I make them go back to 'F'. Then they come back to 'B' flat. Then he come back to middle 'C'. That's making your exchange correct, see. Well that's all.

Course I do all this work. Nobody ever learned me. I was just walkin' along the road one day. I had a piano and rats got in it and cut all the felts out. Strings was all broke up in there. I decided I was gonna fix it. After I done that, I found the secret about it and understood how to work on pianos.

WF: Can you play some more of that swing?
LK: Swang? Aw, yeah. I'll see if I can't cut you another in a little different way. You ready? Well now Tommy Lee (just entered the room), here it go. Getting right. I'm gonner try to git a little boogie woogie to come through there now.

(plays: "I have a little girl,
She lives up on the hill,
If she don't boogie woogie,
Then I really know her sister will"

WF: Do you play the blues on the piano?
LK: The blues. The flat-foot blues, now here I come in middle 'C' with the blues.

(plays: "Got the Blues for my baby.")

- the remainder of this interview will appear in B.U. 98 -

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Lee Kizart's Tutwiler Blues

WF: Lee, do you play the "St. Louis Blues"?
LK: Yes sir. Got it coming up. A blind man can play the "St. Louis Blues". Look at Ray Charles. He don't know where he putting his hands, but he git up there and he know his keys. But now the "St. Louis Blues" let me see how it go. (plays "St. Louis Blues")

WF: Lee, did you say you are sixty-five years old?
LK: Right. I have thirteen children. I had one got killed in July in St. Louis. I had fourteen.
WF: How was he killed?
LK: A incident of some kind come up in a cafe. They stabbed him down up there. I just don't know.

WF: Where are your children living now?
LK: I had a boy to get burnt a little bit before Christmas. He worked in a steel plant in East St. Louis. I sent my wife and them down there to take care of him. He couldn't feed hisself and he burnt from here (indicates his neck) down. They grafted skin on his arm onto the other places, you know, to kind of get him fixed up.

I was over in Aberdeen, Mississippi, and they kept worrying me about "Come on, come on." I told my wife, "Well, I'll just take my truck.

I had a big Chevrolet truck, bob truck. I said "I believe I'll just go on back to Tutwiler and sell out here."

My son-in-law come and get my wife and I sent my son, Ade, up there. He couldn't feed hisself in the hospital. I talked with the nurses and things and they told me what to do. I sent them on up there and give them some money. "I'll go on and take care of him the best you can."

WF: How did he get burned?
LK: You know how they got them old pots and things in a steel-mill? I don't know, but it didn't burn a leg off or nothing. But he just got burnt pretty bad, you know.

WF: Did they give him anything?

LK: He got his insurance. I got a letter from my wife the other day, Friday. She got him up and he is out the hospital. Course they claim he had to be in there six more months. He had to go over there and they check him.

That's why I sent my baby boy. My baby boy, he tall as that boy there (Tommy Lee), but he ain't heavy as him. He stayed with him till he got him in pretty good position with his insurance and everything.

WF: Do any of your children play music?
LK: None but my son. I got a girl, Alice, she play piano.
WF: What does your son play?
LK: He play guitar.
WF: Blues?
LK: Oh, everything.
WF: You ever play spirituals on the piano?
LK: I can play them, but I just don't like it. I won't do like a lot of folks. Disc jockeys and things, they want you to play that mixup rhythm, but I won't do it. I figure I got enough to give encounter. You know we all got a day. I won't cross up.

"I've had many of these church singers come to me and want to break off, but I wouldn't hire them. They say, "I can sing that stuff."

I say "Yeah, but I don't do business that way."

I'll be punished for doing it. Not with you. With the good Lord above. But I won't do it (play church music). If I know a fellow doing something that ain't right, I supposed to tell him. You know it's a lot of people ain't your friends and you can't tell them nothing. And you better not try to tell him nothing, if you do, you got to whop him or he gonner whop you. But now if it's somebody I know and I believe he'll let me talk to him, I say "Look. Come here a minute. Let me tell you something. I'm for right and I'll let you have anything if I got it in my power. But you naturally doing wrong now. You doing wrong. You come on and go with me. If you ain't got no way home, I'll take you home."

You know I been had a automobile all the time till now. I say "Now I'll take you on out and home. Come on. What you want? Anything you want, I'll give you."

I work with more white boys near 'bout than I does my own color cause they round me all the time. But now when they go to do wrong, I'll tell them, "Wait a minute" "What'd y'all come down here for? Y'all come down here to do right or to do wrong?"
Some of them say "It don't make no difference," I say "Well we're not gonner have that here. You have to do go down yonder to give that. Not here. You can't have it here - if you want me to go git the law, I'll go git him."

You know that cut the argument out. That cause hard feeling, but I'd rather have hard feeling between him than see him do something there and git killed behind it. I play for white ladies and they buy all the whiskey I want. Some fellows git crazy when they drink whiskey like I'm doing now. Well if he wants to do wrong I carry him to the door. "Look. Come here with me."

"I know what I'm doing."

"You may know what you doing, but you gonner do what I say. Come on."

I take him right on and carry him on out. That white boy that plays drums with me, I take care of him.

WP: Lee, do you ever sing any songs that got stories to them?
LK: Well, I didn't started that yet. Course I maybe could do sitch, but I love to be right when I be doing it.

WP: What are the oldest songs and tunes you know?
LK: I know lots of old way-backs. But I hardly ever just sit down and play them. One of them is "Come back baby, please don't go." "If you knowed how I love you."

I done near bout forgot that. I hate to try to sing something I don't know. Here a little song, since on my mind, I'll play this one to you. (Plays his "Funny Song."

That's an old way-back. I used to play all that old "Turkey in the Straw" but now I was blowin a harp and picking a guitar, too. I quit because crossing up that way - it's hard to do. Everybody don't understand how that stuff gotta be added in. And you can rearrange and add any addition in that you want. But you got to put it correct so it'll fit. Old "Forty-Four, Vicksburg." That's way back.

WF: Have you ever made up any songs about Parchman, Lee?
LK: Parchman? We had one, but I done forgot it. It was about a mule. The boy that wrote it live in Clarksdale. But if you want music for shuffles and two-four downbeats you got to know what you doing.

WF: Did you say the people that play this music are dying out?
LK: You don't find nobody plays like I'm playing. Everybody got his own key to play in. He might play in middle 'C' and I'm playing in 'G'. I play in 'F' and he might play his'n in one key above me and that's a different tone. You don't hardly find people play alike. You just listen to what I'm gonner do.

(Plays: "Don't the sun look lonesome...")

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EXETER, Devon. Plenty going on at the University. Charlie Gillett and Paul Oliver recently lectured and Les Blank was there in person to show his films of 'lightnin', Mance, and the Cajuns. Richard Lewis, now in Exeter, says they're all fine.

Beware the new BLUES ON BLUES by JOHNNY YOUNG. There are faulty pressings on sale, so buy it where you can take it back...BILL Greensmith, on a recent Chicago trip bumped into EARL PAYTON at Jimmy Cotton's home...Mike Perlowill points out that the first few notes are missing on the GENESIS "Louisiana Blues".

BUDDY GUY has opened his own club, BUDDIES at 421 E.43 St. and when in town can be heard there with his band. FENTON ROBINSON back in Chicago recently at the Silver Moon, 22nd & Kedzie with BIG MOJO on bass who usually does a set a la J.B.Lenoir.

NEW ORLEANS: Professor Longhair is gigging at several local rock and jazz clubs further to his comeback. And there are rumors that Irma Thomas is planning a return to a singing career. I haven't heard her since she used to play teen dances at the Union Hall in Chalmette. The latest addition to the music scene is the Nutcracker Lounge which has a blues policy. Longhair, Jimmy Reed, John Lee Hooker and the King Biscuit Boy among recent headliners. Deacon John is as popular as ever round the city at nightclubs like J.B.s. He was leader of the Ivories and reformed the group as the Electric Soul Train. Every weekend Babe Stovall can be heard doing his brand of country blues and gospel. He is now a local institution and something of a hero to street people. Dr. John's "Gumbo" album is behind a resurgence of the N.O. R&B sound of the fifties. gary modenbach: