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### **GSU Celebrates 50 Years of Alligator Records with Streaming Concert**

Office of Marketing and Communications

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# GSU Celebrates 50 Years of Alligator Records with Streaming Concert



The Center for Performing Arts continues its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season with a celebration of Chicago blues and Chicago-based Alligator Records' 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary by presenting an online streaming video concert starring four of the label's most popular artists. Legendary harmonica player Billy Branch returns to the Center for the third time with his band The Sons of Blues. In addition, "Sweet Home Chicago – An Online Blues Celebration" will feature three special guests -- Grammy-nominated vocalist Shemekia Copeland, slide guitar master Lil' Ed Williams and beloved Chicago blues guitarist and songwriter Toronzo Cannon. The Sons of Blues will serve as the house band for the show, backing each of the headliners and Alligator Records founder and president Bruce Iglauer will serve as emcee.

This once-in-a-lifetime concert will be recorded on the Center's stage to the empty 1171 seat house and will debut as a ticketed streaming event on March 13th at 7 p.m. Ticket holders will have the opportunity to purchase through March 29th and will be able to access the concert on demand through April 11th. For tickets and more information, go to [Centertickets.net](https://www.centertickets.net). The event will stream on the Center's YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/user/GSUCenter>.

Once again the Center will be working with with GSU's [Digital Learning and Media Department](#) with Uriah Berryhill serving as the event producer.

The seed of the concert sprouted pre-COVID at a diner in Andersonville, when Center for Performing Arts' Director Lana Rogachevskaya and Alligator Records founder Bruce Iglauer explored how to celebrate their upcoming institutional birthdays and share their passion for the blues with a larger Chicago community. This conversation reemerged in 2020 with an additional goal of employing Chicago artists, while serving blues fans from all over the globe.

Rogachevskaya says, "Blues is a feeling. A musical genre with origins in American slavery and Jim Crow, its continued popularity is in its universal appeal. Communally held and lived through, blues uplifts, nourishes, and sustains the human soul. Sweet Home Chicago Blues participants will feel the healing power of blues sounds and stories while being together."

*Rolling Stone* says, "Prestigious, scrappy independent blues label **Alligator Records** has reached dizzying heights in celebrating the blues." Alligator Records, founded in 1971 by Bruce Iglauer, is home to some of the world's foremost blues and roots rock talent and is regarded by fans and the media alike as the top contemporary blues record label in the world. From classic Windy City artists like Hound Dog Taylor and "Queen Of The Blues" Koko Taylor, to next generation legends Lil' Ed Williams and Billy Branch to contemporary stars including Toronzo Cannon and Shemekia Copeland, Alligator's discography reads like a who's who in modern blues history. Legendary artists including Lonnie Brooks, Luther Allison, Johnny Winter, Albert Collins, James Cotton, Rick Estrin, Charlie Musselwhite, Michael "Iron Man" Burks, The Holmes Brothers, Mavis Staples, and rising stars Selwyn Birchwood and Christone "Kingfish" Ingram are just some of the blues immortals who have recorded groundbreaking music for the label. Now, at 50 years old, Alligator is still committed to discovering great new talent, proving that the passion, soul and redemptive power of blues and roots music is alive and well.



When **Shemekia Copeland** first broke on the scene with her groundbreaking Alligator Records debut CD *Turn the Heat Up* in 1998, she instantly became a blues and R&B force to be reckoned with. *The Chicago Tribune* says, "Shemekia Copeland is the greatest female blues singer working today." News outlets from *The New York Times* to *CNN* have praised Copeland's talent, larger-than-life personality, dynamic, authoritative voice and true star power. Shemekia earned three

Grammy Award nominations, 12 Blues Music Awards and a host of *Living Blues Awards*, including being named the 2020 Female Blues Artist of the Year. With her recent albums, Shemekia broadened her musical vision, melding blues with more rootsy, Americana sounds. Her new album, the soulful and uncompromising *Uncivil War*, tackles the problems of contemporary American life head on, with nuance, understanding, and a demand for change. It also brings Copeland's fierce, sultry R&B fire to songs more personal than political. NPR's *All Things Considered* says, "Copeland embodies the blues with her powerful vocal chops and fearless look at social issues." *No Depression* declares, "Copeland pierces your soul. This is how you do it, and nobody does it better than Shemekia Copeland."



Upon release of his Alligator Records debut, *The Chicago Way* in 2016, **Toronzo Cannon** burst onto the international stage as one of the most electrifying bluesmen to emerge from Chicago in decades. *The Chicago Reader* said, "Bluesman Toronzo Cannon is one of Chicago's finest string-bending storytellers." He has played major cities all over the U.S., Canada, and Europe, delighting and surprising audiences with one unforgettable gig after another. He has played the Chicago Blues Festival on ten separate occasions, initially as a sideman, then as a special guest, a side stage band leader and finally as a main stage headliner. UK tastemaker music magazine *MOJO* named his latest album, 2019's *The Preacher, The Politician Or The Pimp*, the #2 Best Blues Album Of 2019. Chicago's *Newcity* and *Reader* both named Cannon among the city's greatest musicians. *Blues Music Magazine* says, "Cannon has all the fire and spontaneity of the Chicago legends. His songwriting is a timely and original look at the world, and his assertive voice is the perfect vehicle to deliver the message."



Slide guitar playing blues master **Lil' Ed Williams**, leader of Lil' Ed & The Blues Imperials, comes to the blues naturally. His uncle, Chicago slide guitar king and master songwriter J.B. Hutto, taught him how to feel, not just play the blues. *Living Blues* says, "Lil' Ed plays rough and ready blues with unmitigated intensity...swirling, snarling, riveting slide...scorching and soulful, joyous and stomping." With nine albums and thousands of performances under his belt, Lil' Ed is now universally hailed as a giant of the genre. *The Associated Press* says, "Williams fills Chicago's biggest shoes with more life and heat than anyone on stage today." With his latest album, 2016's ***The Big Sound Of Lil' Ed & The Blues Imperials***, Lil' Ed continues to bring his blistering Chicago blues to fans new and old. His infectious energy, joyful showmanship and masterful playing have been honed to a razor's edge. *The Chicago Tribune* says, "Electrifying, raucous, pure Chicago blues....Lil' Ed is a guitarist extraordinaire...slashing slide and flamboyant stage persona."



Blues giant **Billy Branch** is hailed internationally as one of today's greatest harmonica players. *The New York Times* says, "*Branch has a warm, open vocal style and a full command of the blues harp, from wailing notes to chugging rhythms.*" With his inventive, deeply rooted playing and gritty, soulful vocals, Branch carries on the Chicago blues tradition that he learned first-hand from icons including Big Walter Horton, James Cotton, Junior Wells, Carey Bell, Willie Dixon and many others. With his instantly recognizable sound and his band, The Sons of Blues, Branch has traveled the world, delivering his signature brand of Chicago blues for over four decades. Branch's latest album is 2019's ***Roots & Branches: The Songs of Little Walter***. The album finds Branch and his band boldly reimagining the renowned songs of Little Walter Jacobs. Jacobs was one of the principal architects of the Chicago blues sound and one of the most influential blues harmonica players who ever lived. *Living Blues* said, "Branch plays a potent blend of rootsy integrity and exploratory zeal."

Throughout its 25-year history, many blues artists have grace the Center's stage: Buddy Guy, B.B. King, Eddie Clearwater, Jimmy Burn, Eddie Shaw, Zora Young, Demetria Taylor, Jamiah Rogers, Tail Dragger, Billy Branch, Howard Levy, Sugar Blue, Corky Sigel, Melody Angel, Lurrie Bell, Chicago Ladies Sing the Blues collective, and more.

For more information or to purchase tickets, visit [CenterTickets.net](https://www.CenterTickets.net)The Center for Performing Arts thanks generous partners, funders, and individual contributors including The National Endowment for the Arts, Arts Midwest, ComEd, First Midwest Bank, and the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency.

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