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Bob Jones carries a calling card that reflects the hard travelin' of the old "Chitlin' Circuit." His card says: "Writing. Arrangement. Producing. Recording. Placement. Promotion. Representation. Management. Booking."

Southern Soul is all about being self-contained, and Jones is as self-contained as a genie in a bottle.

As a songwriter, the South Side resident worked magic with the blues.

He wrote hits such as "Leaning Tree" and "Don't Pet My Dog" for Artie "Blues Boy" White. He penned "Wilie Mae" for Willie Kent and "How Do You Want Your Thrill?" for Lee Shot Williams. He made the blues fun, danceable and just plain different than the 277 versions of "Sweet Home Chicago" fans will hear at the Chicago Blues Festival.

But Jones, 74, is among the last of his breed. Between the 1950s and late 1980s, the old Chitlin' Circuit ran a straight shot along Interstate 57 from Alabama to Louisiana, and a down-home drive through Interstate 80 in Georgia, and many of the biggest names Jones worked with on that circuit have passed on: Tyrone Davis, Little Milton Campbell (Jones wrote "This Ain't Blues" for him) and the fantastic James Carr (who covered Jones' "I'm Into Something"). In May 1996, Jones even booked Carr into Rosa's Lounge for his unforgettable last gig in Chicago.

Jones is a hard-working Chicago treasure. His song catalog contains more than 300 Southern Soul and blues tunes. When Artie "Blues Boy" White is asked what makes Jones different from other songwriters he answers, "He writes a lot of songs."

Jones strolls into Helen's soul food restaurant on East 79th Street, a block east of the Regal Theater, wearing an off-white summer suit accented by a white Panama Jack fedora. He is a cool customer on a steamy afternoon.

His hands are large and they carry a half-dozen CDs, including Joe Poonanny's "Signifying Monkey." The CD features "Some Jaws," written by Jones, Poonanny and Chicago actor Carl Wright, who died last month.

Jones' songwriting style is unmistakable.

Southern Soul artists move away from 12-bar blues and make liberal use of horn sections. The most authentic sound is raw and loud, devoid of elaborate electronics. And when Muddy Waters was singing with sly double entendres like "Sugar Bee" artists like Bobby Rush are out in front with "Bare Mouthed Woman."

But this song, "Some Jaws," is a good sound bite of Jones' approach. "Blues comedian" Poonanny sings over a pronounced rhythm and blues beat with dashes of female gospel shouts. A traditional blues guitar solo breaks up raucous lyrics like, "If you don't want to get out of them drawers / I'll settle for some jaws ..."

That wild showmanship -- plus the background singers, horn sections and scantily clad dancers -- is what sets a Chitlin' Circuit show apart from a traditional blues set.

"That kind of music is a very vital part of the scene if blues is going to go out of a stereotype, if people want to stretch out and artistically express themselves," says Barry Dolins, deputy director of special events for the City of Chicago. He has booked the Chicago Blues Festival since 1985.

The roots of the Chitlin' Circuit date as far back as 1929 when the Rabbit Foot Minstrel Show formed in Port Gibson, Miss. Many future blues and R&B greats traveled the circuit. Charles Neville of the Neville Brothers joined the minstrel show in 1954. While on the circuit, he crossed paths with Jimmy Reed and Little Walter.

"Before the 'Chitlin' Circuit' -- and I'm not a fan of calling it that -- there was also the TOBA Theater Owners Booking Agency, and these acts played the Southern route of theaters," Dolins says.

Jones also traveled in the similar rarefied air of George Jackson, who has written Malaco Records smashes for the late Johnnie Taylor, Denise LaSalle and Little Milton.

He learned from them all.

"My song structure is a little different from George," Jones says, with Little Milton playing out of the rhythm-and-blues jukebox at the diner. "I do four lines telling my verse and four-line hooks -- eight lines in the whole thing. George might do eight lines, but they are all talk lines, and he might repeat them. I don't do a lot of repeating. I write from the heart. It took me almost 30 years to get to the style I have."

That extra effort on the hooks is what makes Jones' songs recognizable. He strives to make the hook as rich as the verse.

But while some songwriters start with a melody and others begin with a title, Jones starts from a story. This is how Artie "Blues Boy" White's "Don't Pet My Dog" came about.

"It was about an old-fashioned guy who left his wife at home with his dog," Jones says. "The hook was, 'Don't pet my dog, and please don't hold my woman's hand.' If you can hold a lady's hand and pet the dog, you've made yourself too familiar."

Something else has gotta be going on.

"You've never heard that, have you?"

But Jones argues, "The real deal is when you get through with it, it's still the blues. Soul music. Rhythm and blues, whatever you call it. I'm talking about the stories. Love. Money. Hardship. That's the blues."

Jones adds, "Young kids coming up today have to stick with the feel. Their feel might be a bit more energetic than mine -- I'm 74 years old -- but I can still get into the groove. It depends on the tune and what kind of musicians we got. ... Willie Clayton does a rap verse in a blues tune."

But Jones has only written for one artist in mind, and that was the late Little Milton, who had lived on Chicago's South Side from 1967 to the early 1990s. "Don't tell anybody, but I can sing like him," Jones says. "I'm finally doing a CD of my songs. I'm not expecting any hits, I just wanted something for my grandkids."

When Jones is asked to prioritize the multi-tasking on his business card, he answers, "I'm a songwriter first. I'm not getting tunes on the artists like I used to. I haven't had anything on Willie Clayton in the last five years, but I still get other tunes played. The next thing would be promotion. I'm still promoting records and concerts."

Every three weeks, Jones drops into Dr. Wax, 6225 S. Harper in Hyde Park, to work a new project. "It's always some soul-blues artist," says store owner Sam Greenberg. "No one works a specific genre like he does. Bob is promoting his records, somebody he's produced or somebody he knows. We always buy from him, and we sell a lot of it. Theodis Ealey is very popular. He's sex-oriented. He brought in Miss Peaches; she's down and dirty."

And Jones brings along "Blues Boy" White and Bobby "Slim" James for his appointment at Helen's.

"The longer I get into this, I learn how blues is about extended family," Dolins says. "You have to hustle to make it. That's what Bob is all about. You have to do everything because this is such a low end of the totem pole compared to mass media pop music. And Bob is an underappreciated diamond in Chicago."

Jones' first big song placement came in 1976 when "Blues Boy" White recorded his song "Leaning Tree." With hurt in his eyes Jones recalls, "I was dating a girl on the West Side. Soul singer, no relation Bobby Jones was doing a show in Milwaukee, and I was his road manager. This girl wanted to go with me. I had the band and all the equipment, and I didn't want her to go. The show ended about 3 in the morning. I came back and left Bobby there.

I got to the West Side around 4:30, 5 a.m. Remember, I was in love. I had a key. I

opened the door, and it was chained. I started knocking and a deep voice said, 'Dammit, we're sleeping in here!' That broke my heart. I got in my car and drove back to my home in Chicago Heights. I pulled off I-55 and wrote 'Leaning Tree' in 15 minutes.

"She was my leaning tree, she was who I loved."

CHITLIN' CIRCUIT EMPOWERED SOUTH'S BLACK ENTERTAINERS

The Chitlin' Circuit was a collective name for a series of performance venues throughout the South and some of the East Coast -- venues that were havens for black performers and audiences. These places thrived as a kind of black vaudeville circuit -- there was music, comedy, all kinds of entertainment -- during the mid-20th century era of racial segregation in the United States.

Some of the venues on the circuit included the Apollo Theater in Harlem and the Regal Theater in Chicago.

The name was derived from a particular item on soul-food menus: chitterlings, or boiled pig intestines.

The Chitlin' Circuit was an important safe place for black artists to hone their chops before enthusiastic crowds. A few of music stars who got their start on the Chitlin' Circuit include Cab Calloway, Duke Ellington, Ray Charles, the Supremes, Ike & Tina Turner, Patti LaBelle, Jimi Hendrix, Gladys Knight & the Pips, The Isley Brothers and the Jackson Five.