

Good afternoon! Tuesday, August 12, 2008

Herald & Tribune

JONESBOROUGH, TENNESSEE

Lifestyles

Story published: 08-12-2008

LIGHTNIN' CHARLIE

By Heather E. Seay
Online Editor / Staff Writer

You never know what's going to happen in downtown Jonesborough on a Saturday night, especially if you're at a Lightnin' Charlie show.

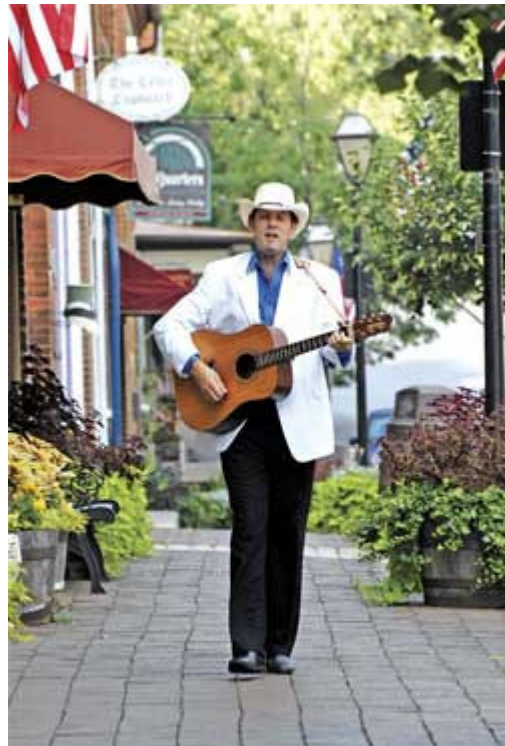
You might, even if you don't know how to dance, end up dancing on the arm of Jonesborough resident Cosmo Griffith to the sounds of Lightnin' Charlie's guitar.

Every month the local performer (Charlie, not Cosmo), a favorite in this area for years, performs his live by request show at the Cranberry Thistle. There's almost always a packed house.

Lightnin' Charlie is a natural entertainer. Even if he weren't a good musician, he can keep a crowd entertained at every turn. He can laugh at himself with the best of them. L.C.'s stage presence is almost half the show.

The audience (whether it's because of the small venue, it's hard to say) connects with Lightnin' Charlie. When you leave the show, you feel as if you know him, and his family.

But, getting past the jokes and the expert showmanship, Lightning Charlie has a sound all his own. His guitar playing is expert and seemingly effortless, and he's got the voice to back it up.



**Charlie walks down Main Street in Jonesborough before a recent performance.
(Charlie Mauk / H & T Photographer)**

Pulling from blues and rockabilly greats, Charlie exudes a feeling of timelessness, favorites that never get old, sung in ways you've never heard before.

His live request shows vary from his usual gigs, in that the audience is in control of what they hear -- to some degree at least.

L.C. brings to life songs such as the "Tennessee Waltz," "Blue Suede Shoes," "Pretty Woman," and, my personal favorite, "Blueberry Hill."

When you hear Lightnin' Charlie perform the song Fats Domino made an international hit back in 1956, it takes on a life of its own.

Charlie also performs a few gospel tunes, and one that he says he sings as a gospel even though it might not have been written as one. I have to agree, "Bridge Over Troubled Water," especially when Lightnin' Charlie performs it, is a heartfelt gospel song.

His monthly shows at the Thistle, the first Saturday of every month, feature not only himself, but the musical stylings of his wife, Beth, and his two sons, Sidney and Samuel. Beth and Charlie were married in 1997, and their sons, who are now old enough to take the stage, take up most of their time.

Charlie is still a musician, however, and keeps performing and making new CDs, even though his traveling slowed down a little once the kids were born.

Beth is a vocalist in her own right. In the duets, especially the bluesy ones, is where her voice really shines. She's got a heck of a voice for a physical therapist.

L.C., who was named favorite musician in the Mountain Empire in both 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 by the readers of Marquee Magazine, performs across the area solo and with his band, the Upsetters.

Charlie, a Tennessee native since 1979, has gone from playing in strip clubs and bars to playing in nursing homes, festivals and he returns to Jonesborough again and again.

"I always feel like I'm at home when I'm in Jonesborough," Lightnin' Charlie said to the crowd. And you could almost feel them agree that, at his show, they feel the same way.