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I had an early-ish show the next day as well, and by Monday I was cruising. I played four shows in all, plus three with Bettye, leaving plenty of time for seeing bands and hanging out and meeting lots of cool folks. And eating.

Other doors that opened from this experience: The Daytona Blues Fest was a blast. After a seven- or eight-hour drive from a gig in South Carolina, I opened the back door of my hotel room to ocean waves. That was sweet. I played early the next afternoon and was treated great by the fans, promoters, and crew.

The Hot Springs Blues Fest was another great hang. Again, I was treated fine and had everything I needed to do my thing. In my many years as keyboardist and music director for soul diva Bettye LaVette, I've played shows on six continents (gotta find a gig in Antarctica) and

I can say that the shows I was awarded because of the IBC were all top notch.

I should also mention the Kentucky Blues Fest, in western Kentucky. It was not an awarded show, but the presenter attended the finals in Memphis, saw me, and hired me. Great feat, nice when that happens.

Obviously, I'm very grateful for the opportunities I've been given by winning "the thing," as I've come to call it. I'm really grateful that The Blues Foundation exists. Most of my primary blues heroes are gone, and I imagine it takes a Herculean effort to continue the legacy of the music I love, putting a spotlight on new artists and fans. I'll be back in Memphis in January to pass my love to the next Mr. or Ms. Universe. Let's keep this thing going! Blues music lives! ✪



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