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## Country-Blues Runs Deep In Colin Linden's Blood

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By: [ChartAttack.com Staff](#)

Dressed in black and sporting a matching cowboy hat, **Colin Linden** arrives for his interview at True North's office looking like a blues legend from a bygone era. Not just any blues period, but that of the 1920s and depression-era country-blues, which were made colourful by characters such as **Robert Johnson**, **Son House** and **Skip James**.



Colin Linden

It's not surprising that Linden looks the part, because the blues are at the root of everything he does — whether writing, playing or producing. "When I pick up a guitar, that's what comes out," he reveals.

"Whether I'm producing a record for **Bruce Cockburn** or I'm performing on a country record in Nashville, the thing that informs my musical aesthetic is country-blues from the '20s and '30s."

For Linden's latest True North album, *Easin' Back To Tennessee*, the Toronto native returned exclusively to this magical milieu. "A lot of the songs on the new record I learned to play when I was in my teens," says the 45-year-old.

"As a kid, I always listened to rock 'n' roll music, but was drawn to the rootsier end of it. In the '60s, most of what was going on in rock 'n' roll was influenced by blues or country or both."

Linden was fortunate to get to know the larger-than-life blues legend **Howlin' Wolf** during the bluesman's final five years on the planet. Their initial encounter changed the wide-eyed 11-year-old's life. "On the very first day that I met him, he said, 'If you want to learn how to play this stuff, listen to who I listen to,'" Linden says.

"He told me about **Charley Patton** and the **Mississippi Sheiks**, and from that I learned about Son House and the whole scene of 1920s blues. It was such fascinating music to me, and that's when I began to want to learn to play that stuff and practice six hours a day and just be completely consumed by it."

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On the new disc, which Linden describes as a companion piece to 2005's Southern Jumbo, the bluesman succeeded at bringing these old songs to life while ensuring that he didn't just copy the masters. "With every song I recorded, I wanted to have some element of it that was unique and that deviated from the original recording," he says.

"I wanted to feel that there was some type of improvisational spark in every song that made it on the album ♦ I was conscious of not wanting to imitate the originals as I spent so much time in my youth trying to do that. I felt comfortable in my skin with all these songs."

So why, 80 years after many of these songs were written, does Linden feel that they're still relevant to today's music fans?

"Artists could develop in a little bit more of a vacuum, and the country-blues artists were such ragingly unique stylists ♦ some of them would only know how to play in one key or only knew a few licks, but they would be their own. It was really geared to personal expression that way. I think the way these poets and artists communicated was completely timeless. There was nothing frivolous about it. Sometimes some of the places they sing about and the language is of the time. But even so, it's so poetic and so beautiful. And that aspect makes it timeless."

Linden will be the opening act for Colin James at shows across eastern Canada from January 27 to February 8 before playing a series of dates on his own from February 25 to May 27. You can catch him here:

- January 27-28 Halifax, NS @ Casino Nova Scotia
- January 29 Glace Bay, NS @ Savoy Theatre
- January 31-February 1 Gatineau, QC @ Theatre Du Casino Lac-Leamy
- February 6 Belleville, ON @ Empire Theatre
- February 7 Laval, QC @ Salle Andre-Mathieu
- February 8 Joliette, QC @ Centre Culturel Du Joliette
- February 25 Almonte, ON @ Old Town Hall
- March 11 Harrison Hot Springs, BC @ Town Hall
- March 22 Ottawa, ON @ Glebe Community Centre
- March 23 Montreal @ La Sala Rossa
- March 25 Kemptville, ON @ North Grenville Municipal Centre
- March 29 Montreal, QC @ Cafe Campus
- April 8 Sudbury, ON @ Sudbury Secondary School
- May 19 Huntsville, ON @ Algonquin Theatre
- May 20 Innisfil, ON @ Peter's Place
- May 27 Belleville, ON @ Belleville Club

—David McPherson



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