

Review for the UK BLUES CHALLENGE @ The Robin2, Wolverhampton - 12th November 2016

By Rosy Greer - Lancashire Blues Archive

The poster for the UK Blues Challenge 2016 features a collage of photos of various blues artists on the left side. The main text on the right reads: 'UK BLUES IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE ROBIN 2 PROUDLY PRESENT' at the top, followed by 'THE 3RD UK BLUES CHALLENGE' in large blue letters. Below that, it says 'SATURDAY 12 NOVEMBER 2016' and lists the winners: 'DOVE & BOWEEVIL * KAZ HAWKINS' and 'REBECCA DOWNES * WILLE & THE BANDITS'. Ticket information is given as 'TICKETS: £10 adv | £12 door'. The venue is 'AT THE ROBIN 2' at '20-28 Mount Pleasant, Bilston, West Midlands WV14 7LJ'. A note states: 'The winner will be invited to represent the UK at the European & International Blues Challenges in 2017'. Contact information for tickets is provided: 'For tickets, call: 01902 401211 or buy online: therobin.co.uk www.UKBLUES.org'. A small 'UK BLUES' logo is in the bottom right corner of the poster.

<http://www.ukblues.org/>

At the fantastic venue of the **Robin2** at Bilston, Wolverhampton, four bands/artists were selected in a nomination process which saw more than 250 people from across the blues spectrum in the UK being invited to take part. Those selected were **Dove & Boweevil**, **Kaz Hawkins**, **Rebecca Downes** and **Wille & The Bandits**.

The winners are invited to represent the UK at the **7th European Blues Challenge**, which takes place in Horsens, Denmark on 6th, 7th & 8th April 2017 and also the **33rd International Blues Challenge** in Memphis, Tennessee, which runs from 31st January to 4th February 2017. A panel of prestigious judges, from far reaches of the blues fraternity, had an incredibly hard job on their hands to choose a winner, as calibre and diversity of the bands was high.

First on the stage were **Wille & The Bandits**. Hailing from the Southwest, they gave a highly charged performance. The guys continue to raise their game, musically and with release of their new album 'Steal' due in the new year, their style is totally unique. They cannot be categorised as they cross the boundaries of so many genres, with elements of blues, and roots rock falling into the 'alternative' with a freshness of sound which sets them apart. The musicianship is of par excellence with Will Edwards fronting the band on exceptional guitar and lap slide with raw and passionate vocals. One of the most incredible bass players I have seen of late, Matt Brooks, plays a six string bass as a lead and also a bespoke upright bass. Andrew Naumann, who's individual style deservedly earned him the title of Drummer Of the Year in the British Blues Awards 2016, gave us some technically brilliant and creative drumming, adding to the whole ambiance of the performance of this exceptional band.



Wille & the Bandits <http://www.willeandthebandits.com/>

The second band on stage were **Dove and Boweevil**, from Norfolk. With a mix of roots, soul and Southern rock, they showed an intensity and passion for the music they played. Fronted by Lauren Dove on classic vocals, Mark 'Boweevil' Howes on guitar with Paul Williams on bass, Paul Weston on drums and Mojo on keys. A great set from a superb band.



Dove & Boweevil <http://doveandboweevil.co.uk/>

Kaz Hawkins and her band were next to take to the boards. From Northern Ireland they certainly came in with a bang, which continued throughout the set. Kaz, fronting the band on powerful vocals and guitar, is certainly a lady with presence. She has been compared to Etta James and Janis Joplin and was ably supported by her band. As a finalist for Female Vocalist of the Year 2016 in the British Blues Awards, I can certainly see why she has caused such a stir. With high energy, their music spanned the blues genres from soul and roots to classic blues and rockabilly. The band have great stage charisma which works well on a big stage and the set was incredibly well received by the audience.



Kaz Hawkins Band <http://kzhawkins.com/>

The final artist of the evening was Birmingham based, **Rebecca Downes** and her band. Voted Female Vocalist of the Year and Emerging Artist of the Year 2016 in the British Blues Awards, she came with an outstanding pedigree. Rebecca certainly didn't disappoint as she belted out a variety of blues drenched numbers with powerful vocals that could earn her the title of Little Miss Dynamite. On vocals and guitar, she was well supported by her band of excellent musicians. She has had considerable success with her album 'Believe' released earlier this year. The main influence of their music is blues, with elements of rock, soul, funk and jazz, giving a variety which keeps the audience enthralled. An excellent performance from an excellent band.



Rebecca Downes Band <http://www.rebeccadownes.com/>

The judges had an incredibly difficult job, but working on given criteria they were able to make a decision and the prestigious award went to Kaz Hawkins and Band. There has to be an 'outstanding applause' to the rest of the artists performing, who were selected from the multitudes of bands on the working circuit, so high acclaim to all of them. With many thanks also, to **Upton Blues Festival** who sponsored the event and to the **UK Blues Federation** for organising.

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