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God, Goats, and Guitars

**By Pete Sardon** PHOTOGRAPHY © COURTESY EG KIGHT

Kight grew up in a household drenched in country music, began performing for money during the ninth grade, opened shows for country music legends like George Jones and Jerry Lee Lewis, and sang many times on TNN's Nashville Now. But Kight's country music world turned up side down in 1995 when she heard Koko Taylor for the first time. Like everyone bitten by the blues bug, Kight felt reborn by its honesty and understood this was the musical truth she'd always wanted. Kight left comfortable country music world and accepted the challenge to start over. With every album since, Kight has distinguished herself as one of the finest songwriters in the blues. Like the best Robert Cray songs, she takes simple situations and universalizes them. With the release of *The Trio Sessions*, Kight continues to demonstrate a mature sensibility as both a musician and songwriter. With a stripped down acoustic approach, Kight's messages are delivered without the clutter of extensive instrumentation. She writes compelling songs and then employs the vocal methods needed to tell her stories with powerful emotion, like Taylor, so the audience connects. At the same time, EG has published a children's book titled, Things I Learned From A Goat.

**Blues Music Online:** What was it like learning to play the guitar from your grandmother?

**EG Kight:** I had the coolest grandma, who was so kind and loving to me. She was a Godly woman and I learned so much about everything from her. She kept me for my parents to work. She loved music and could play both the piano and the guitar a little bit.

I was quite young when I got interested in the guitar, and of course Grandma was right there to help with it. I was little for my age, and the guitar was nearly as big as I was! There was a path between our house and Grandma's house, and at any given time you'd find me holding a doll in one hand and dragging the guitar behind me with the other.

**Blues Music Online:** What tunes did she teach you and what type of guitar was it?

EG Kight: She started showing me some chords on mostly gospel songs. I remember that the first song was "The Old Rugged Cross". Later we worked on Mother Mabel Carter's "Wildwood Flower" My mama was offered a contract in gospel music when I was an infant, but she turned it down to be a wife and mother. My mama's brother gave me my first guitar. It was a small acoustic, but I can't remember the brand. He had a rock 'n' roll band in high school, and they would rehearse at my grandparents' house. They would play songs by Elvis, James Brown, the Coasters, Little Richard, and all the cool cats during that time. I would sit in the corner on the floor and take it all in. I was in awe and looking back they were a great influence on me getting into music. Around the time I was in the fourth grade, my parents bought me a Silvertone guitar from Sears and Roebuck. I believe it cost \$17.95. I learned a lot on that little guitar. And I still have it, hanging on the wall in my office.

**Blues Music Online:** When did your life force compel you to become a working musician?

**EG Kight:** I believe I knew I was meant to be a performer from the time I was four years



old when I sang my first solo in church. Mama said that when I finished the song I bowed to the congregation, and she knew right then that I would probably be an entertainer.

I started getting paid for performing when I was around 16 years old. It was mostly civic meetings and city events. But then I started getting more and more invitations to do some shows. I opened for Jerry Lee Lewis at the Macon Coliseum when I was 19, and in my early 20s, I was hired as a vocal instructor for Burgess Meredith who had a singing part in a movie they were filming in Macon, *Mr. Griffith And Me*. And around that time I also got to sing some Dixieland Jazz with Pete Fountain's band a couple of times. Yes, I've always loved performing.

**Blues Music Online:** You favor Taylor guitars. Can you share with us which model you use and how you made their brand your choice?

**EG Kight:** I've played many different guitars through the years but Taylors just seem to fit me to a tee. I started out with a 312ce, then played a 712ce for a long time. A few years back, I tried out a GS Mini Koa and fell in love with the little thing! It's a smaller guitar, which fits me better, and it fits in the overhead on a plane a lot better, too. I initially planned to just use it for travel, but the more I played it, I couldn't put it down! I play it all the time now, and used it when I recorded my latest album. It has a smooth low end, which fits in perfectly with my trio.

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Blues Music Online: Which guitar do you favor when playing electric?

**EG Kight:** I love my Fender Stratocaster. It's one I've used for electric shows for many years. It's a red sparkle. Michael Burks had one just like it.

**Blues Music Online:** You have a very listenable voice. When did you start singing and, besides Koko Taylor, what other vocalists do you enjoy?

**EG Kight:** Thank you. I started writing songs as a teen and was starting to get serious about my music then. I started doing live shows when I was 16. I started working shows after high school graduation. And even though I owned my own day care business for several years called, "Miss Songbird's", I spent many weekends on stage somewhere.

I sang mostly country and pop music in my shows, eventually adding some Phoebe Snow and Bonnie Raitt tunes. Then I heard the powerful voice of Koko Taylor. She touched me deeply by the feeling she put into her songs. She felt it all over, from her head to her toes, and she made me feel it too. There are so many vocalists that I love. I've always loved Elvis, Patsy Cline, Linda Ronstadt, Eva Cassidy, Lady Gaga, kd lang, Merle Haggard, Phoebe Snow, Bonnie Raitt, Dorothy Moore, and Etta James. The list could go on and on. There are just too many to name.

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I have many good friends in the business that are awesome, and I love it when we're able to share a stage and sing together. And I co-produced two albums for Lisa Biales. She's an amazing vocalist, and we formed a duo called the "Peach Pickin' Mamas," and played shows together for a little while. We had a lot of fun on stage, trading songs, and harmonizing with each other.

Blues Music Online: Tell our readers about your love and admiration of Koko Taylor.

**EG Kight:** When I fell in love with Koko's music, I had no idea I'd ever get to meet her. But, about a year after I first got one of her cassette tapes, I got to meet her in a small club in Chattanooga, Tennessee. I got to the venue hours before they opened their doors and sat in stunned silence about five feet from the stage as she and her band put on a show. She absolutely blew me away!

After the show, I begged the club manager to please let me speak to her. I was relentless, so he finally gave in and let me in his office to see her. I was so excited, and without hardly taking a breath, I spent several minutes telling her what she had meant to me and everything I ever wanted her to know. I just knew she'd think I was a crazy fan, but she was so kind, and gracious, and before long she was reaching into her handbag, pulling out a business card. She handed it to me and invited me to call her any time.



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If I ever got discouraged, all I had to do was call Koko, and she would lift me up. I flew to Chicago several times to be with her, at a couple of birthday parties, her bachelorette party, and her wedding.

She even surprised me one evening when I was performing in Huntsville, Alabama. I was just getting ready to take the stage and looked up, and she was standing there, smiling from ear to ear. She could tell I was stunned, so she reached out and grabbed me and said "It's me! It's me!" She knew she'd pulled off the best surprise ever!

I was a bit nervous to perform a show in front of the Queen of the Blues, and I was sort of in a daze, but I somehow managed to get through it. It meant the world to me that she'd take time out of her busy schedule to come catch my show. I was so honored. And I'll never forget it.

Koko believed in me enough that she recorded one of my songs on her last two albums. I remember while I was driving through Atlanta one day, she called and sang one of my songs she was going to record to see if it sounded okay. I said, "Koko, don't you know if you sang 'my dog has fleas' I'd love it!" We both laughed, and she went on to record "Fuel To Burn" on her *Royal Blue* album and "Bad Rooster" on her *Old School* album.

Koko was a kind, loving, very thoughtful woman who had a heart of gold. I think about her every day and miss her terribly.

## Blues Music Online: Besides your deep love of and influence by Koko Taylor, what other music/musicians have influenced your current musical direction?

**EG Kight:** I've been influenced by such a variety of singers and musicians. I love the acoustic artists like Doug MacLeod, Lightnin' Hopkins, Dolly Parton and her simple way of telling a story, and Willie Nelson, his guitar playing and the standards he sings. Some other artists that I'm listening to now and really diggin' are Brittany Howard and Larkin Poe. And I'm also really into Christone "Kingfish" Ingram's music.

**Blues Music Online:** Ian Fleming said, "You only live twice. Once when you are born and when you stare death in the face." Having overcome a potentially fatal illness, how has this affected your outlook on life now that you have gained "irreversible knowledge" about yourself?

**EG Kight:** I always say that "God, Goats, and Guitars" have helped me get through many hard times.

My faith in God has always been my rock. My goats give me a sweet, loving distraction from life's difficulties. And my music has always soothed my soul.

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And getting a second chance at life, like I have, teaches you to look at life differently and not sweat the little things, to look at what's really important in your life and stay away from the negatives. Negativity will only bring you down. I've been reminded, in the most profound way, that life is short, so we need to spend our time with the people and things that bring us joy.

I still live on land that belonged to my great-granddaddy. I love the earth, the trees, the pond, the birds, and all the other critters. I'm a country girl for sure, and I love spending time in nature. It's good medicine, too, and good inspiration for writing songs. For years I've been surrounded by caring, unselfish people who have "loved" me back to health, along with my precious family. I am so blessed.

**Blues Music Online:** I was raised with a goat farm at the end of our block and they are interesting animals. How did you get involved with your love of goats? Please tell us some interesting things about them.

**EG Kight:** I had a pet goat when I was around nine or ten years old. I would dress that little nanny with beads and a hat, and folks would come from all around to see her. She was quite the attention-getter. I guess you could say I've always loved goats. They're natural entertainers, goofy, smart, gymnastic, loving, and yet sometimes aggravating (like some people). I find them to be great stress relievers. Someone asked me recently about the expense of feeding them and taking care of them. It's quite a lot, but like I told him, it's cheaper than having to buy medication!

**Blues Music Online:** You have written a book for children about goats. Will you share with us how this came about? Are there future books in your well of knowledge?

**EG Kight:** When the pandemic hit and touring stopped, I finally had time to finish something I had started a couple years ago, a goat book! As most of my friends and fans know, I love photography, and I take pictures of my goats all the time. I usually have my phone or camera around when I'm with them. I try to catch them doing something comical or loving, and quite often I'll post their picture on Facebook. I started noticing that the goat posts were getting more attention than anything else I was posting, so I decided it might be time to make a children's picture book.

That's when *Things I've Learned From A Goat* was born. The photos of my goats spoke to me and made it easy to write. In fact, it was as if the goats were writing it themselves. They give advice like "be kind," "be yourself," "enjoy your friends," "keep a song in your heart," and on and on. It's also good advice for big "kids." The book has been a success, so I'm thinking about doing another one. You can't help but smile when you see the pictures, and Lord knows we all need something to make us smile these days.

**Blues Music Online:** *The Trio Sessions* is a stellar CD. Would you consider recording another CD with the same two musicians as the chemistry on this CD is quite evident?

**EG Kight:** Thank you for the kind words! The two guys in my trio, Gary Porter, my drummer and percussionist, and Ken Wynn, my guitarist, have worked with me for over 20 years in my band. In fact, you can hear them playing on several of my records. In 2018, I had the idea of going back to my roots and playing more of an acoustic sound, so I talked to them about it and they were on board and excited about the possibility.

Being brought up in the church, with my Mama singing in a trio for years, I've always loved harmony. So I kept working with Gary and Ken and had them to step outside their comfort zones and do some background vocals. And they did great! I think this is what makes my trio a little different. It's stripped down, simple, acoustic, with lots of harmony.

We were really doing well before Covid hit, and the fans seemed to be digging the new sound. Our schedule was picking up and we were all excited about a tour coming up but then the pandemic put a stop to that!

I have three covers on the album, and they may not know it yet, but the fans actually picked those songs. I listen to my audiences and pay attention to all of their requests. And these three covers are requested a lot at my shows, so they made it onto the album. I feel sure we'll make another album together. I love playing with these guys. I just need to write some more songs for it!

**Blues Music Online:** If a CD tells a story, what is the overall concept or story this of this new record?

**EG Kight:** I guess you could say this album is just about life, whether it's getting burned in a relationship, "ain't gonna touch that stove again," or having the courage to get out of a bad relationship and "Feelin' a Healin'," "Falling" in love when you least expect it, or being lonely because you've been "Alone Too Long." It's scenarios that we all go through sometimes.

Blues Music Online: Can you explain the teamwork aspect of this new record?

**EG Kight:** I worked with a young man, Sean Williams, in his little studio, and he just put us at ease from the moment we started. Gary, Ken, and I got in a circle and played like we would on stage. Sean later added some bass on some of the songs, but there weren't many overdubs. The boys and I have played so long with each other that we can tell what the other one is thinking, and we just go for it. Not only are these guys great musicians, they're such wonderful people on and off the stage.

**Blues Music Online:** Describe your songwriting technique and how you formulate the tunes.

EG Kight: I get ideas from everywhere, TV, reading, looking at greeting cards, the

newspaper, or listening to something someone says. And a lot of song ideas come when I'm walking around on my land or walking down the road by my house. I write down ideas all the time. Sometimes I come up with a melody first, maybe something that's cool that I haven't done before, and sometimes the lyrics come first. I write a lot of songs by myself. And I've been blessed to co-write many songs with Tom Horner who lives near Chattanooga. He and I were nominated for a Blues Music Award a few years back for Song of the Year. He's my go-to guy for co-writing. And I was blessed to write one song on this record with Johnny Neel. He played with the Allman Brothers for a while and has been in the business a long time. He was a joy to work with and such a good writer. I'd love to write some more with him.

Blues Music Online: What are the blues traditions that you are most influenced by?

**EG Kight:** I really gravitate toward gospel blues. Just listening to Mahalia Jackson sing a capella brings tears to my eyes. And what about the great Sister Rosetta Tharpe! Like Mahalia, her singing and guitar playing make you feel it. Then there's the groove of Jimmy Reed and then the growling of my mentor, Koko Taylor. I asked her one time how she did that and she said "It just comes out of me!" I should say how much I love Willie Dixon's writing, too. I would've loved to sit down and write with him.

**Blues Music Online:** As a woman succeeding in the music business, what advice do you have for young girls today who are looking for a career in this business.

**EG Kight:** It's important to get an education or learn a trade, so you'll always have something to fall back on. You just never know what might happen. Who would've thought we'd be going through a pandemic, and the entire world would be impacted?

And don't think you can't do something because you're a woman. Go for it! You must follow your heart to find true happiness. This business isn't easy, and you'll get a lot more "no's" than "yes's." But like the Eric Bibb song says, "Don't let nobody bring your spirit down." You have to be tough, and learning to be that way comes with time. And you have to persevere and keep the faith. Like my song says, "Don't Give Up."

**Blues Music Online:** You possess an amazing God-given talent, EG, and thank you so much for sharing with us.

EG Kight: Thank you Pete! I appreciate your interest in my music!

# THE EG KIGHT TRIO



**BIO** EG Kight is "one of the blues' most respected vocalists," according to the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*. Over the years she has emerged as a preeminent voice in roots music. And *CityBeat Cincinnati* writes that Kight is "a cross between Bonnie Raitt's bourbon stung growl and Phoebe Snow's emotive warble."

With her rich vocals, well-crafted songs, and inimitable sense of humor, Kight has entertained on stages around the world, and has received various music industry nominations, including six for *Female Artist of the Year*, three for *Song of the Year*, and one for *Album of the Year*. A notable songwriter, many artists have recorded Kight's songs, including Koko Taylor and Dorothy Moore. Her songs have ended up on Grammy nominated albums, on four major TV networks, and in a movie.

Kight has performed with her band at many festivals and concerts through the years, and has a successful solo show. Recently she decided to do something a little different, and get back to her acoustic roots, so she formed a trio with a couple of her band members - percussionist Gary Porter and guitarist Ken Wynn.

When asked what makes this trio unique, Kight stated "This new trio excites me in a way I haven't felt before. The three of us have performed together in my Georgia band for over 20 years, and Gary and Ken are like brothers to me. This stripped down version allows for a tighter show with sweet harmonies, harp, percussion, drums, dobro, and acoustic and electric guitars. We're having a great time venturing out into some new musical areas, and the audiences seem to love it! We're getting great responses, and we can't wait until the next show!"



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## ALBUM REVIEW

#### Various Artists

Mick Fleetwood & Friends-Celebrate the Music of Peter Green and the Early Years of Fleetwood Mac BMG



Back in the late 60s, Fleetwood Mac wasn't just another solid UK act influenced by American blues musicians; they were one of the best, if not THE best of an impressive batch, which included the Rolling Stones. That was in large part due to the phenomenal musicianship of the late frontman/founder/lead guitarist Peter Green. He started Fleetwood Mac in the latter part of 1967-early '68 with drummer Mick Fleetwood and bassist John McVie, both fellow refugees from John Mayall's Bluesbreakers. That was the beginning of a long and often twisted saga, one that is still playing itself out. Green's association with the band was relatively brief though; he left in early 1970 after the legendary *Then Play On* album and tour, arguably the highlight of his tenure with the band. Drug and psychological issues plagued him for decades, even after a late career return with the Splinter Group, and his playing never regained the fire,

imagination and sheer intensity of his work with Mac. In February 2020, before the COVID pandemic shut down live shows, Mick Fleetwood organized this rather awkwardly titled tribute to his old band mate Green. The guitarist passed in July of that year.

While neither Green nor original bandmate John McVie take part in this 2 ½ hour concert, other previous and current Mac members are on board. They include guitarist Rick Vito (one of the evening's backline band), Christine McVie, Jeremy Spencer, and even newer Mac recruit Neil Finn. Other guests such as Johnny Lang (another featured backline player who remains on stage most of the night), Billy Gibbons, Mayall, Pete Townshend, Steven Tyler, Noel Gallagher, David Gilmour and others also appear. Drummer Zak Starkey joins Fleetwood on a second kit, perhaps not entirely necessary considering how dominant a musician Fleetwood is.

It's an impressive lineup and this predominantly blues show brings out the best and most humble aspects of these musicians (well except for showboat Tyler) as they dig into Green's rich early catalog. All the songs you would expect are accounted for, most in versions that, if not besting the originals, maintain the high standards set by Green in his writing, singing and playing. Jeremy Spencer's subtle slide work on "The Sky is Crying" is at least up to his playing in the '60s, and perhaps better. Vito and Lang are in top form for "Rolling Man," "Homework," "Sandy Mary," a superb and poignant "Need Your Love So Bad," and a crackling seven minute "Black Magic Woman." The latter extends its final shuffle into an explosive closing, showing just how potent, powerful and in the pocket Fleetwood's drumming has always been.

Tyler and Gibbons rip into the sleazy "Rattlesnake Shake" and "Oh Well (Pt.1)," Gilmour joins for lovely, refined takes on the seldom covered instrumentals "Oh Well (Pt. 2)" and especially a sublime lap steel lead on "Albatross," a song as dreamy as anything Pink Floyd played. A brief two tune acoustic set in the middle of the gig features Gallagher, who acquits himself remarkably well considering he doesn't actually rate as a blues musician. Townshend fronts "Station Man," the only non-Green selection of the night, mentioning how he ripped off the riff for his own "Won't Get Fooled Again."

As usual for these events, the entire lineup joins for a shambling closing which is eight minutes of "Shake Your Moneymaker." With about eight guitarists each soloing, it's not surprisingly a bit of a mess, but a heartfelt one. Everyone is clearly enjoying themselves, even the notoriously stone-faced Bill Wyman.

Camera work, lighting and audio is all professionally done which helps make this a consistently enjoyable visual experience. A double CD is also available but the real thrill is watching these musicians interacting with each other and bonding over the songs and performances of Peter Green.

"It's a dream come true," says Fleetwood in his closing remarks to this one-off extravaganza, one that is unlikely to be replicated. It's required viewing for any fan of Green's, which is likely any fan of the blues.

- Hal Horowitz



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#### **The Last Soul Company: The Malaco Records Story** By Rob Bowman Malaco Press



The Last Soul Company is an outsized volume, measuring 12x12 inches and weighing a couple of pounds, telling the story of Malaco Records. It is illustrated with scores of never-before-seen photos and author Rob Bowman's vibrant text tracing the label's more than half-century history of bringing Southern African-American music to the world from its headquarters in Jackson, Miss.

It's an improbable story, as Bowman says, that a company that began by booking black musicians for white frat-house parties at Ole Miss – where only a few years before students had rioted when James Meredith enrolled – should not only survive and but prosper. It's a rewarding story.

Malaco Records started in 1967 as an offshoot of Malaco Attractions, which college students Tommy Couch and Wolf Stephenson launched as undergraduates at the University of Mississippi in Oxford. In the label's early days, Couch, Stephenson, and third partner Mitchell Malouf took local artists into a makeshift studio and then licensed the recorded results to established companies, initially placing singles and a Mississippi Fred McDowell album, *I Do Not Play No Rock 'n' Roll,* with Capitol, the home to the Beatles and the Beach Boys. The album surprised everyone by earning a Grammy nomination.

In 1970, the Malaco principals worked out a deal with New Orleans producer Wardell Quezergue (Fats Domino, Professor Longhair, Earl King), who offered to supply their new label with artists in return for studio time and session musicians. The first of Quezergue's crew arrived in a borrowed school bus. Among those aboard were King Floyd who recorded "Groove Me" and Jean Knight who cut "Mr. Big Stuff," both in their first week at Malaco. Each tune became a No. 1 hit on R&B charts, after Atlantic and Stax initially passed on them, for Malaco on its own new Chimneyville label.

The Malaco founders quickly capitalized on their chart successes, signing such soon-to-be famous artists as Little Milton, Denise LaSalle, Latimore, Johnnie Taylor, Z.Z. Hill, and the already established Bobby "Blue" Bland. Over subsequent decades, Malaco has flourished while other labels that focused on African-American music (Chess, VeeJay, Jewel, Ace, King, etc.) have gone out of business or lost their independence (Motown, Atlantic, Stax). The Malaco recording empire today includes the world's largest gospel music catalog, numerous Christian rock recordings, and a vintage jazz label while it continues to issue R&B and blues recordings. It even acquired the famed Muscle Shoals Sound Studio in 1985.

Malaco's success story gets a full outing in *The Last Soul Company*, a sumptuous new book put together by Grammy-winner Bowman (*Soulsville, U.S.A. – The Story of Stax Records*). He is the director of York University's graduate program in Ethnomusicology & Musicology in Toronto and has a long history of working on programs for the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and providing liner notes for such prestigious releases as the 50th anniversary reissue of the Rolling Stones' *Their Satanic Majesties Request*. Peter Guralnick, best know for his fine books on Elvis, Sam Phillips, and Sam Cooke, provides a foreword.

– Bill Wasserzieher



### APRIL 2021 Downoad the 12 songs at:

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Thanks to all the artist who contributed their music to this Song Sampler. All the songs are available for download at the BluesMusicStore.com.

1) Steve Cropper - "Fire It Up" from the album Fire It Up on Provogue Records

2) Ghalia Volt - "Meet Me In My Dreams" from the album One Woman Band on Ruf Records

3) Clarence Spady - "Surrender" from the album Surrender on Nola Blue Records

4) New Moon Jelly Roll Freedom Rockers – "Blues For Yesterday" from the album Volume 2 on Stony Plain Records

5) The WildRoots - "Move Along Part 2" on the album Wildroots Sessions Vol. 1 on WildRoots Records

6) Maria Muldaur with Tuba Skinny – "Let's Get Happy Together" from the album Let's Get Happy Together on Stony Plain Records

7) Quinn Sullivan - "How Many More Tears" from the album Wide Awake on Provogue Records

8) Chickenbone Slim - "Vampire Baby" from the album Sleeper on Self-released

9) Billy Jones & Delta Blues Outlaws- "My Love Is Real" from the Self-titled album on Delta Blues Records

10) Ryan Perry, Whitney Shay, and Jeremiah Johnson – "Ain't Afraid To Eat Alone" from the album *Blues* Caravan 2020 on Ruf Records

11) Ally Venable - "Heart Of Fire" from the album Heart Of Fire on Ruf Records

12) Early Times & The High Rollers!- "Return Of The Queen" from album The Corner on VizzTone Label Group

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