



Editorial Review

"A fascinating film documenting the far-reaching impact of the blues on society, focusing on one of its most talented champions. Highly Recommended."

DEEP ROOTS: THE ART AND MUSIC OF BILL STEBER AND FRIENDS

DEEP ROOTS: THE ART AND MUSIC OF BILL STEBER AND FRIENDS is a 2025 documentary directed by the noted musicologist and filmmaker Robert Mugge. Now available on DVD, it is intended as a companion piece to his 1991 film DEEP BLUES.

It is a joyous portrait of Bill Steber from Centerville Tennessee, a real blues renaissance man. Steber is a photographer, raconteur, storyteller, artist, writer, musician and sculptor – all of his many talents devoted to one thing – chronicling and celebrating blues culture in the American South, concentrating on Mississippi and Tennessee.

Starting out as a photojournalist, he expanded his artistic reach to include art installations utilizing found objects, like the dirt and soil of the Delta, branches of trees, cotton buds, deer skeletons and more, all from places with a solid connection to the story of the blues. Examples are the remnants he saved of Junior Kimbrough's juke joint which burned to the ground in 2000, and detritus from the site of the house where Robert Johnson died. Steber is an articulate and entertaining interviewee, his enthusiasm and passion for the blues coming across with every word. He also makes music with his three bands – the Jake Leg Stompers, the Hoodoo Men, and the Stoop Down Rounders.

The film starts with an extended live set by the Stompers at the Linebaugh public library in Murfreesboro TN. The band step out playing music from the mid 1920's and 30's, incorporating blues, jug band, country and gospel, with Steber gleefully pointing out the connections between all of these genres and their influence on rock and roll and the music of today. Steber proves to be a capable singer and multi-instrumentalist, shining on banjo, guitar, harp and even a saw!

Also, in his home base of Murfreesboro, the Baldwin photographic gallery at Middle Tennessee State University shows an impressive exhibition of Steber's work, incorporating his photos, multi-media projects, and even a recreation of a sharecropper's shack. It is a particular source of pride for Steber, as he is an alum.

The second half takes place mostly in the Delta, with Steber's visits to Clarksdale, the Highway 61 blues museum in Leland, and a juke joint festival where the Stoop Down Rounders play a set of original blues numbers.

All in all, a fascinating film documenting the far-reaching impact of the blues on society, focusing on one of its most talented champions.

Highly Recommended. - M. Hudson for The Sound View.