

# THE COUNTRY BLUES TOUR



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

California  
PRESENTERS

*The Country Blues Tour* is a multi-generational exploration of acoustic southern blues, **curated by the National Council for the Traditional Arts (NCTA) and presented in partnership with California Presenters, Inc.**, that spans both the geographical and musical roots of deeply rooted American traditions. It brings together, for the first time, an exceptional group of American country blues masters. The program will feature pre-blues Mississippi fife and drum ensemble **Sharde Thomas and the Rising Star Fife and Drum**, Piedmont blues guitarist and songwriter **Warner Williams**, Mississippi hill country bluesman **Reverend John Wilkins**, blues harmonica wizard **Phil Wiggins** joined by buckdancer **Willette “Willie” Hinton**.

**The Country Blues Tour will be available for the 2012/2013 season.**

**Sharde Thomas and the Rising Star Fife and Drum** infuse a centuries-old tradition with youthful energy and spirit. Performed on the cane fife accompanied by bass and snare drums, the pre-blues African American fife and drum band has its roots colonial America and both the military and social history of our nation. When NEA National Heritage Fellow Othar Turner, the oldest living fife and drum practitioner, died in 2003 at age 95, many believed that this tradition would vanish. But today his legacy lives on with Othar’s 20-year-old granddaughter Sharde, who learned his songs, his fife-making craft and now leads his band.



**SHARDE THOMAS** PHOTO: VICTOR JOUVERT

Born and raised in Takoma Park, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, D.C., **Warner Williams**, age 80, is recognized as one of the best Piedmont blues guitarists in the nation and as a true American “songster”—an artist attuned to great songs, whatever their source. His father, mother and all of his eight brothers and three sisters played instruments and sang. By the time Williams reached his teens, he was playing regularly around the Washington, D.C. area in what was then a thriving street scene. Nick Spitzer, folklorist and host of PRI’s American Routes, declared: “Given this varied repertoire, one is tempted to call Warner Williams a musical almanac.” The talented “Mister Warner,” as he is affectionately known, has never chosen to be a full-time musician, but instead plays locally at house parties, community events and in church.



**WARNER WILLIAMS** PHOTO: MICHAEL G. STEWART

Mississippi bluesman **Reverend John Wilkins** is the second youngest of the seven children born to pre-war blues legend Robert Wilkins. Like his father, Rev. John Wilkins began his career playing for house parties, worked as a session guitarist in Memphis, and later turned to the church. Since 1983, he has been pastor of Hunters Chapel Missionary Baptist Church in Como, Mississippi. When not otherwise engaged with preaching or performing, Wilkins dons his black leather jacket and takes up his duties as chaplain of the King Riders Motorcycle Club. In Como, he’s known as the “Biker Preacher.”



**REV. JOHN WILKINS** PHOTO: AMOS HARVEY

**Phil Wiggins** is arguably America's foremost blues harmonica virtuoso. While rooted in the melodic Piedmont or "Tidewater" blues of the Chesapeake region, his mastery of the instrument transcends stylistic boundaries. Born in Washington D.C., Phil Wiggins began his musical career with some of Washington, D.C.'s leading blues artists including Archie Edwards, John Jackson and locally-noted slide guitarist and gospel singer Flora Molton. Wiggins achieved worldwide acclaim over three decades as one half of the premier Piedmont blues duo of Cephias & Wiggins. Since the death of guitarist and singer John Cephias in 2009, Phil brought his harmonica wizardry to bear in a variety of musical collaborations.



**PHIL WIGGINS** PHOTO: PETER HEDLUND

**Willette "Willie" Hinton** is master buckdancer, with dazzling footwork and charisma to match. He comes from the North Carolina Piedmont and his dance style reflects that heritage. Willie learned to dance from his mother, Algia Mae Hinton, a great country blues musician and dancer, who believes that music and dance are inseparable. Buckdance is a traditional Appalachian freestyle solo dance style with roots in Africa and Europe, particularly the British Isles, which emphasizes percussive rhythms created by the heel and toe. Often playfully competitive, it has long been a feature of rural dances and house parties. A precursor of tap, buckdance was popularized by minstrel performers in the late 19th century.

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### Tour Package

*The Country Blues Tour* package includes all costs for entourage travel and accommodations; audio engineers; excellent promotional materials including poster artwork and beautifully-designed educational program books for free distribution to all audience members. The tour can provide a variety of social media content to market and promote the concert. This can include YouTube videos, a customized YouTube channel highlighting tour musicians and behind-the-scenes content, interviews with the artists, and media articles that can be posted to your Facebook pages as well as Twitter feeds. The NCTA will also have a unique Facebook page created for the tour so all presenters can link to the page in order to access artist content, and connect with other venues, fans, and communities along the tour. Thoughtful curation and production will frame the program in ways that deepen understanding and appreciation of the artists and the tradition each represents. The tour is designed to play in venues of all sizes. As with all NCTA tours, *The Country Blues Tour* will offer top quality educational K-12 programs, master classes and workshops. NCTA will design outreach and residency activities tailored to the specific needs of each presenter's local community.

*The Country Blues Tour is produced by the National Council for the Traditional Arts in partnership with California Presenters.*

### About the NCTA

The National Council for the Traditional Arts (NCTA) is a private, not-for-profit corporation dedicated to the presentation and documentation of folk and traditional arts in the United States. Founded in 1933, it is the oldest folk arts organization in the nation. Its programs celebrate and honor arts that are deeply rooted cultural expressions - music, crafts, stories and dance passed on through time by families, communities, tribal, regional ethnic and occupational groups. The NCTA stresses quality and authenticity in presenting traditional artists to the public in festivals, tours, concerts, radio/TV, recordings, exhibitions and other programs.

### About California Presenters, Inc.

California Presenters was founded in 1985 as a statewide coalition of organizations committed to advancing professional touring and presenting of the performing arts. As such, California Presenters nurtures organizational leadership, professional development, and knowledge exchange in the performing arts. Twenty-five years later, California Presenters affirms this mission and promotes four core goals to support our field in a rapidly changing arts environment: annual presenter-to-presenter Artist Information Exchange; funding to support New Work artist tours to California Presenter members; advocacy at the regional, state and national level for the arts in California; and to support, nurture and develop leadership for new professionals in the presenting field.



[www.ncta.net](http://www.ncta.net)



[www.calpresenters.org](http://www.calpresenters.org)

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