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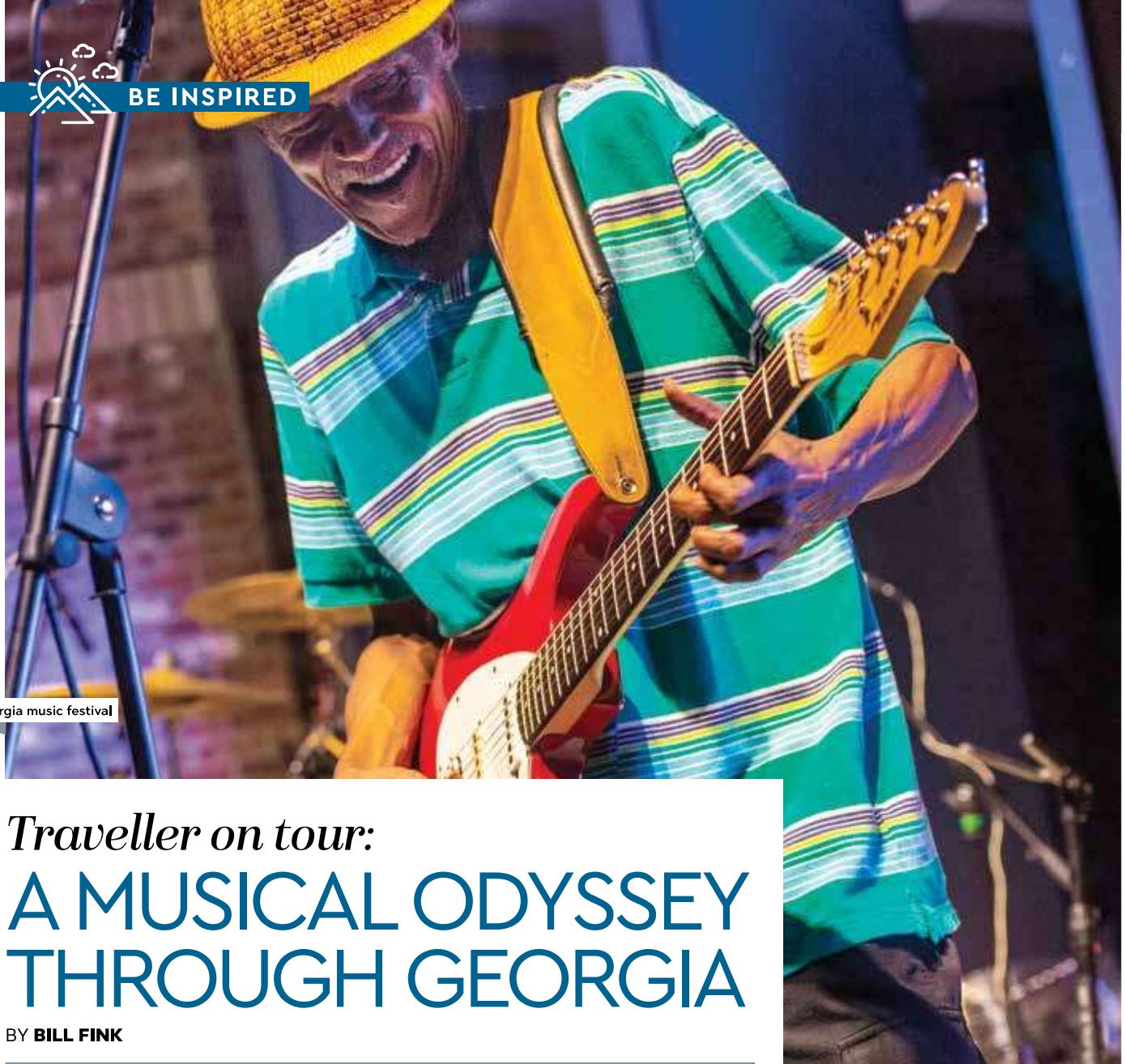
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Georgia music festival

Traveller on tour: A MUSICAL ODYSSEY THROUGH GEORGIA

BY **BILL FINK**

GORGIA HAS SOUL. And it starts with Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, the “Mother of Blues.” I saw it in her restored shotgun shack in Columbus and in the 1920’s-era sepia photos on the walls of her home-turned-museum. I felt it on the keys of her banged up piano, and heard it in the scratchy sounds of vintage 78 records; in the throaty, raunchy lyrics of *Deep Moaning Blues*, appropriate in the thick, humid air I breathed along the Chattahoochee River on the border of Alabama.

For one week, I travelled around Georgia and across musical genres, to experience life inside the ultimate jukebox of American sounds, from gospel and jazz to rock, soul, country and hip-hop. If it’s got a beat and you can dance to it, you’ll find it in Georgia.

ON THE OPPOSITE END OF THE spectrum from Ma, I followed preppy University of Georgia students crossing the “khaki line” in their college town of Athens to hear bands playing in legendary local venues like the 40 Watt Club. Athens launched the careers of the B-52s, REM, Widespread Panic and the Drive-By Truckers, so I kept my ears open, hoping to discover the great new sound of tomorrow playing in a dive bar, but still found time to go to the grand Georgia Theatre to catch a big name act.

“HEEEE-YOW!” SHOUTED DEANNA Brown Thomas, daughter of James Brown, as she led my bus tour in her late father’s hometown of Augusta, some 160 kilometres and 50 years away from the modern Athens music scene. “Daddy just *looved* the fried chicken at this here

corner shop.”

Our James Brown Family Tour brought us to the Augusta Museum of History where we viewed Brown’s funky stage costumes. “You know I TOLD daddy this jumpsuit was NOT something a 70-year-old man should be wearing,” she clucked. “But did he listen?! Oh no he didn’t. Zipped it open to his belly button, showing off all that chest hair.”

Riding through the sometimes gritty, depressed backroads of the home of the “Hardest Working Man in Show Business” gave me a feeling of just how hard the Godfather of Soul had to work to rise above his humble beginnings.

The Allman Brothers were humble too, begging for meals at H&H Soul Food Restaurant in Macon, when the then (literally) starving artists couldn’t

James Brown Statue



muster enough cash for lunch. When the Southern rock icons hit it big, they still visited the diner, as I did, to enjoy genuine Georgia fried chicken, collard greens and biscuits. Up the road a piece, the Allman Brothers' Tudor-style "Big House" is now a museum filled with band memorabilia and tours are given by life-long fans. In the attic, I grabbed one of the guitars lying about and eked out a few chords of *Ramblin' Man*. My tour guide visibly winced, but I happily imagined I was jamming with the boys back in the day.

GEORGIA MUSIC HERITAGE combines past, present and future in Atlanta, the capital and biggest city in the state. Atlanta's urban sounds of the "Dirty South" created hip-hop stars like Outcast, Ludacris and Young Jeezy, and continues with the more recent chart-topping successes of locals Young Thug and 2 Chainz, showing that the story of Georgia sound is still being written. I grabbed day-of tickets at big Atlanta venues including the Fox Theatre and Tabernacle and then caught some up-and-coming artists.

My only regret on my Georgia music odyssey? That I didn't have the time to continue criss-crossing the state to soak my soul in some of the dozens of different music festivals that happen year-round. But with a unique musical heritage of well over a hundred years, I know Georgia will offer encore presentations for as long as I want to return. 📍

Geoff L. Johnson, Visit Ugusta, Ralph Daniel

When you go

SUGGESTED ROUTE:

Start your tour in **Atlanta**. Catch a stadium headliner or an intimate live performance at one of the city's many small stage venues. Southern rock or hip-hop? How about both? Next, drive 174 kilometres southwest to **Columbus** to tour **Ma Rainey House and Blues Museum**. From Columbus, head 156 kilometres east to **Macon**. Join **Rock Candy Tours** for a two-hour melodic deep dive, visiting the homes, crash pads and haunts where Macon music history was written. Don't miss **The Allman Brothers Band Museum at The Big House** and before departing, catch a show at **Hummingbird Stage and Taproom** or **The Grand Opera House**. From Macon, drive 194 kilometres north-east to Augusta. Pay a visit to **Local Legends**, a permanent exhibit at the **Augusta Museum of History** which chronicles the famous personalities that made the city a musical epicentre. From Augusta, head west to **Athens** (152



The Allman Brothers Band Museum

kilometres). Drop by the visitor centre to grab a self-guided walking tour (or download the map in advance) to visit 24 hot spots rich with Athens music history. Unmissable highlights include **The 40 Watt Club**, **Morton Theatre** and **The Foundry**. End your road trip here or loop back to Atlanta, a distance of 115 kilometres from Athens.



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