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Making a Scene Presents an Interview with Debbie Bond

American Singer, guitar player and songwriter Debbie Bond has been performing for decades in the Alabama backwoods and is now a regular on the Southern US and European club and festival circuit. Influenced by raw juke joint blues and the famed sounds of Muscle Shoals, Debbie's impressive story includes years of performing with traditional Alabama blues musicians, like Johnny Shines, Eddie Kirkland, Willie King, Shar Baby, Little Jimmy Reed and more. Immersion in Alabama roots music has deeply flavored her guitar playing, soulful voice and original song writing, giving her a contemporary and original sound, with soul, blues, and jazz influences.

Debbie's collaboration with British born keyboard and harmonica player "Radiator" Rick has added a swampy New Orleans edge to her sound. Debbie is a blues activist and founder of the award-winning Alabama Blues Project, a non-profit dedicated to promoting and preserving the state's blues heritage. She is the recipient of numerous awards, including a "Keeping the Blues Alive Award" from the Blues Foundation, and a prestigious "Coming Up Taller Award" for her blues education work



with the Alabama Blues Project. She has been recognized by the Alabama Music Hall of Fame as a “Blues Achiever” and the national Blues Hall of Fame as a “Great Blues Artist”.

Ealing Blues Festival 2015



Debbie Bond was born in California to a musical family. Her father was a Baptist minister and mother the church choir director. When she was eight years old, her family moved to Europe but soon after her parents separated and her father returned to the U.S., while she remained in Europe to be raised by her mother along with her two brothers. The family lived a nomadic life in Europe and West Africa while her mother pursued her studies and field research in cultural anthropology. It was in Africa that she first heard and fell in love with African music and the American sounds of the sixties that were popular at the time, in Freetown, Sierra Leone. She began playing guitar at age twelve and her first solo

performance was on a Sierra Leonean TV show at age thirteen. She subsequently joined her first band while attending college in Brighton, England.

In 1979, Bond moved back to the US and settled in Alabama where she started working with many veteran blues masters, including the late, great [Johnny Shines](#). Together, they performed at regional clubs and festivals from 1981 until his death in 1992 and she appeared in the Johnny Shines PBS documentary “On and On.” She also worked alongside many other great Alabama bluesmen, including [Jerry “Boogie” McCain](#), [James Peterson](#), [Eddie Kirkland](#), [Sam Lay](#), [Little Jimmy Reed](#) and [Willie King](#). Inspired by Johnny Shines and the rich Alabama blues culture, in 1995 Bond co-founded the [Alabama Blues Project](#), an organization with the mission to promote and preserve the state’s blues heritage. That year she also toured England, Ireland, Scotland, Germany and Luxemburg opening for the Alabama duo [Little Whitt and Big Bo](#). Throughout this period, Bond continued to perform with her own Kokomo Blues Band at clubs and festivals in Alabama and Mississippi; including Birmingham’s City Stages, Kentuck Arts Festival, W.C. Handy Festival, the legendary Chukker and area juke joints.



In 1997 she was included on a live compilation, *Alabama Blues Showcase*, released by the Alabama Blues Society. 1998 saw the release of her debut album, *What Goes Around Comes Around*. In 2001 she was featured as one of the Alabama blues artists on Germany's Taxim Records compilation, *Blues from the Heart of Dixie*. With the Alabama Blues Project, she performed many "Blues in the Schools" programs and showcase concerts, often with Big Bo McGee until his untimely death in 2002. She returned to her studies during this period to enhance her blues education work and in 2002 received an MA in American Studies, specializing in the blues. That year she also received an Alabama/Georgia State Council on the Arts Apprenticeship Award to study guitar with Eddie Kirkland, with whom she often performed and presented school programs until his death in 2011.

In 2002 she restructured the award-winning Alabama Blues Project (ABP) into an educational

non-profit. The ABP school programs and showcases featured many of the great Alabama blues musicians with whom she regularly performed. Through the ABP she impacted thousands of students of all ages and received multiple arts and education awards, including a KBA from the Blues Foundation in 2004. Bond is also listed as an Alabama Music Hall of Fame Music Achiever.

It was also in 2002, through bluesman Willie King, that she met British keyboard and harmonica player, "Radiator" Rick Asherson. They soon formed a musical and life partnership, including getting married on Freedom Creek with Willie King as their best man. Together, they began touring with Willie King as members of his band, The Liberators, and also produced and recorded on his last two albums. Together they toured in the US, from backwoods house parties and juke joints to well-known venues and festivals, including King's own Freedom Creek Blues Festival in Old Memphis, AL, the Highway 61 Blues Festival in Leland, MS, Ground Zero Blues Club, the Sunflower Festival and the Juke Joint Festival in Clarksdale, MS, the great King Biscuit Festival in Helena, AR, and the Richmond Folk Festival in VA.

Overseas, they performed with King at many European festivals, including the Cognac Blues Passions Festival in Cognac, France, the Roots and Blues Festival in Parma, Italy, and the Blues 'n' Jazz festival in Rapperswil, Switzerland. They appeared in several films with King including the Dutch documentary *Down in the Woods*, and a PBS documentary. Bond and Asherson toured with Willie from 2003 until his untimely death in 2009. After King's death, Debbie Bond and "Radiator" Rick continued performing

in their own right as a duo as well as with band in the Southern US and Europe. They also continued presenting blues education programs and showcase performance with other notable and talented Alabama blues women and men in the state, such as Earl "Guitar" Williams, Caroline Shines (daughter of the late great Johnny



Shines), Shar Baby, Rachel Edwards, Sweet Claudette, B.J. Miller and B. J. Reed. Performances as a member of an Alabama Blues Women Showcase, ranged from Little Willie's Blues Club and the City of Mobile's Arts Alive Festival to the Ritz Theater in Muscle Shoals. The Alabama Bureau of Tourism declared 2011 to be the Year of Alabama Music and Debbie has featured in many Alabama music promotions, including The Oxford American, Southern Living Magazine and a PBS documentary on Alabama music.

The pair have continued to tour in the Southeast US as well as Europe at festivals, clubs, juke joints and songwriter listening rooms. They tour annually in Europe particularly on the UK blues club and festival circuit. UK shows include London's legendary 100 Club, the Ealing Blues Festival, Maverick Americana Festival, Blues on the Farm, Marlborough International Jazz and blues Festival and more. They have continued to release critically acclaimed albums of their own music: 2011, *Hearts Are Wild*; 2014, *That Thing Called Love*, recorded in Nashville; 2016, *Enjoy the Ride*, recorded in Muscle Shoals' famed Wishbone Studio. *Blues Without Borders*, a more international effort, mixed and recorded in Alabama, Baltimore and the UK, was released in the spring of 2021.