

# GUITAR SHORTY

WE THE PEOPLE

'DEFIANT ELECTRIC BLUES WITH PIERCING INTENSITY AND RAW VENOM THAT'LL LEAVE YOUR EARS SINGED' -CHICAGO TRIBUNE



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# 'A SUPERB BLUESMAN WHO CAN SCORCH YOUR EARS OFF WITH LETHAL LICKS AND HEAVYWEIGHT BLUES-ROCK GROOVES' - GUITAR ONE

Guitarist/vocalist and blues legend Guitar Shorty is a man of the people. With the ability to pack clubs and festivals as one of the blues' most celebrated live performers (even before he had any nationally available recordings) and now among the top-selling recording artists in the blues world, he is clearly the people's choice. Between his blistering, rocked-out guitar work and his fierce, soulful vocals, the power of his music is unmatched, and his perceptive and meaningful lyrics unique among modern bluesmen. Credited with influencing both Jimi Hendrix and Buddy Guy, Shorty has been electrifying audiences for five decades with his supercharged live shows and his incendiary recordings (beginning in 1957 with a Willie Dixon-produced single on the Cobra label). Through the years, Shorty has performed with blues and R&B luminaries like Ray Charles,

Sam Cooke, B.B. King, Guitar Slim and T-Bone Walker. Although he had recorded a handful of singles for a variety of labels, it wasn't until the 1990s that the wider world opened its collective ears to one of the blues' most exciting performers. His albums since then all received massive critical acclaim, and his legendary live performances have kept him constantly in demand all over the world. His 2004 Alligator Records debut, **WATCH YOUR BACK**, became the best received, best-selling album of his career. *GuitarOne* magazine said, "Guitar Shorty is a superb bluesman who can scorch your ears off with lethal licks and heavyweight blues-rock grooves." With his new CD, **WE THE PEOPLE**, he's prepared to continue what he's started, taking his music, and his fans, to deeper places and even greater heights.

Produced by Wyzard and Brian Brinkerhoff, **WE THE PEOPLE** finds Guitar Shorty singing and playing with ferocious urgency and a fierce righteousness. **WE THE PEOPLE** burns with heavy rock and roll fire from start to finish, putting Shorty's infectious energy and guitar pyrotechnics on full display. And more than ever before, his songs tell the story of the harsh realities of everyday life in terms both stark (*We The People*), pointed (*Cost Of Livin'*) and poignant (*Down That Road Again*). What he began with **WATCH YOUR BACK**, Shorty accelerates with **WE THE PEOPLE**, creating an album that is as memorable for its menacing guitar work and defiant vocals as it is for its incisive and wide-ranging stories.

Guitar Shorty was born David William Kearney on September 8, 1939 in Houston, Texas and raised in Kissimmee, Florida by his grandmother. He began playing guitar as a young boy, excited by the sounds of B.B. King, Guitar Slim, T-Bone Walker and Earl Hooker. His first lessons came from his uncle, but when it became clear that the youngster was serious about his music, his grandmother hired a tutor for him. "I learned so fast I was always two or three pages ahead of my teacher," he recalls. After a move to Tampa when he was 17, Kearney won a slot as a featured guitarist and vocalist in Walter Johnson's 18-piece orchestra. Being younger—and shorter—than the rest of the band, the club owner bestowed the name Guitar Shorty on him, and it stuck. After a particularly strong performance in Florida, the great Willie Dixon, who was in the audience, approached Shorty and said, "I like what you're doing. You've got something different. I gotta get you in the studio." A few weeks later Shorty was in Chicago and, backed by Otis Rush on second guitar, he cut his first single, *Irma Lee* b/w *You Don't Treat Me Right*, for

Chicago's famed Cobra Records (the first label home for Rush, Magic Sam and Buddy Guy) in 1957. "Willie Dixon was a huge influence on me and my singing," Shorty remembers. "If it hadn't been for him, I never would have recorded."

After recording the Cobra single, Shorty's fortunes continued to rise, as the great Ray Charles hired the young guitar slinger as a featured member of his road band. While touring Florida, Shorty met one of his idols—guitarist/vocalist Guitar Slim, famous for his hit *Things That I Used To Do* as well as for his wildman stage antics. Slim's manager offered Shorty the opening slot on the guitarist's upcoming tour, and Shorty jumped at the chance, following his hero to New Orleans. Inspired by Slim, Shorty began incorporating some of the older artist's athletic showmanship into his own performances. Before long, he was doing somersaults and flips on stage. Between his blistering talent and his wild stage shows, Guitar Shorty found his audience growing even larger. He recorded three 45s for the Los Angeles-based Pull Records label in 1959. Those six sides—all Guitar Shorty originals incorporating techniques learned from Willie Dixon—showcased his first-rate vocals and his dynamic guitar style.

He gigged steadily through the late 1950s and 1960s, working with Little Milton, B.B. King, Lowell Fulson, Sam Cooke, Otis Rush, Johnny Copeland and T-Bone Walker. Settling down in Seattle, he married Marsha Hendrix, Jimi's stepsister. Hendrix loved his guitar-playing brother-in-law, and confessed that in 1961 and 1962 he would go AWOL from his Army base in order to catch Shorty's area performances, picking up licks and ideas. "I'd see Jimi at the clubs," Shorty recalls. "He'd stay in the shadows, watching me. I hear my licks in *Purple Haze* and *Hey Joe*. He told me the reason he started setting his guitar on fire was because he couldn't do the back flips like I did."

Guitar Shorty moved to Los Angeles in 1971 and worked as a mechanic during the day while playing gigs at night until 1975, when he again became a full-time musician. He had his share of career tribulations, though, including a performance (albeit a winning one) on *The Gong Show* in 1978, playing guitar while standing on his head. After overcoming a serious auto accident in 1984, he recorded an EP for Big J Records and a few more singles (this time for Olive Branch Records) in 1985, showcasing his fat-toned guitar licks and deep blues vocals. The strength of these recordings kept him busy on the club scene, and he eventually landed a British tour in 1990.

Guitar Shorty cut his debut album for the JSP label in 1990 while on tour in England. Released in 1991, *My Way Or The Highway* received the Blues Music Award for "Contemporary Foreign Blues Album Of The Year" and revitalized Shorty's career in the U.S. With all the attention Shorty received, the New Orleans-based Black Top label signed him and released three albums (*Topsy Turvy*, *Get Wise To Yourself* and *Roll Over, Baby*) during the 1990s, and in 2001 Evidence Records issued *I Go Wild*. All received an abundance of positive press as he barnstormed his way across the U.S. and around the world, with stops in Europe, China and Malaysia. *The Chicago Tribune* declared, "Shorty's forte is his high-energy style and fluid, imaginative fretboard work." *DownBeat* raved, "Guitar Shorty's music is a funky, boisterous buffet of off-the-wall blues fun." Appearances at major festivals like The Monterey Bay Blues Festival, The San Francisco Blues Festival and The King Biscuit Blues Festival brought him to larger and larger audiences. At the 1998 Chicago Blues Festival, Shorty opened for his old boss Ray Charles and thrilled an audience of thousands with his jaw-dropping stage show.

With the release of **WATCH YOUR BACK** in 2004, Guitar Shorty's long rise to blues stardom grew exponentially. The outpouring of soulful emotion, the power of his playing and the strength of the material added up to the toughest album of Shorty's renowned career. *Living Blues* called Shorty "a blues rock original [who plays] screaming, empowered guitar and sings with streetwise defiance."

Now, with **WE THE PEOPLE** Guitar Shorty delivers a moving and soulful statement, featuring some of the most fire-coated fretwork he has ever laid down and the most thought-provoking songs he's ever recorded. He's playing with a passion and dedication almost unmatched in today's music scene. With dates constantly being added to his tour calendar, this guitar-wielding, soul-singing, rock-solid performer is set to bring his mind-expanding music to locations North, South, East and West. Always a celebrated live performer and now a top-selling recording artist as well, Guitar Shorty will no doubt find that **WE THE PEOPLE** will once again make him the people's choice.



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