

# Blues magnet

Blues musicians from around the country have been moving to Portland — and they're loving it

By **DON CAMPBELL**  
SPECIAL TO THE OREGONIAN

Say you're a blues musician looking for a home, a safe haven from the battering storms of a downturned economy and a dying blues circuit.

Maybe the hit-factory studios where you used to work are all shutting down in favor of Apple computers and Pro Tools gear that allow anyone to make a CD. Maybe you're sick of the neck-knotting stress of a mega-urban grind. Maybe you miss your kids. Maybe you just need a change of scene.

Or maybe, just maybe, at some point in your career you trundled through Portland and made a mental note somewhere that this might be the place to practice your craft and perfect your art, not to mention get a good cup of coffee, a Powell's book or a pint of microbrew.

Maybe you would point this way and join the influx of other artists to town. And that's exactly what's happened here in the past few years.

Several blues players with impressive résumés and even more impressive skills have migrated to town, and they've come from such music hotbeds as Los Angeles, New York, New Orleans and Austin, Texas.

What's the attraction? Talk to a selection of them, as we did, and they sound like a Chamber of Commerce ad for the city: livable neighborhoods, a verdant local music scene, the beautiful natural setting. Or maybe they've swapped out their previous locales to live, as bluesman Robert Cray puts it, in "God's own time zone."

## BLUES IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Need to know more about your new musical neighbors? Check out their Web sites:

**The Original Snakeboy:**  
[www.theoriginalsnakeboy.com](http://www.theoriginalsnakeboy.com)

**Mary Flower:**  
[www.maryflower.com](http://www.maryflower.com)

**Jennifer Batten:**  
[www.jenniferbatten.com](http://www.jenniferbatten.com)

**Ron Rogers:**  
[www.ronrogersart.com](http://www.ronrogersart.com)

**Steve Cheseborough:**  
[www.stevecheseborough.com](http://www.stevecheseborough.com)

**Reggie Houston:**  
[www.reggiehouston.com](http://www.reggiehouston.com)



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Thara Memory (from left), New Orleans transplant Reggie Houston and Patrick Lamb prep at the 2005 blues festival.



## ◀ Mary Flower

Mary Flower's love affair with Portland actually began with her son Jesse, who attended Lewis & Clark College and plays bass with the local neo-bluegrass band Jackstraw.

Flower is a renowned finger-picking guitarist who performs and teaches far and wide. Based for 30 years in the Denver area, taking time off to marry and have children, she's built an exhausting career of touring, teaching and recording, including a new Yellow Dog Records album coming this fall.

But, she says, "I knew there was a better life." She found it in Portland. With the sale of a guitar she'd won at a national finger-picking competition, she paid for her move to Portland a year ago.

The attraction came from her "love of the unconventional," she says. "Every day is an adventure in this city," including a recent Last Thursday art walk on Northeast Alberta Street, where she encountered an accordion-and-saw duo and transvestite on stilts. "This city is full of surprises."

"In Portland there's this support of creative people making a living doing art. There's great radio, there's OPB's 'Oregon Art Beat,' who did a piece on me. There are lots of venues. It all works together to create a support system. Otherwise a creative community couldn't exist. I'm not used to seeing those in place. There's the small-town thing of it," she says. "It's changed my life."

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