

Blue Muse: Timothy Duffy's Southern Photographs Duffy, Timothy Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019. 152 pp. \$60.00. ISBN 978-1-4696-4826-2. E-book ISBN: 978-1-4696-4827-9. [Book review]

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Abstract:

Duffy's powerful photos introduce the reader to American roots musicians in the South. Using photographs to reflect a moment in time, Duffy presents images that tell a story of the performers of the traditional music of folk, jazz, gospel, rock, and the blues. Russell Lord, in his foreword, discusses the works as Duffy's "attempts to reclaim their subjects' rightful status as the creators, custodians, purveyors, and performers of American music" (p. ix). The photographs are a means that Duffy uses to document the legacies of the artists. He has a deep respect for his subjects and explains that "they are keenly aware of the treasure of music they inherited from the elders who taught them and feel duty-bound to pass it on to the next generation" (p. 5).

Keywords: book review | photography | performers | Timothy Duffy

Article:

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Through the historic photographic technique of the tintype, more precisely known as the ferrotype, Duffy captures the images by using a large special camera in which the plates are

directly produced. Duffy explains the process in his artist's introduction which emphasizes the immediacy of the method that produces a single photograph but no negative that would allow for multiple prints. Light and shadow become part of the evocative, striking quality of the photos.

Compelling visuals of his subjects portray the performers with expressions that can be interpreted as ranging from joyful and fearless to poignant and heartbreaking. The clarity of the portraits brings every facial detail into focus. The emotions of eyes in a glance or a bold look give the impression of immediacy and intimacy.

Brief notes provide biographical information about the subject of each plate, including such individuals as keyboardist Ironing Board Sam, blues singer Pat "Mother Blues" Cohen, and Freeman Vines, a maker of guitars. The settings for the photos are a combination of the studio, interiors of homes or music venues, and exterior shots on lawns or in a meadow. Always it is the person who captures the attention of the reader.

Blue Muse was published in association with the New Orleans Museum of Art, where Duffy held a solo exhibition that included thirty of the photographs from the book. UNC Press is the publisher of Duffy's *Music Makers: Portraits and Songs from the Roots of America*, and his title, *We Are the Music Makers! Preserving the Soul of America's Music*, co-authored with Denise Duffy.

This beautiful book will appeal to all readers interested in photography, roots music, and the culture and peoples of the South.