

## Guy Davis Biography

Genres: American Roots, Blues, Folk, Spoken Word, New Artistic Renaissance

Instruments: Vocals, 6 & 12 string guitar, harmonica, 5 & 6 string banjo, didgeridoo

Guy Davis is a two-time, back-to-back Grammy nominee for Best Traditional Blues, a musician, Actor, Author, and Songwriter. Guy uses a blend of Roots, Blues, Folk, Rock, Rap, Spoken Word, and World Music to comment on, and address the frustrations of social injustice, touching on historical events, and common life struggles. His background in theater is pronounced through the lyrical storytelling of songs "God's Gonna Make Things Over" about the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, "Welcome to My World", and "Got Your Letter In My Pocket". His storytelling is sometimes painful, deep, and real, an earthy contrast to modern-day commercial music, meant to create thought, underlined by gentle tones from his guitar or banjo fingerpicking.

A self-taught "Renaissance Man", he first heard the banjo at a summer camp run by John Seeger, the brother of the American Folk Musician, Pete Seeger, and soon after, asked his father for one.

His records, while terse and truthful, are softened by songs like "We All Need More Kindness In This World", denoting lyrical inspiration from Pete Seeger's "If I Had A Hammer". Then, teased with lyrically strutting works nudged by Hip Hop and Honky Tonk, like "Kokomo Kidd". The contrast between pieces provides a robust, balanced experience, while giving Guy and his audience a healthy outlet for frustration through song and dance.

Along with his music writing and performance, Guy has written several scripts for stage and film. He recently debuted his latest piece, "Sugarbelly and Other Tales My Father Told Me" at the famed Crossroads Theatre in New Brunswick, NJ. He previously presented his other New York Foundation for the Arts winning play at the Crossroads, "The Adventures of Fishy Waters: In Bed with the Blues", a one-man show whose Off-Broadway debut in 1994 received critical praise from The New York Times and the Village Voice.

Also at the Crossroads Guy appeared with his parents, Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis, in a show called "Two Hah-Hahs' & A Homeboy". Guy also starred in the Off-Broadway production of "Robert Johnson; Trick The Devil" at the New Federal Theater which earned him a "Keeping The Blues Alive" Award from The Blues Foundation. On Broadway, Guy was in the cast of the Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes play, "Mulebone", which featured the music of Taj Mahal. And in 2009-2010, in a revival of "Finian's Rainbow", Guy undertook the role that was originated by one of his musical heroes, Sonny Terry, who created the role in the original 1947 production.

Guy's earlier works in theatre include him creating a show called, "The Trial" (later renamed, "The Trial: Judgement of the People"), an anti-drug abuse, one-act play that toured throughout the New York City shelter system, and was produced Off-Broadway in 1990, at the McGinn Cazale Theater. Another work, "Mudsurfing", is a collection of three short stories, for which he received the 1991 Brio Award from the Bronx Council on the Arts.

"To Be a Man", is an Emmy Award-winning film, and the music for it was arranged, performed, and co-written by Guy. In 1995, Guy's music was used in the national PBS series, The American Promise. His music has also been used for The PBS "The Story Hour" as its theme song. Guy portrayed Dr. Josh Hall for one season on the Daytime Soap, "One Life to Live". He appeared in and co-wrote with Dr. John for the Nickelodeon show "Whoopie Goldberg's Littleberg". He was a guest on the Conan O'Brien Show with his all-star band featuring T-Bone Wolk (Hall & Oats, SNL), John Plantania (Van Morrison, Chip Taylor), Levon Helm (The Band), Gary Burke (Bob Dylan, Joe Jackson), and Mark Murphy (Walt Michael & Co., Natalie Merchant).

On the big screen, Guy starred opposite Rae Dawn Chong in the seminal breakdancing film, "Beat Street", produced by Harry Belafonte. Guy performed 400 consecutive online half hour "Coffee with Kokomo" shows during the pandemic.

Guy sings, plays six and twelve string guitars, the five-string banjo, harmonica, and didgeridoo.

Guy has performed before the Crowned Heads of Denmark, and even the reknowned explorer, Jacques Cousteau. He's played alongside Pete Seeger, Bruce Springsteen, Ian Anderson of Jethro Tull, Levon Helm, Dr. John, Kris Kristofferson, Buffy Saint-Marie, T-Bone Burnett, Taj Mahal, Keb Mo, John Hammond, John Sebastian, John Denver and Don McLean. He has opened for, among others, Chuck Berry, Joan Armatrading, James Cotton, and B.B.King. He has performed in 48 of the 50 states, throughout most of Europe, Australia, Indonesia, Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Canada, Greenland, The Shetland Islands, The Faroe Islands, and The UK. He's been chased out of Red Square in Moscow for trying to sing, sung in Soviet Occupied East Berlin, and performed standing in front of an iceberg in Greenland.

When asked about his experience as a performer, Guy has replied, "There is no tale so tall that I cannot tell it, nor song so sweet that I cannot sing it."

His performances feature a mix of his original songs and cover songs by Muddy Waters, Howlin Wolf, Pete Seeger, Bob Dylan, Mance Lipscombe, Blind Willie McTell, Leadbelly, Blind Lemon Jefferson, and many others. His admiration for antiquities parallels his love of music, "I like antiques and old things, old places, that still have the dust of those who've gone before us lying upon them." Blowing that dust off just enough to see its beauty is something Guy has excelled at for over twenty-five years

of songwriting and performing. like savoring the ghosts of old sounds while still enjoying modern music.

Guy is a songwriter greatly influenced by his love of theater and storytelling, who derives joy from touring and seeing people from all walks of life. His hope is to bring people together, with the commonality that we are all people regardless of class, race, or personal experience, a lesson he learned from his long time friendship with Pete Seeger. Guy feels that Pete's greatest strength was his ability to bring total strangers together, and have them all singing harmony by the time they left at the end of the night.

While not touring Guy writes and occasionally performs his one man plays. He teaches Master Classes in Blues guitar styles, harmonica, or acting/stage presence at music camps like Common Ground On The Hill, SAMW, Swannanoa, Fur Peace Ranch, Centrum, and others. Guy has developed an education program spotlighting the Blues For Young Listeners called "Routes of the Blues", and has been on the artist rosters of The Lincoln Center Institute in NYC, Young Audiences of NJ, the State Theatre in New Brunswick, NJ, and The Kennedy Center in Washington, DC. He has performed for children across the U.S. and Canada, as well as in Greenland, Ecuador, Indonesia, Australia, The UK, and The Basque Region of Spain. His song "I Will Be Your Friend" was the title to a teacher's aide project that included two dozen songs and "Activities For Little Peace Makers" created by The Southern Poverty Law Center called, "Teaching Tolerance".

## **ARTIST ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

### **Awards/Fellowships:**

- \* New York Foundation for the Arts Gregory Millard Fellowship / Playwright: "The Adventures Of Fishy Waters: In Bed With The Blues"
- \* Keeping the Blues Alive award, for his starring role in "Robert Johnson: Trick The Devil".
- \* AUDELCO "Best Actor" for "Robert Johnson: Trick The Devil"
- \* 1991 Brio Award, Bronx Council of the Arts for Mudsurfing (Collection of Short Stories)

### **Nominations:**

Grammys 60th & 64th (Best Traditional Blues Album / Sonny & Brownie's Last Train and / Be Ready When I Call You, Best Traditional Blues Album)

Blues Foundation 2021 (Keeping The Blues Alive, Best Acoustic Album of the Year)  
Best Acoustic Artist of the Year, Best Instrumentalist)

Blues Award Nominations (About two dozen nominations) “Best Acoustic Blues Album”, “Best Traditional Blues Album”, “Best Blues Song” (“Waiting On the Cards to Fall”), “Best Acoustic Blues Artist”

**Actor:**

- \* Beat Street (Lead – Kenny), opposite Rae Dawn Chong in the first Breakdancing movie. Produced by Harry Belafonte
- \* One Life to Live (Cast – Dr. Josh Hall)
- \* Finian's Rainbow (Cast – Sonny) 2009-2010 Revival
- \* Mulebone (Cast), Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes play, “Mulebone”, which featured the music of Taj Mahal
- \* Nickelodeon (Guest)

**Composer:**

- \* PBS Television series: The American Promise (Ossie and Ruby Theme Song)
- \* Public Radio: The Story Hour Theme Song

**Scriptwriter:**

- \* The Trial (The Trial: Judgement of the People) - 1990 Off-Broadway, McGinn Cazale Theater.
- \* The Adventures Of Fishy Waters: In Bed With The Blues - New Federal Theater in NYC. Crossroads Theater in New Brunswick, NJ.
- \* Sugarbelly And Other Tales My Father Told Me - 2022 Crossroads Theater, New Brunswick Performing Arts Center in New Brunswick NJ.

**Residencies:** Lincoln Center Institute, Kennedy Center, New Jersey State Theater.

**Novelist:** Mudsurfing (Short Story Collection)

**Online Shows:** 400 consecutive Self-Produced half hour shows called, “Koffee with Kokomo”

**Media Acknowledgements:** New York Times, Village Voice, Boston Globe, Pulse Magazine, Acoustic Guitar, Dirty Linen, Songlines, Blues Blast Magazine, Living Blues, Blues Magazine, Down At the Crossroads, The San Francisco Chronicle, Association For Independent Music (formerly NAIRD), Playboy Magazine, National Public Radio (NPR), "Folk Alley", and Sirius.

**Discography \*majority original songs\***

- 1978: Dreams About Life (Folkways Records)
- 1993: Guy Davis - Live, 1993 (Self Released)
- 1995: Stomp Down Rider (Red House Records)
- 1996: Call Down the Thunder (Red House Records)
- 1998: You Don't Know My Mind (Red House Records)
- 2000: Butt Naked Free (Red House Records)
- 2002: Give in Kind (Red House Records)
- 2003: Chocolate to the Bone (Red House Records)
- 2004: Legacy (Red House Records)
- 2006: Skunkmello (Red House Records)
- 2007: Guy Davis On Air (Tradition & Moderne)
- 2009: Sweetheart Like You (Red House Records)
- 2012: The Adventures of Fishy Waters (Smokeydoke Records)
- 2013: Juba Dance (Smokeydoke Records / DixieFrog Records)
- 2015: Kokomo Kidd (Smokeydoke Records / DixieFrog Records)
- 2015: Sonny & Brownie's Last Train with Fabrizio Poggi (Smokeydoke Records)
- 2019: Gumbo, Grits & Gravy (Self Released)
- 2021: Be ready When I Call You (Smokeydoke Records)

Guy has appeared on numerous compilation albums paying tribute to Bob Dylan, Nick Lowe, and Pete Seeger, and appeared on friends' albums like Eric Bibb's "Friends", Otis Taylor's "Recapturing the Banjo", and Corey Harris' "True Blues". He appears on the soundtracks to "Beat Street" and "Finian's Rainbow".