

LUCKY CAT PRODUCTIONS
226 Jackson St.
Lafayette, LA 70501



337-255-6447/337-269-5153
ac2525@bellsouth.net
www.hengray.com

HENRY GRAY

- ✚ 2008 featured in 25th anniversary of NEA's NCTA Blues Master's Series nationally
- ✚ 2008 Lowell Folk Fest artist & poster image
- ✚ 2006 NEA National Heritage Fellow Nation's top honor for Folk Artists
- ✚ 2006 featured artist in Sun Lion's "Falsifyin'" w/ Jerry lee Lewis & Pinetop Perkins
- ✚ 2005 one of the Featured artist in the Lincoln Center's 1st "Blues" concert "Blues Legends"
- ✚ 2003 featured in Clint Eastwood's "Piano Blues" -Martin Scorceses' "The Blues" Series Living Blues "Pianist of the Year" NO Big Easy "Blues Artist of the Year"
- ✚ 2002 Four WC Handy nominations, Living Blues "Pianist of the Year"
- ✚ 1998 Grammy Nominee Played Mick Jagger's 55th birthday party in Paris, France
- ✚ 1956-1968 Howlin' Wolf's pianist
- ✚ Performed at virtually all Forty NO Jazz Fests



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HENRY GRAY BIO

Henry Gray may well be Louisiana's oldest active legendary master Blues pianist. At 84, with a career that spans over six decades, Henry continues to deliver his rollicking, two-fisted boogie-woogies and passionate blues to people throughout the world. David Kunian, an honored documentarian in New Orleans, wrote the following about Mr. Gray:



“Henry Gray’s influence is immeasurable... If you’ve listened to blues music in the last half-century, you’ve heard pianist Henry Gray... he recorded and played with everybody... [he] helped create the blue print for Chicago blues piano and all that it would be... Henry pioneered the sound of electric piano in Chicago blues... whenever you hear someone play a familiar blues riff or turnaround on the piano, there is a good chance they learned it from Henry Gray — or someone who learned it off Henry Gray” (Dave Kunian, Blues Access, Spring 2001, Issue 45, p. 44).

Not only is Henry hailed for his contribution to post WW II Chicago blues, he is also recognized as one of the key contributors to Louisiana's unique 'Swamp Blues' sound. Henry and other Louisiana 'Swamp Blues' artists recorded many sessions for J.D. Miller at his studio in Crowley, LA on the legendary Excello label. Henry's significant role in the Chicago and Louisiana blues scenes is unique.

Jeff Hannusch, a respected music journalist in New Orleans, referred to Henry's unique role, ***“This makes Gray the only artist to have worked with the three most renowned blues producers of all time — J.D. Miller, Leonard and Phil Chess and Willie Dixon ”*** (Living Blues Magazine (LBM) 2001 #158, p.24). Hannusch continued, ***“One of the mysteries of the blues world is the lack of recognition given to Henry Gray... Despite being an obvious heir to the Chicago blues piano throne...”***

Henry Gray was twelve years old in 1937. It seemed to Henry that his future was already set. He would follow his relatives into a work cycle in the fields that stretched until noon every Saturday. That summer, however, Henry would discover a force that would allow him to change his destiny. He would discover the power of music.

Sneaking around the 'juke' as young boy, Henry soon discovered that his talent on the piano could put him in the spotlight. So, around the age of 14, with his father in tow, Henry began his 70-year career as a blues musician in the joints adjoining the Louisiana cotton fields.

Henry's reputation as a 'Lucky Man' began in WWII when a combat mission proved to be fatal to him and one of his comrades. During his recovery, the Army noticed Henry's talent on the piano, and he was regularly selected to entertain the troops with his south Louisiana blues and jitterbug music.

After the war, Henry's talent as an entertainer pointed the way to Chicago. He soon developed a reputation in the clubs on the south side that brought him to Big Maceo, the most eminent blue pianist in that era of the formation of the 'Chicago Blues.' Henry's elements of southern gospel and boogie-woogie mixed well with Maceo's powerful driving blues. He eventually became Big Maceo's chief disciple. Maceo spoke of Henry as his 'son.' When Maceo lost use of his left hand from a stroke, Henry would play dates on the same piano stool with him as 'Maceo's left hand.'

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From those early days in south side blues clubs, Henry emerged as one of the original architects of the Chicago blues piano. He matured as an artist during his twelve years of playing piano with the legendary Howlin' Wolf (Chester Burnett). According to Lily Burnett, Wolf's wife, Henry became the leader and vocalist for the band when 'Wolf' had to travel to make solo appearances. Henry wrote some of his best blues songs during this time.



After a dozen years of touring and recording with one of the hottest blues bands in the country, Henry returned home to Louisiana in 1968. He worked in his family's fish store in Alson, LA and later as a roofer for the East Baton Rouge Parish School Board. Henry had not given up his music, by any means. He played two or three times a week in the clubs around Baton Rouge, helping, with Tabby Thomas, to create and sustain the 'Swamp Blues' sound of that area. Henry's activity kept him in the local public eye enough to catch the attention of the New Orleans and Jazz Heritage Festival. Since that time, Henry has played every N.O. Jazz Fest. Rolf Shubert, a German blues promoter, discovered Henry at one of these festivals in the mid 1970's. Shubert began to bring Henry over to Europe to play festivals and venues as solo blues artist. In 1978, Shubert released Henry's first feature album which spotlighted Henry as a solo artist singing and accompanying himself on the piano. Henry became popular with European blues enthusiasts. To this day, Henry is more widely known in Europe, Scandinavia, and other parts of the world than in the United States.

Henry's importance in the Baton Rouge blues scene garnered him a spot as one of the featured artist in the original 1985 nationally televised public television's "*Rainin' in my Heart*," a documentary on Baton Rouge blues artists. Interestingly, a few years later, when the organizers of the Chicago Blues Fest were approached about having Henry perform there as part of the first Howlin' Wolf Reunion concert, they argued that Henry had already died. Describing Henry's performance at the Chicago festival that year, Larry Kart of the Chicago Tribune wrote, "***When Henry Gray took the stage (with his voice like a slab of slate, his piano work tough & jumping) the blues were there for real.***" (Chicago Tribune Sunday, June 7, 1987, front page). As a result of Henry's appearance at the 1987 Chicago Blues Fest, Blind Pig Records released "*Lucky Man* (1988)," Henry's first United States recording on which he was the featured artist. "*Lucky Man*" helped to begin a new career for Henry as a bandleader and as a touring solo artist in Europe again. Henry and his band the Cats were invited to and featured at the prestigious Montreal Jazz Fest in the summer of 1988, as well as doing small tours nationally.

During the 1990's, Henry played concerts each year in Europe, either as a solo artist, or with the backing of European blues bands. In the States, he continued to play selected nationally known festivals and venues scattered around the nation with his own band, Henry Gray the Cats. Since 1999, Henry Gray & the Cats have released three critically acclaimed CDs on the band's label Lucky Cat Productions.

Henry has lost none of the power that was seeded in the Louisiana jukes and flowered in Chicago's south side. In March 2003, while appearing for a week at the prestigious Lionel Hampton Jazz Club in Paris, Henry Gray & the Cats set nightly attendance records. While in Paris, France's Blues Society awarded Henry the country's top honor as 2003 'Blues Pianist of the Year.' In 2009, Henry Gray & the Cats are scheduled to release their fourth CD "*Come on In*" highlighting 8-9 original tunes including one entitled "Barack Obama Boogie."