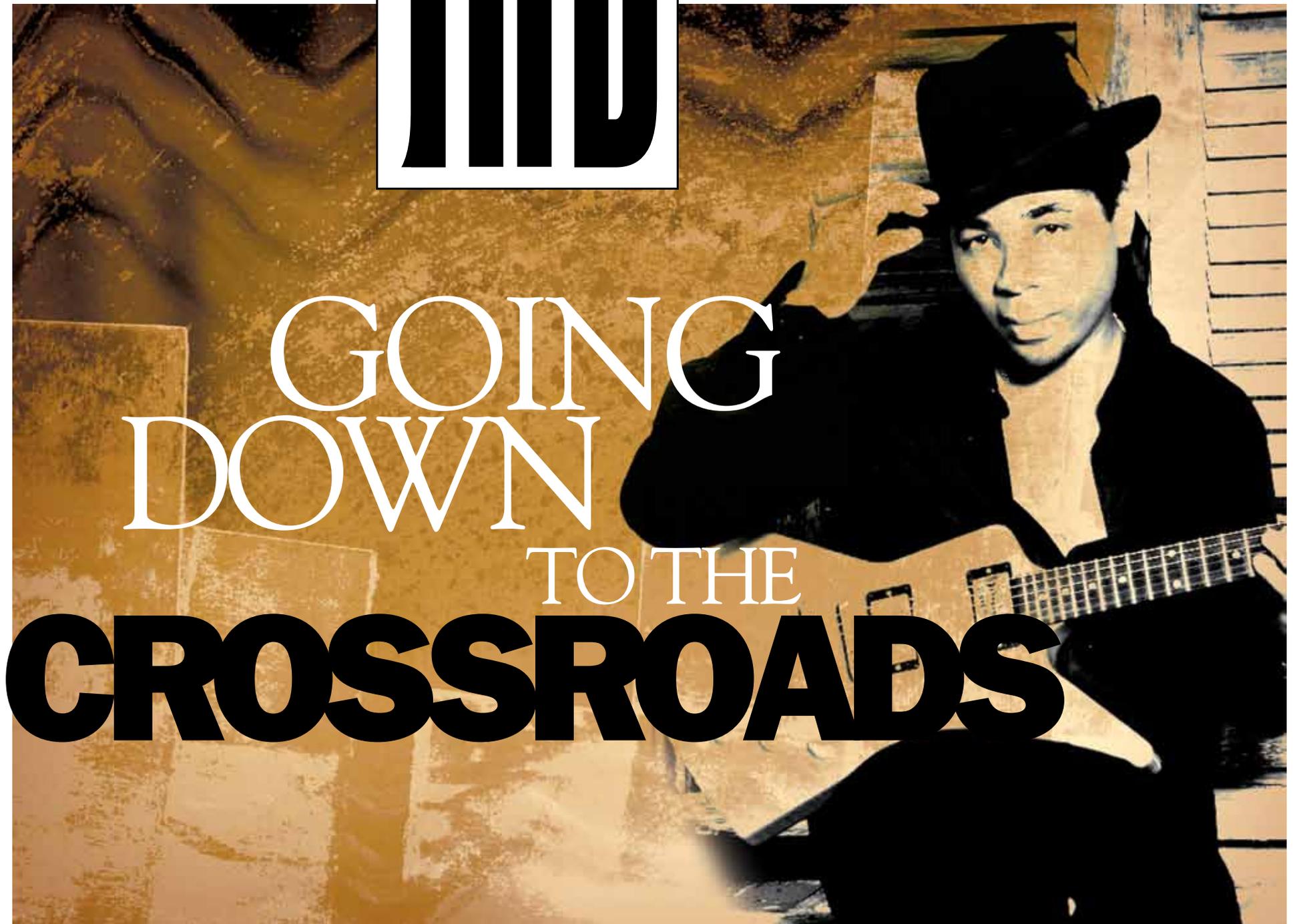


LIVING

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Baton Rouge bluesman Chris Thomas King plays Lafayette's hippest music series.

By Dege Legg

From the Delta blues you can trace the roots of rock and roll, rockabilly, southern rock, punk rock, alt-country, modern R & B, pop music, jazz, hip-hop, elements of Cajun, zydeco, and Creole music, and whatever other genre of popular music you'd like to fit in there. There is no debate; elements of almost all of it came from the great wellspring of the blues. There is no other greater influence on modern music. The Delta spills from the cotton fields of Mississippi to the stars on Hollywood Boulevard, and Louisiana bluesman Chris Thomas King is a tributary of it as well as a rightful heir to that massive wellspring. Born in Baton Rouge, son of the late Tabby Thomas — owner and proprietor of the legendary Tabby's Blues Box — since the 1980s King has explored many facets of the multidimensional universe of the blues. From its raw, dirt-packed roots to rap/blues hybrids to gunslinger flash, he's covered a lot of ground in the last few decades. Awards along the way include Album of the Year from the Grammys and the Country Music Awards. King has sold more than 10 million records in the U.S., appeared in movies like *O Brother Where Art Thou?* and Wim Wenders' *The Soul of a Man*, and tunneled his way into the subconscious of blues fans around the world by putting out records that both challenge, appease and inspire roots music fans from around the world.

On Jan. 21, King plays this month's installment of the Louisiana Crossroads series at the Vermilionville Performance Center in Lafayette at 7 p.m. In addition, he'll be doing educational presentations on the blues at various Lafayette public schools Jan. 19 - 22.





**Oak Ridge Boys**  
 Friday, January 22, at 9pm  
 Tickets are \$30



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## POSTHASTE WITH **CHRIS THOMAS KING**

By Dege Legg

1. In the movie, *O Brother, Where Art Thou*, you play a killer version of Skip James' "Hard Time Killing Floor Blues." Explain to the laymen why Skip James was so unique. First of all, his music is deceptively complex, because when you hear it, it sounds so natural and so comfortable, it sounds like running water...like you're on the banks of the Mississippi. When T Bone Burnett told me one of the key songs in the movie was going to be "Hard Time Killing Floor Blues" and he wanted me to play it, I played him my interpretation of it. But they wanted it as close to the original as possible, and I had to go back and do some homework. His style is so unique. It's not something that came naturally to me; it was a challenge to master that song, but now it's become part of my repertoire. It comes natural to me now.

2. Where in the world do people most strongly react to blues music? Moscow surprised me. A few years back we did a festival tour of Russia sponsored by a major Western European beer company. The look on people's faces and the body language of the people in the audiences, their jaws were dropping. It just seemed that they had not been exposed to music with that kind of emotional impact, that type of feeling that the blues emotes. Those were performances that I'll always remember. They weren't jaded, they were excited, and they were hearing something new. And when you tour around the U.S. you rarely get that; most people are jaded about the form.

3. How would you describe your own style of playing? I'd like to think that my style is unique, and I haven't seen too many people play the slide guitar and rap and sing. I think you have to be able to do a lot of different things well in order to perform my songbook. A few bands have adapted my style. After I recorded "Hard Time Killing Floor Blues," which is a song that most people had never heard, Buddy Guy and lots of rock artists recorded it. A lot of people were moved. I've heard my influences in people like The White Stripes and others. When I think of B.B. King or Buddy Guy, even though those are great musical heroes of mine, lots of people over the years have adapted their style of picking and can emulate them. I think my style is a new approach and a little more challenging than others. It's not a purposeful thing; it's just that I use 21st century techniques to create my music. A lot of blues that came before me has become more formulaic. I play slide, acoustic, finger-picking, electric, and I sing and rap, and that makes it a little bit more challenging.

4. What's the future of the music industry? Where's it going? I'm part of the blues genre, which is a very small segment of the music business. I have my own record label, 21st Century Blues Records. When I talk to other people in this business, they're concerned. The audience is older, and they're not as into downloading music. Now anyone who wants to record and release music internationally can do it, but the problem is fans out there have to sift through so much music to find some quality. It's a little more difficult and intimidating



### SELECTED RELEASES:

*Nawlins Callin'* (EP), 21st Century Blues, 2009

*Rise*, 21st Century Blues, 2006

*The Legend of Tommy Johnson*, Stony Plain, 2001 reissued 2007

*O Brother, Where Art Thou?* Original Soundtrack, Mercury, 2000

for the consumer. There's just a lot of clutter out there. I think that the superstar days of being able to throw televisions out of hotel room windows, MTV Cribs, and a lot of that is disappearing. A lot of people that are just in this business for the money are going to leave, and it's going to go back to what music was like in the beginning before Thomas Edison. Music was a way people entertained each other and themselves. And some musicians were able to make a living from it, but it was kind of rare that they would make an extraordinary amount of money from it. I also see a day in the distant future when copyrights catch up to the Internet and technology, songwriters, publishers and content owners are going to do very, very well.

5. What can we expect from Chris Thomas King in the future? I have a book deal, and I've been writing a book for about the last year and a half about the 25 years that my family ran Tabby's Blues Box and club. It's kind of a memoir about growing up in a juke joint. It talks about the history of where Louisiana blues originated and how Tabby's Blues Box helped build a bridge and continued to develop a new generation of musicians. And it'll talk about how this music has gone on to influence Hollywood. When people heard me in movies like *Ray* and *O, Brother* — that's an extension of what people heard in the Blues Box on a typical night. I've also got a lot more music in the works. I plan to release several EPs with four to six songs each this year because there's no reason to wait and do a 14-song album. And I'll be touring extensively. My music can all be found at my Web site: [ChrisThomasKing.com](http://ChrisThomasKing.com) and iTunes. □