

CHRIS THOMAS KING

King was born on October 14, 1964, in Baton Rouge. His father, Tabby Thomas, is a locally prominent bluesman who owned a club called Tabby's Blues Box, which opened in 1979 and closed in 2004 following Tabby's retirement. As a result, King, started early toward his musical future; even as a youngster he was well known as Rockin' Tabby's son and a child genius. While frequenting his father's club he performed with the late Silas Hogan, Guitar Kelly and Clarence Edwards, three masters of swamp blues. By sixth grade, King was learning to play the trumpet and later traveling as a rhythm guitar player of famous musicians like Lowell Folsom and Joe Tex. As he matured in the musical setting of New Orleans area blues culture, King was encouraged to experiment and develop his own style. Because each blues musician had a unique playing and singing style, he was discouraged from singing others' songs or even playing the way they did. He told Lisa Simeone on National Public Radio's Weekend Edition, "They would never sit me down and say, 'Well, this is how it goes.' They ... told me don't sing their songs ... 'Find your own song and sing that.'"

At some time around 1980, while King was still in his teens, he toured in Europe with a group of Louisiana artists. After returning to the United States he produced a demo recording playing all the instruments himself, which led to a deal with Arhoolie Records. King's debut album, *The Beginning*, appeared in 1986 and featured King on vocals, bass, and guitar. Arhoolie reissued the album in 2001 under the title "It's a Cold Ass World."

King signed a major recording contract with Warner Brothers Records in 1989 and headlined a national tour to support the release of his greatly anticipated follow-up "Cry of the Prophets," making his national television debut on the David Letterman Show. However, after releasing his first album, which was steeped in tradition, he embarked on bold artistic directions of his own, on following albums. Controversy and debate grew among purists because of the uncharted directions he was taking the blues. He was the first bluesman to embrace the digital music revolution and the first to introduced hip-hop along with sampling and deejay-distorted electronica into genre.

Like Miles Davis and Bob Dylan before him, Chris Thomas King was originally celebrated as the young savior of an aging musical culture when he first arrived on the national scene. Branded as a rebel King was banned from blues festivals across the United States. He fled to Denmark to cool his heels in the more liberal environment that flourished in Europe. While in Denmark he recorded and released the critically acclaimed hip-hop blues album "21st Century Blues from da hood." The French embraced him as a major artist with vision and the rest of Europe followed. He toured with his Danish band extensively across Europe playing major festivals and theaters but longed to return to New Orleans. Upon returning to the United States in 1995, he started his own independent production company and record label, 21st Century Blues. Soon after he found success as a film composer and actor. Winning three Grammy Awards by 2003 and several Country music CMA awards.

King's major acting debut in the Coen brothers' film *O Brother, Where Art Thou* in 2001 transcended blues and gained him an international mainstream audience. The movie tells the story of escaped convicts who become singers in Mississippi, the movie starred George

Clooney and John Turturro. King played the role of Tommy Johnson, a true-to-life blues singer from the 1930s. His legend is perpetuated by a story that he was known to tell to anyone who would listen--he sold his soul to the devil in return for his musical talent. Of the songs on the movie's Grammy-winning soundtrack, King's "Hard Time Killing Floor Blues" was one of the only few recorded live during filming. The soundtrack reached number 1 on the billboard charts and has since sold ten million copies. King's performance and the on screen field recording by legendary producer T-Bone Burnett is perhaps the most famous blues performance of all time.

While filming *O Brother*, King took on the character of Johnson with such intensity that during his work breaks he wrote an album of songs in the legendary bluesman's style. Released in 2001, *Legend of Tommy Johnson--Act 1: Genesis, 1900s-1990s* included original King tunes as well as a bona fide Tommy Johnson classic, "Canned Heat." The album cover is a portrait of King in the pose and dress of a popular photo of Robert Johnson. By the end of the year King had traveled to 40 American cities with the All Blues Tour and appeared in *Down from the Mountain*, a concert film organized by Joel and Ethan Coen and T-Bone Burnett in the spirit of *O Brother*. The program, filmed live at the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville by D. A. Pennebaker, featured King and Colin Linden performing "John Law Burned Down the Liquor Store" written by King, along with numbers by Emmylou Harris, Alison Krauss, and other performers. A soundtrack album of the event was certified gold in February of 2003.

In 2002 on his own independent label 21st Century Blues, he released *Dirty South Hip-Hop Blues*. The album blends Delta blues, New Orleans hip-hop grooves, electronica, and Euro-dance styles. Also in 2002 an in demand King worked with director Martin Scorsese. King toured that fall with bassist Anthony Hardesty and DJ Spin.

In 2004 King co-starred in the Oscar winning movie *Ray* about the life and times of the legendary Ray Charles with whom King recorded the score for the soundtracks which went on to win several Grammys and an Oscar.

In 2006 following Katrina, which destroyed King's New Orleans home, he wrote and recorded his most personal album to date, simply but eloquently titled "Rise." The album's themes flow between hope and tragedy perhaps best captured in "Baptized in dirty water", a slow driving 12 bar blues which featured a soaring electric guitar performance. It was nominated for a Grammy Award for song of the year.

Chris Thomas King's new album "Antebellum Postcards" is the masterful musical statement his fans always knew the multi-talented musician and actor was capable of. Its obvious after one listen King's at the height of his powers as a guitarist, singer-songwriter and studio wizard. The new recordings are heavily influenced by Nashville.

21 songs narrowed down to 10 for the release was two years in the making with King as a one-man string band, playing guitars, mandolin, banjo, bass, steel guitar, piano, organ, drums and at least a dozen other instruments with additional support from drummer Jeff Mills and bassist Ryan Clute. King has been the vanguard of the blues for more than a decade. His genius is seamlessly merging the vintage with the avant-guard, analog recording with digital technology, and early blues with the 21st century.

Some rare artists create great works that are ahead of its time. Chris Thomas King has been there and done that. But Antebellum Postcards is right on time and of its time. The album has much in common with today's popular roots bands like the Fleet Foxes, Mumford and Sons and the Civil Wars. Incorporating folk, blues and the roots of Nashville with energetic rock sensibilities developed from years of touring in front of enthusiastic crowds.

Chris Thomas King has developed a singular sound and style that transcends his blues roots from his years of performing before loyal fans at packed clubs, major festivals, theaters and juke joints. King performed more than 88 sold-out concerts with the "Down from the Mountain" tour performing alongside Alison Krauss and Union Station, Emmy Lou Harris, Ralph Stanley and others.

As an actor King has a role in the HBO series Treme and he continues to compose music for Hollywood films. King may not have totally gone country but he's traveling down the Lost Highway on his new CD Antebellum Postcards.