

John Primer – Biography



By any yardstick, Chicago guitarist John Primer has paid his dues. Prior to making *The Real Deal* for Mike Vernon's Atlantic-distributed Code Blue label, Primer spent 13 years as the ever-reliable rhythm guitarist with Magic Slim & the Teardrops. Before that, he filled the same role behind Chicago immortals Muddy Waters and Willie Dixon.

All that grounding has paid off handsomely for Primer. His sound is rooted in the classic Windy City blues sound of decades past: rough-edged and uncompromising and satisfying in the extreme. He's one of the last real traditionalists in town.

By the time he came to Chicago in 1963, Primer was thoroughly familiar with the lowdown sounds of Waters, Wolf, Jimmy Reed, B.B. and Albert King, and Elmore James. He fronted a West Side outfit for a

while called the Maintainers, dishing out a mix of soul and blues before joining the house band at the Southside blues mecca Theresa's Lounge for what ended up being a nine-year run. Elegant guitarist Sammy Lawhorn proved quite influential on Primer's maturing guitar approach during this period.



Always on the lookout for aspiring talent, Willie Dixon spirited him away for a 1979 gig in Mexico City. After a year or so as one of Dixon's All-Stars, Primer was recruited to join the last band of Muddy Waters, playing with the Chicago blues king until his 1983 death. Right after that, Primer joined forces with Magic Slim; their styles interlocked so seamlessly that their partnership seemed like an eternal bond.

But Primer deserved his own share of the spotlight. In 1993, Michael Frank's Chicago-based Earwig logo issued Primer's debut domestic disc, *Stuff You Got to Watch*. It was a glorious return to the classic '50s Chicago sound, powered by Primer's uncommonly concise guitar work and gruff, no-nonsense vocals.

With the 1995 emergence of *The Real Deal* – produced by Vernon and featuring all-star backing by harpist Billy Branch, pianist David Maxwell, and bassist Johnny B. Gayden, Primer's star appeared ready to ascend. He soon transferred back to the Wolf label for sets such as 1997's *Cold Blooded Blues Man*, 1998's *Blues Behind Closed Doors*, and 2000's *It's a Blues Life*. *(by Bill Dahl/www.allmusic.com)*