



Hezekiah Early

Blues Musician

Hezekiah Early was born in Natchez, Mississippi, on October 7, 1934. He had seven brothers and sisters with Hezekiah being the youngest of the boys. He found his love for music while listening to his father's fife-and-drum field band.

Hezekiah's father, Wilson Early, played a fife that was made by hand from switch cane that could be easily found close to home. His father would heat up a nail and burn out the holes that would be used to form the notes. The fife is a small, high pitched, flute that is similar to the piccolo. It was one of the most important musical instruments in America's Colonial period and was a favorite among early African American Blues artists. By the age ten, Hezekiah was marching and playing the fife right alongside his father and the band.

Hezekiah added to his musical talents as he learned to play the 50 cent harmonicas that his father would bring home after trips into town. Ever seeking to expand his musical abilities, he crafted for himself a make-shift guitar out of an empty wooden cheese box. He would strum away on the strings that he tightly stung across the box, forming chords and melodies along with his friends. Early took the chords he learned on his make-shift guitar and began to perform locally with other musicians.

Before long, their group got themselves a raggedy, patch covered set of drums, and just like he did with the fife, harmonica, and guitar, Early taught himself to play the drums.

Early never felt that his music would get out of Natchez until he and his band "The House rockers," recorded their first album, "Since Ol' Gabriel's Time," in 1982. The trio uniquely mixes the sounds of the drum, trombone, guitar, and harmonica. According to several reviews, the band's sound calls to mind the river blues of the early steamboat jazz and country blues bands originating in the lower Mississippi River Valley. Early's talents have led him and his band on 13 tours abroad and numerous jazz and blues festivals across the U.S.

Hezekiah Early was inducted into the Louisiana Folklife Center's Hall of Master Folk Artists, during the 30th annual Natchitoches NSU Folk Festival. Dr. Pete Gregory,

professor of anthropology and cofounder of the Folk Festival accepted the award on behalf of Early, who was unable to attend. Dr Gregory and Dr. Shane Rasmussen, director of the Louisiana Folklife Center at NSU, presented the plaque to Early at his home in Natchez, Mississippi, August 6, 2009.