

# Helaire, Major



## Blues Musician

Helaire was born Major Helaire in 1937, in Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana. Helaire went into the service at Fort Hood in central Texas and served briefly in Germany. Major came back to Natchitoches because, as he says, "This is home and I can't get away from it." At that time, he began playing blues music and took to the stage. He re-named himself B. B. King Helaire. The name was in honor of the blues-man B. B. King.

Helaire grew up in a blues tradition. Both his mother and uncle played the guitar. Growing up during the 1950s, he was influenced by records and the radio. He listened to great artists like Lightning Hopkins, John Lee Hooker, and Robert Johnson. With tips from his mother and uncle, and listening to Mr. Clifford Blake Sr., a gospel and blues singer at work, Mr. Helaire learned to play the blues.

His brother-in-law made his first guitar. He used a piece of plywood to construct a homemade instrument for Helaire. Eventually, Helaire started getting gigs and was able to buy a Silvertone from Sears Roebuck.

Oddly enough, music is the one class he skipped in high school. According to Helaire, "a blues player quickly learns to depend on playing by feeling. The musician who feels sad will play sad music, and if he's happy he will play happy music." Helaire considers B.B. King, by far, the greatest influence on his sound.

1964 marks the year Helaire began playing professional gigs. He started playing in a band with Overton Owens, known locally as Dr. Drip Drop. In Natchitoches Helaire played with Owens and Ocie Shields as part of a band called the "Natchitoches Blues-men." Later, Major helped form a band called "Phil Davis and the Unique." He also played in a band called the "House-rockers" and later his band was called the "B.B. Majors Blues Show." Major was sometimes called upon to open for such stars as Bobby "Blue" Bland, Millie Jackson, and even his idol, B.B. King.

Major gradually developed a following outside the Natchitoches Blues scene through his appearances in Rapides Parish and at the Natchitoches-NSU Folk Festival. He wrote his own music and looked forward to the day when he could record an album of his own music.

On Sunday, October 19, 2008, Image Helaire, Jr. (also known as Major Helaire or B.B. Major) passed away in Natchitoches, Louisiana.

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