

**Alexis Korner** (19 April 1928 – 1 January 1984) was a British blues musician and radio

broadcaster, who has sometimes been referred to as "a founding father of British blues". A major influence on the sound of the British music scene in the 1960s, Korner was instrumental in bringing together various English blues musicians.

Alexis Andrew Nicholas Koerner was born in Paris to an Austrian Jewish father and a Turkish-Greek mother. He spent his childhood in France, Switzerland and North Africa and arrived in London in 1940 at the start of World War II. One memory of his youth was listening to a record by black pianist Jimmy Yancey during a German air raid. Korner said, "From then on all I wanted to do was play the blues."

After the war, Korner played piano and guitar (his first guitar was built by friend and author Sydney Hopkins, who wrote *Mister God, This Is Anna*) and in 1949 joined Chris Barber's Jazz Band where he met blues harmonica player Cyril Davies. They started playing together as a duo, started the influential London Blues and Barrelhouse Club in 1955 and made their first record together in 1957. Korner made his first official record on Decca Records DFE 6286 in the company of Ken Colyer's Skiffle Group. His talent extended to playing mandolin on one of the tracks of this rare British EP, recorded in London on 28 July 1955. Korner brought many American blues artists, previously virtually unknown in Britain, to perform.

In 1961, Korner and Davies formed Blues Incorporated, initially a loose-knit group of musicians with a shared love of electric blues and R&B music. The group included, at various times, such influential musicians as Charlie Watts, Jack Bruce, Ginger Baker, Long John Baldry, Graham Bond, Danny Thompson and Dick Heckstall-Smith. It also attracted a wider crowd of mostly younger fans, some of whom occasionally performed with the group, including Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, Brian Jones, Geoff Bradford, Rod Stewart, John Mayall and Jimmy Page.

One story is that the Rolling Stones went to stay at Korner's house late one night, in the early 1960s, after a performance. They entered in the accepted way, by climbing in through the kitchen window, to find Muddy Waters' band sleeping on the kitchen floor.[citation needed]

Although Cyril Davies left the group in late-1962, Blues Incorporated continued to record, with Korner at the helm, until 1966. However, by that time its originally stellar line-up (and crowd of followers) had mostly left to start their own bands. "While his one-time acolytes the Rolling Stones and Cream made the front pages of music magazines all over the world, Korner was relegated to the role of 'elder statesman'."

Although he himself was a blues purist, Korner criticised better-known British blues musicians during the blues boom of the late 1960s for their blind adherence to Chicago blues, as if the music came in no other form. He liked to surround himself with jazz musicians and often performed with a horn section drawn from a pool that included, among others, saxophone players Art Themen, Mel Collins, Dick Heckstall-Smith, Lol Coxhill, Dick Morrissey, John Surman and trombonist Mike Zwerin.

In 1970 Korner and Thorup formed a big-band ensemble, C.C.S. – short for "The Collective Consciousness Society" – which had several hit singles produced by Mickie Most, including a version of Led Zeppelin's "Whole Lotta Love", which was used as the theme for BBC's *Top of the Pops* between 1971 and 1981. Another instrumental called "Brother" was used as the theme to the BBC Radio 1 *Top 20/40* when Tom Browne/Simon Bates presented the programme in the 1970s. It was

also used in the 1990s on Radio Luxembourg for the Top 20 Singles chart and was hosted by Shaun Tilley. This was the period of Korner's greatest commercial success in the UK.

In 1973, he formed another group, Snape, with Boz Burrell, Mel Collins, and Ian Wallace, who were previously together in King Crimson. Korner also played on B.B. King's *In London* album, and cut his own, similar "supersession" album; *Get Off My Cloud*, with Keith Richards, Peter Frampton, Nicky Hopkins and members of Joe Cocker's Grease Band. In the mid-1970s, while touring Germany, Korner established an intensive working relationship with bassist Colin Hodgkinson who played for the support act Back Door. They would continue to collaborate right up until Korner's death.

A chain smoker, on 1 January 1984 aged 55, Korner died of lung cancer in Westminster Hospital, London. He was survived by a daughter, singer Sappho Gillett Korner (died 2006) and two sons, guitarist Nicholas 'Nico' Korner (died 1988) and sound engineer Damian Korner (died 2010).