

## **Champion Jack Dupree**

**William Thomas "Champion Jack" Dupree (July 23, 1909 or July 4, 1910 – January 21, 1992)** was an American blues and boogie-woogie pianist and singer. His nickname was derived from his early career as a boxer.

### **Biography**

Dupree was a New Orleans blues and boogie-woogie pianist, a barrelhouse "professor". His father was from the Belgian Congo and his mother was part African American and Cherokee. His birth date has been given as July 4, July 10, and July 23, 1908, 1909, or 1910; the researchers Bob Eagle and Eric LeBlanc give July 4, 1910.

He was orphaned at the age of eight and was sent to the Colored Waifs Home in New Orleans, an institution for orphaned or delinquent boys (about the same time, Louis Armstrong was also sent there as a child, after being arrested as a "dangerous and suspicious character"). Dupree taught himself to play the piano there and later apprenticed with Tuts Washington and Willie Hall, whom he called his father and from whom he learned "Junker's Blues". He was also a "spy boy" for the Yellow Pocahontas tribe of the Mardi Gras Indians. He soon began playing in barrelhouses and other drinking establishments.

He began a life of travelling, living in Chicago, where he worked with Georgia Tom, and in Indianapolis, Indiana, where he met Scrapper Blackwell and Leroy Carr. He also worked as a cook. In Detroit, after Joe Louis encouraged him to become a boxer, he fought 107 bouts, winning Golden Gloves and other championships and picking up the nickname Champion Jack, which he used the rest of his life.

He returned to Chicago at the age of 30 and joined a circle of recording artists, including Big Bill Broonzy and Tampa Red, who introduced him to the record producer Lester Melrose. Many of Dupree's songs were later credited to Melrose as composer, and Melrose claimed publishing rights to them.

Dupree's career was interrupted by military service in World War II. He was a cook in the United States Navy and was held by the Japanese for two years as a prisoner of war.

After the war, his biggest commercial success was "Walkin' the Blues", which he recorded as a duet with Teddy McRae. This led to several national tours and eventually a European tour. In 1959 he played an unofficial (and unpaid) duo gig with Alexis Korner at the London School of Economics.

Dupree moved to Europe in 1960, settling first in Switzerland and then Denmark, England, Sweden and, finally, Germany. On June 17, 1971, he played at the Montreux Jazz Festival, in the Casino Kursaal, with King Curtis, backed by Cornell Dupree on guitar, Jerry Jemmott on bass and Oliver Jackson on drums. The recording of the concert was released in 1973 as the album *King Curtis & Champion Jack Dupree: Blues at Montreux* on the Atlantic label.

During the 1970s and 1980s he lived at Ovenden in Halifax, England. A piano he used was later discovered at Calderdale College in Halifax. He continued to record in Europe with the Kenn Lending Band, Louisiana Red and Axel Zwingenberger and made many live appearances. He

also worked again as a cook, specializing in New Orleans cuisine. He returned to the United States from time to time and performed at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival.

Dupree died of cancer on January 21, 1992, in Hanover, Germany.

### **Musical style and output**

Dupree's playing was almost all straight blues and boogie-woogie. He was not a sophisticated musician or singer, but he had a wry and clever way with words: "Mama, move your false teeth, papa wanna scratch your gums." He sometimes sang as if he had a cleft palate and even recorded under the name Harelip Jack Dupree. This was an artistic conceit, as he had clear articulation, particularly for a blues singer. He would occasionally indulge in a vocalese style of sung word play (similar to Slim Gaillard's "Vout"), as in his "Mr. Dupree Blues", included on the album *The Complete Blue Horizon Sessions*.

Many of his songs were about jail, drinking and drug addiction, although he himself was a light drinker and did not use other drugs. His "Junker's Blues" was transmuted by Fats Domino into "The Fat Man", Domino's first hit record. Some of Dupree's songs had gloomy topics, such as "TB Blues" and "Angola Blues" (about Louisiana State Penitentiary, the infamous Louisiana prison farm), but he also sang about cheerful subjects, as in "Dupree Shake Dance": "Come on, mama, on your hands and knees, do that shake dance as you please". He was a noted raconteur and transformed many of his stories into songs, such as "Big Leg Emma's", a rhymed tale of a police raid on a barrelhouse.

The lyrics of Jerry Lee Lewis's version of "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On"—"You can shake it one time for me!"—echo Dupree's song "Shake Baby Shake".

On his best-known album, *Blues from the Gutter*, released by Atlantic Records in 1959, he was accompanied on guitar by Larry Dale, whose playing on that record inspired Brian Jones of the Rolling Stones.

In later years Dupree recorded with John Mayall, Mick Taylor, Eric Clapton and The Band.[6]

Although best known as a singer and pianist in the New Orleans style, Dupree occasionally pursued more musically adventurous projects, including Dupree 'n' McPhee, a collaboration with the English guitarist Tony McPhee, recorded for Blue Horizon Records.

Since his death, Dupree has undergone a revival of interest on the British vintage dance scene. His recording of "Shakin' Mother for You" now features on the playlist of most DJ's on the UK Lindy Hop scene and it has become the de facto standard track for the 'Cardiff Stroll'.

## **Tony McPhee**

**Anthony Charles McPhee (born 23 March 1944) is an English blues guitarist, and founder of The Groundhogs. An early version of this band backed Champion Jack Dupree and John Lee Hooker on UK**

concerts in the mid-1960s. He is often credited as 'Tony (T.S.) McPhee'. He was given this name by the producer Mike Vernon who suggested adding 'T.S.' to his name when McPhee released a duet single with Champion Jack Dupree in 1966 called Get Your Head Happy, in order to make it look more like an official blues name. It stands for Tough Shit.

The Groundhogs evolved into a blues-rock trio that produced three UK Top 10 hits in the UK Albums Chart in the early 1970s. Although they have continued to play in various line-ups to the present day, McPhee officially retired from the band in 2015.

Solo album The Two Sides of Tony (T.S.) McPhee was released in 1973. Side A of this record is blues rock and Side B is a single psychedelic art rock electronic composition, featuring Arp 2600 Synthesizers, Electric Piano and The Rhythm Ace Drum Synthesizer exploring McPhee's strong stance against Fox and Stag-Hunting. McPhee has also released many other solo acoustic blues records, as well as duets with Jo Ann Kelly.

Apart from the Groundhogs, McPhee has played with Herbal Mixture, the John Dummer Band, Hapshash and the Coloured Coat, Tony McPhee's Terraplane, Tony McPhee's Turbo, the Tony McPhee Band and Current 93

In 2009, McPhee suffered a stroke which affected his speech and ability to sing.