



Henry Gray
blues pianist
Baton Rouge, LA

Henry Gray's seven decade long career as a blues and boogie-woogie pianist spans both the geographical and musical roots of the genre and makes him arguably one of the most influential blues musicians of the past half-century. At 82, Henry continues to deliver his rollicking, two-fisted boogie-woogies and passionate blues to audiences throughout the world.

Henry Gray grew up on a farm near Baton Rouge, Louisiana. By the age of 12 he was spending his free time away from the cotton fields playing in nearby churches and juke joints where he earned a reputation as a formidable musician. After serving in World War II, he joined the rural migration north to Chicago where his stints in south side clubs brought him to the attention of bluesman Big Maceo Merriwether, the preeminent blues pianist in the period that defined the Chicago blues. Under Maceo's mentorship he emerged as one of the architects of Chicago blues, spending twelve years with the legendary Howlin Wolf's band. During the 50s and 60s he also worked as a sideman on many record labels including Chess and the Louisiana Excello label, and played with a long list of bluesmen including Sonny Boy Williamson, Elmore James, Buddy Guy, B.B. King, Tabby Thomas, Silas Hogan and Guitar Slim.

In 1968 Gray returned to Louisiana to care for his mother after his father's passing and took up work as a roofer for the East Baton Rouge Parish School Board. Although he continued to work at his day job, Gray kept up his busy music career playing in clubs and at festivals in southern Louisiana, helping create the "swamp blues" style of the region. Over the past twenty years he has recorded a number of well-received albums, both solo and with his band "Henry Gray & the Cats" and he has again begun touring and appearing at festivals. In 1998 Henry Gray's contributions to the blues world were honored with a Grammy nomination and four W. C. Handy award nominations. He has received several Life Time Achievement Awards and in 2002 won the New Orleans Big Easy award for Blues Artist of the Year. In 2006, Henry Gray was awarded the NEA National Heritage Fellowship, this country's highest recognition of traditional artists.