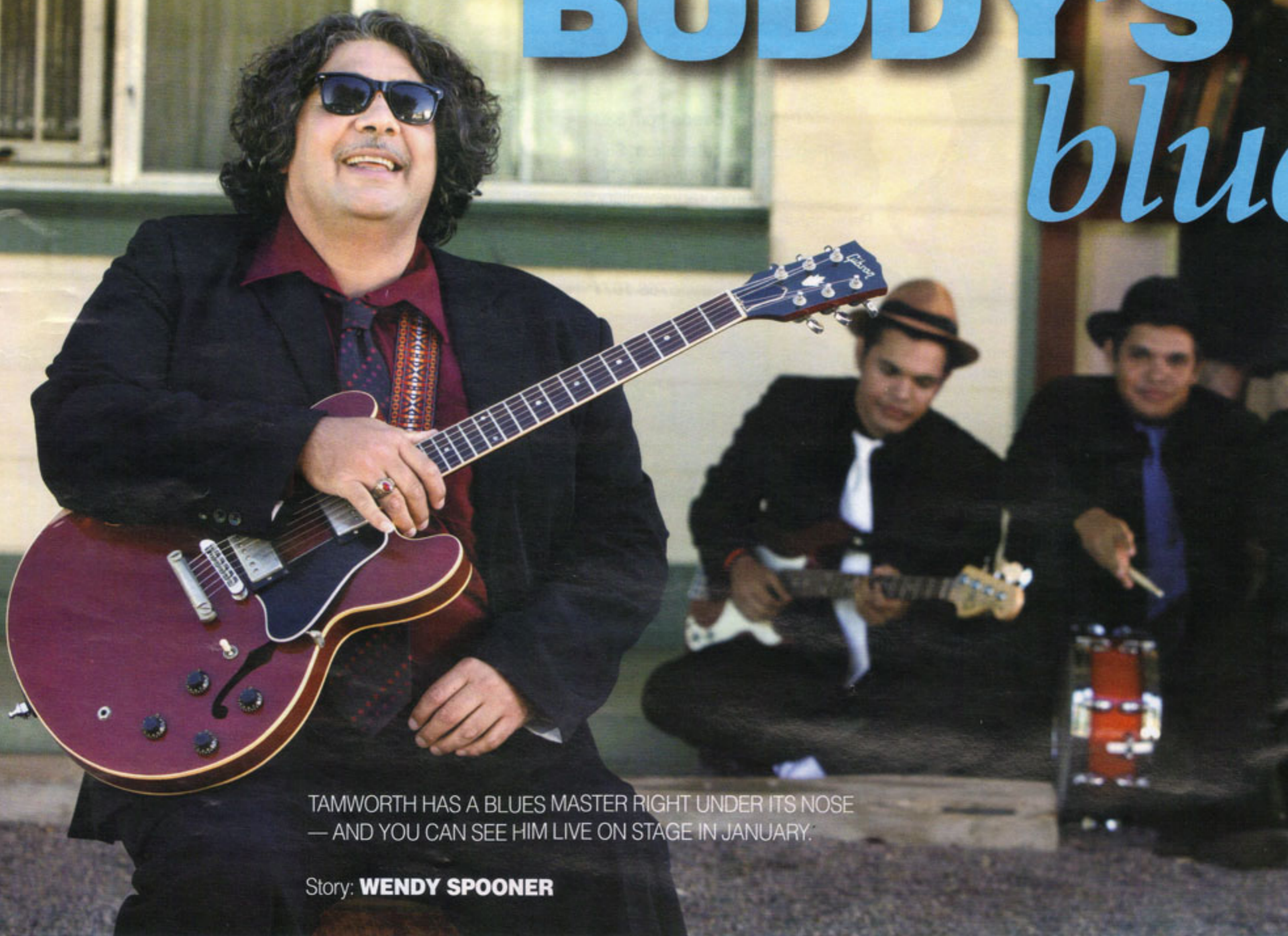


# BUDDY'S blues



TAMWORTH HAS A BLUES MASTER RIGHT UNDER ITS NOSE  
— AND YOU CAN SEE HIM LIVE ON STAGE IN JANUARY.

Story: **WENDY SPOONER**

**B**uddy Knox is Tamworth's musical hidden treasure – which is ridiculous because he fronts one of the best blues bands in the land. People need to know about this extraordinary talent right on our doorstep: pubs, you should be booking the Buddy Knox Blues Band.

In January 2008, Buddy released his debut album, *got da blues*. The album, comprising 14 cover songs and featuring Buddy's clean but impressive lead guitar sounds, has already been heavily feted by industry peers.

At the Australian Blues Music Chain Awards, held at the 2009 Goulburn Blues Music Festival in February, Buddy won Best New Blues Talent for 2008 and was also a finalist in Best Male Vocal and Producer of the Year.

"The Chain Awards are named after the only blues band in the world to have had a number-one hit on the Australian music charts (*Black 'n' Blue*), as well as a number two (*Judgement*)," Goulburn Blues Festival director Jenny Falconer said. "The awards are recognised as the industry's most prestigious honour and are presented each year to recognise excellence in blues music in Australia."

The album also won Album of the Year 2008 at the 2009 Newcastle Blues Music Awards; Buddy was also nominated for a Deadly Award this year – Male Artist of the Year.

"It was a surprise – I don't think I'm good enough to get those things but I'm proud of it," Buddy said.

Foxtel also recently did a documentary on Buddy which is yet to air.

You could say that Buddy's life has, naturally, led him to this point – but it's also a product of dedication and hard work.

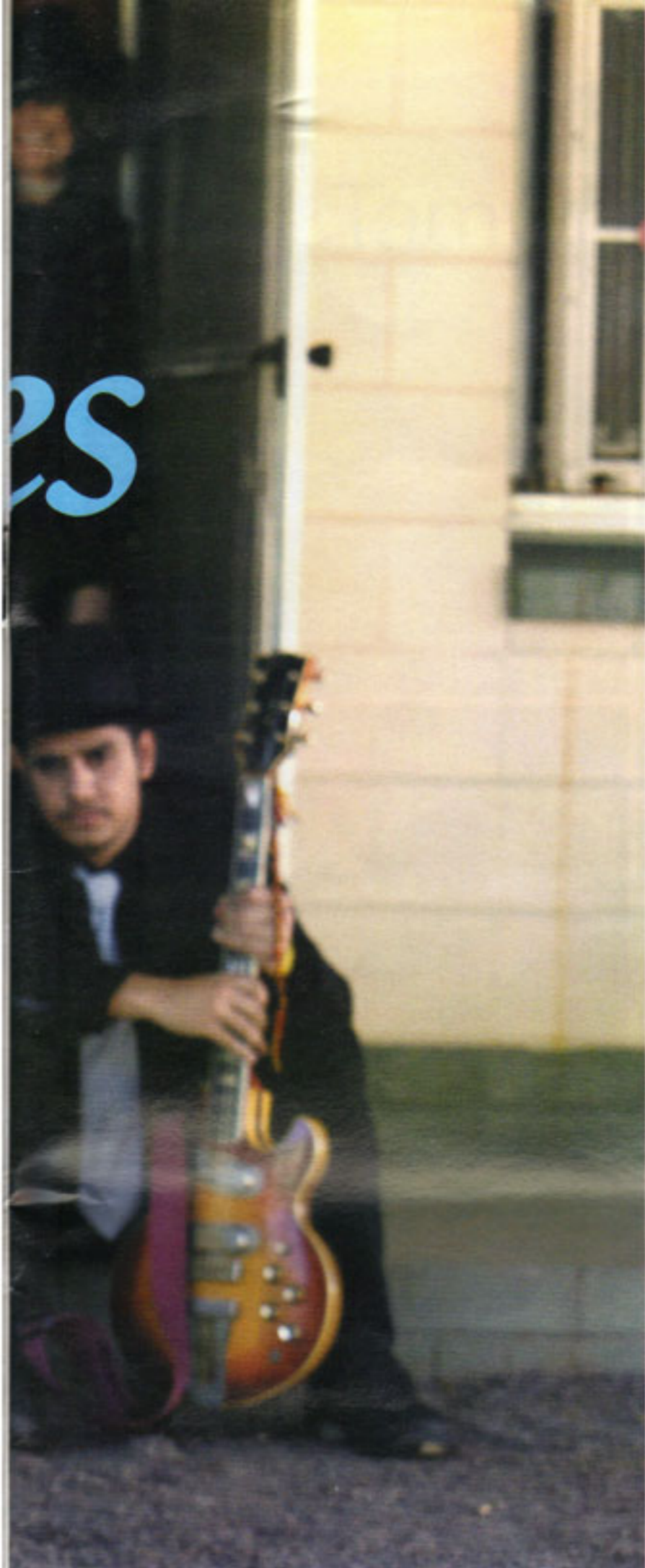
Son of Aboriginal country music legend Roger Knox, Buddy grew up with guitars around him and his mother, Vivian, taught him his first three chords. "The guitar was always around," said Buddy, 41. His blues talent is so good one forgets that it did not surround him as a young tyke. "A lot of people don't realise that I didn't grow up with blues – I grew up with rock'n'roll and country music."

After a lifetime of being a guitarist for others and building up his talent, in 2006 Buddy formed his own band, in major part because of the intense support of his good friend and fellow musician, accordion player Fiona Peters, who inspired him to take the plunge. "She's the number-one fan and the one that believes in me the most," Buddy says.

His guitar experience laid the groundwork for his current band. "The thing that I like most in all my musical career is what I'm doing now," Buddy said. "All the other stuff set me up for this, but if I hadn't met Fiona, it wouldn't have happened."

Fiona met Buddy at the 2005 national finals for campdrafting at Baradine, near Coonabarabran, when she was playing with Darren Clark. "Darren needed a guitar





“You don't have to go to America or England to get some good blues.”

player with a bit of zing who could play,” she said.

Fiona suggested Buddy form a band because “I could see this incredible talent ... his voice ... I knew he could play guitar,” she said.

By the time Fiona met Buddy he'd played with Tamworth country singer Wanita for 10 years. He'd also toured nationally and internationally with many artists, eg, the Warumpi Band and their Big Day Out tours, Troy Cassar-Daley, Paul Kelly, Roger Knox's band called Euraba, with a six-week stint in Canada, gigs in London and Nashville, countless “Big House” performances, and national and regional touring experiences.

When he was 13, he'd had a sink-or-swim experience – his father was hurt in a plane crash at Oodnadatta in South Australia and Buddy was asked to fill in on guitar. “I still do things with him as well,” Buddy said.

Why does he dig the blues so much?

“It's what I feel within me ... and the passion within me ... I can't see myself doing anything else,” Buddy said.

He likes many different forms of music and reels off a long list of musicians he admires. “I like country music. I like rock'n'roll. I like blues, soul, r'n'b, reggae, heavy rock. I like Al Green, Teddy Pendergrass, Albert Collins, Muddy Waters, Marvin Gaye and the Temptations, but I do like the blues better. My favourite is Freddie King. I listened to Chuck Berry when I was growing up. I like Eric Clapton, BB King.

“I just like [the blues] – there's no big story. I feel blues don't make me feel good, they make me feel up. I feel a bit down, I go and play some blues on my CD; I just relate to everything about the old blues.”

Buddy's guitar sound is clean and never overworked.

“It's developed from the past. In the past, I played without a rhythm guitarist so I had to do rhythm and lead guitar: I had to fill in the gaps,” he said. It's somehow given him this preternatural ability to know just when to crank it up and when to back off.

“I think Buddy's got a rare talent for playing soulful, expressive guitar and he eats, breathes, sleeps music,” Fiona said. His guitar playing is “smooth”. It's not too busy. It's polished and classy “and it looks effortless – and I know it's not”.

Buddy's two nephews, twins Barega (bass) and Bareki (drums) are also with him on his musical journey. Buddy's original drummer was the twins' father, Gene Knox, who recently left the band due to other band commitments elsewhere. Fiona also sometimes plays accordion with the band and appears on *got da blues*.

The Knox twins, 21, are, possibly, better known for their football prowess and traditional dance skills.

On stage, the twins cause quite a sensation when performing on Uncle Buddy's blues platform. “He adores his nephews and sees their talent,” Fiona says.

Buddy said: “The sound that you hear today – it's all me. [The twins] are starting to understand what I do – they're

playing with confidence, they understand what I want to happen and it makes the band sound even tighter and better.”

It's working. The band blew away punters at the 2009 Tamworth Country Music Festival. Fiona said former Albert Hotel publican Gavin “Snow” Myers told her that “I had people telling me he was the best thing they've ever seen at the festival – and they've been coming here for 15 years”.

Buddy said: “You don't have to go to America or England to get some good blues – we've got it here. I say to Fiona ‘I came out of the koori scene – any of the kooris who came before we're gonna be bigger and better’. They're going to remember me.”

He says all this with candour but he's not bragging. “I've got to aim big – if I don't aim big, what message am I sending to the young ones that are coming after me?”

Buddy loves to mentor young people. “I try and help them; I like to encourage the kids and inspire them somehow,” he says.

One of his more famous *protégés* is Smokin' Joe Robinson, 18, of Kempsey, widely regarded as the next big guitarist in Australia and who this year toured America with Tommy Emmanuel. Joe, a former winner of *Australia's Got Talent*, climbed up on stage for a number with Buddy at The Albert Hotel at the last Tamworth Country Music Festival. The joy was obvious for all to see.

Joe has a close association with Buddy. “Joe was around Tamworth as a youngster ... he's a sponge,” Fiona said. “He was told by [jazz/country drummer] Randall Wilson ‘You're a good little player, mate, get your arse over and see Buddy Knox’.

“Joe came up and introduced himself to Buddy ... They got talking ... Buddy said ‘I'll show you some guitar tricks’ ... they had a jam.



Top: Smokin' Joe Robinson, right, plays Buddy's Ibanez Blazer at a gig at The Youthie during the 2009 Tamworth Country Music Festival.

Above: Buddy and the twins rehearse at Fiona Peter's place once a week in the old Bithramere Hall which was transported to the farm.



“I just relate to everything about the old blues.”

Above: Buddy in the foreground with members of his original band, with Teangi Knox at right. PHOTO: Courtesy Foxtel

Left: At the 2009 Chain Awards, Buddy won Best New Blues Talent for 2008 and was also a finalist in Best Male Vocal and Producer of the Year.



“Anything he knows he teaches kids, in particular – he nurtures kids ... he’s currently mentoring kids,” Fiona said, citing singer Loren Ryan of Tamworth High School. “Any kids that want to learn he’s generous with his knowledge.”

Regarding Joe, “Buddy’s not dazzled by his fame but he’s dazzled by his talent.”

Buddy said: “I just made him aware of a couple of things. There are certain people he likes to be around. He’s been around a lot of big-name guitar players – and he’s been around me! (laughs)”

Buddy also played some gigs in July at several Sydney jails. “I think he’s Australia’s answer to Barack Obama or whatever because he’s passionate about helping people and getting them back on track and realising their talents and potential,” Fiona said. “[But] Buddy, if anything, is incredibly modest.”

He and the twins are studying for a certificate IV at TAFE to teach small groups – and Buddy will be conducting two blues workshops called ‘Talkin’ the Blues with Buddy Knox’ at The Youthie in Tamworth in January during the Tamworth Country Music Festival. The workshops, to be held on January 19 and 22, will see Buddy teaching the history of the blues and also blues guitar.

The band’s blues repertoire has also been augmented with a dash of other musical styles lately – although the core element will always be the blues.

“He’s singing all this soul stuff – he’s got his nephews doing doo wop and harmonies,” Fiona said.

Buddy said: “Blues is our thing – we try to have fun with some of the other things.”

Fiona said: “[This band] has rhythmic and melodic dig in the blues – this is the only blues band I know of that is doing it.”

The album, *got da blues*, is all cover songs – no originals.

“He didn’t have a belief in his ability to write,” Fiona said. But he’s starting to write more now, including a song called *Squeaky Chair Blues*. “The next CD I do, I’ll have a couple of covers, but there’ll be more original songs,” Buddy said.

For the Tamworth Country Music Festival, the Buddy Knox Blues Band will play at The Albert Hotel in Peel St on January 16 and 17, at 7pm and 7.30pm respectively; during

“ I think we’re the only indigenous band in Australia playing the blues.



1 – Buddy in rehearsals. 2 – Buddy with the twins, Barega (blue tie) and Bareki. 3 – Buddy on stage. 4 – Buddy with Sugarcane Collins, a blues guitarist and songwriter from Cairns, at this year’s Gympie Muster.

the final weekend, January 23-24, Buddy will also be a guest artist for the Capitol Theatre’s Showcase finale, as well as being in the Showcase band throughout the whole week.

Then, on Tuesday, January 26, Buddy’s band will be performing at the Australia Day celebrations at The Dag Inn, “Wombramurra”, Crawney Rd, Nundle. The performance is happening around noon.

Since forming in 2006, the band has played at the 2007, 2008 and 2009 Tamworth Country Music Festival, the 2008 Cutting Edge Festival, 2008 Wagga Jazz ‘n’ Blues, 2008 Woodford Music Festival, The Dreaming Festival 2008-09, the 2009 Byron Bay Bluesfest, 2009 Gympie Muster and the Sydney Blues Festival.

The album, *got da blues*, was recorded in three weeks in the Newcastle studio of Gareth Hudson, with Darren Clarke on bass/drums and Gene Knox on drums, Buddy on vocals, lead and rhythm guitar (a 335 Gibson), his son, Teangi, on an L5S Gibson (and playing lead on two tracks), Tamworth didg player Mark Atkins, Smokin’ Joe Robinson on lead guitar on one track and Fiona Peters on

accordion on the R&B tune. Buddy also enlisted some session musos to add a little keys, trumpet, sax and some backing vocals.

Live, the band comprises Buddy and the twins.

“We’re an all-black band playing the blues – you normally get that over in America, you don’t get that over here. I think we’re the only indigenous band in Australia playing the blues,” Buddy said.

This is certainly a band to watch and the accolades have started. It’s now time to build the momentum, with another CD planned for later next year. As Buddy puts it: “I feel like I’m about to light a smoke next to a petrol pump.

“I heard this from one of the old blues men: good things come to those who wait. It was BB King. He was 84 at the time!

“Patience – I think you’ve gotta have it. [Singers] Vicki Sims and Bob McLeod told me ‘Your time, as your own act, will come’.

“I said to Fiona ‘We’ve gotta get our shades ready, cause the future looks bright.’”