

Created by: Debra C. Argen

Maria Muldaur - Interview

Blues Queen Maria Muldaur chats with [Luxury Experience](http://luxuryexperience.com/) about singing the Blues, influences in her life, her career focusing on American Roots music, and her latest release, ***First Came Memphis Minnie***, released on the [Stony Plain Recording Co. Ltd.](http://luxuryexperience.com/) label.



Maria Muldaur

LE

Thank you for taking time out of your touring schedule to speak with Luxury Experience. Edward F. Nesta and I are strong supporters of the arts and music, and enjoy making the connection between artists and Luxury Experience readers, believing that if that people do not support the arts, soon there will not be any art or music.

Maria

Thank you, and Amen to that, Sister!

LE

Your style has included Pop, Folk, Roots Music, Blues, Bluegrass, and 'old timey' music of the American rural south, how did you get started as a professional singer?

Maria

I was born in Greenwich Village in New York City, and came of age in the early 60s. There was a big scene in discovering various music of the American South including Country Blues, Delta Blues, and Folk. There was no master plan, no career plans, we were just exploring it for the passion. Coming out of the 50s, which was very bland, with songs like, *How Much For That Doggie In The Window*, to hear really vital, fresh, soulful music, well, you can imagine how exciting that was. I learned to play country fiddle, and old

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timey fiddle. I joined a jug band and we performed all over the United States and Canada. I married one of the singers, Jeff Muldaur, which launched my career in 1963. Jeff and I made 2 albums in the 1970s before we dissolved our marriage and our music partnership. I moved to Los Angeles and recorded my first solo album, *MariaMuldaur*, in 1973, which included the hit song *Midnight at the Oasis*, which was nominated for a Grammy for "Song of the Year." Since then I have recorded 39 additional albums. In 2013, I will celebrate 50 years as a recording artist, and what a blessing that is.

LE

First Came Memphis Minnie is your 40th release and it is absolutely wonderful!

You credit the venerable Blues artist Victoria Spivey for introducing you to the music of Memphis Minnie in the 1970s in New York City, and I want to thank you for introducing Minnie to the rest of us, and posthumously thank Victoria Spivey, a contemporary of Memphis Minnie, and owner of Spivey Records, for making the initial connection.

Born in 1897 in Algiers, Louisiana, Memphis Minnie Lawlers was one lively gal, and she must have had some incredible stories to tell. How did you come to select Minnie's music for the release?

Maria

I had done several albums with Stony Plain doing vintage Blues, and recently received a Grammy nomination for, *MariaMuldaur & Her Garden of Joy*. Memphis Minnie was a rich source of material, so I approached my "Sisters in Music" who I knew shared my love of Memphis Minnie music.

LE

You assembled an incredible talent of Blues artists and musicians to join you on the 13-track release to share the music of Memphis Minnie.

How did you select the artists and musicians to join you and what was it like working with your "Sisters in music": Bonnie Raitt, Rory Black, Phoebe Snow, Ruthie Foster, and Koko Taylor, and musicians Del Rey, David Bromberg, Alvin Youngblood Hart, Roy Rogers, Steve James, and Steve Freund?

Maria

This was the fourth time that Bonnie Raitt and I had worked together, Rory Black is a formidable Blues woman, as are Ruthie Foster and Koko Taylor, and Phoebe Snow and I bonded in 1971 on a street in Greenwich Village before either of us knew that we would make a career out of music. Phoebe came up to me and said, "You like Memphis Minnie, too, I heard you sing *Chauffeur Blues*." With that, Phoebe took out her guitar and started playing and singing the Memphis Minnie song, *In My Girlish Days*.

When I told Phoebe about the project several years ago, as my projects often have long lead times, if she would be interested in joining me on a Memphis Minnie album, she was very excited about it, and said that she wanted to sing, *In My Girlish Days*. Unfortunately, she had a stroke a short time after and died about a year later. I approached Sony and they allowed us to use an earlier Phoebe Snow recording, which is one of my favorite tracks on the release. Phoebe could relate to the song, as like Memphis Minnie, she ran away from home to find her own way in the world.

LE

What other artists have made an impact on you and your career?

Maria

Victoria Spivey, a contemporary of Memphis Minnie and a Blues singer whose biggest hits were in the 1920s, and in the 1960s created her own record label and was the first to ever record Bob Dylan. She was a talented singer, and a very smart businesswoman to create her own label.

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LE

What is next for Maria Muldaur?

Maria

I am touring extensively performing music off the First Came Memphis Minnie release, as well as music from my 39th release, Steady Love, which is a killer album, one of my favorites, and reached #1 on the Living Blues radio Charts. I made that album with my touring band, playing Swamp Funk music. I went to New Orleans, connected with my favorite musicians, and cut it in a few days. The release is raw, high octane, and electric.

I would also love to make a movie about the life, adventures, and music of Memphis Minnie set against the backdrop of what was happening in the world around her. Ruthie Foster would be a natural as Memphis Minnie.

Everyone has heard of Bessie Smith, however when I ask the audience how many have heard of Memphis Minnie, only a few respond, yet I see them nodding with the music in agreement.

Memphis Minnie had no blueprint, no role model, she just went for it, and most of her recordings were acoustic with Minnie playing guitar. She not only was one of the few women guitarists at the time, she a killer guitar player, a great songwriter as Blues has to tell a story, and a great singer. She was Queen of the Blues scene in Chicago and was one of the first guitarists to plug in her guitar, helping to create the Chicago Electric Blues scene, which morphed into R & B, which morphed into Rock.

LE

Maria, thank you for not only keeping the Blues alive, but helping to nourish it along as well.

Visit Maria Muldaur's website for touring dates and cities at: www.MariaMuldaur.com

Read the review of [First Came Memphis Minnie](#) in the [Music Scene](#) section.

Follow **MariaMuldaur** on **Facebook** at **Facebook/Maria Ritenour**

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