

"Blues music is truth," explains Bowling Green John Cephas, the guitar-playing half of the acoustic guitar and harmonica duo Cephas & Wiggins. "The lyrics are true-to-life experiences that people everywhere can relate to." His partner, Harmonica Phil Wiggins, agrees: "Blues is nourishment for the human spirit."

Cephas and Wiggins are third on the line-up for the Third Annual Flatland Blues Festival held June 3-4 at Memorial Park and the County Fair Grasslands in Russell. The Festival is hosted by Friends of the Deines Cultural Center, Russell Main Street and Russell Arts Council.

Because both Cephas and Wiggins were born in Washington, D.C., they bring an urban sophistication to the traditionally rural blues they perform, sometimes referred to as East Coast Piedmont style. They have performed in living rooms for a handful of people and in front of thousands at blues festivals all over the world. They even entertained at President Clinton's inaugural party in 1997. Cephas & Wiggins keep the Piedmont tradition alive by infusing it with their own originality, vitality, and, most importantly, fun. The duo celebrates the gentle, melodic blues style of the southeastern U.S. with every performance.

John Cephas was born in 1930 into a deeply religious family and raised in Bowling Green, Virginia. His first taste of music was gospel, but blues soon became his calling and he learned to play the alternating thumb and finger picking guitar style that defines Piedmont blues.

Phil Wiggins was born in 1954. Besides being a renowned harmonica player, Wiggins is also a gifted songwriter and baritone singer whose material has helped define the duo's rural-blues sound.

Other performers for the festival are Shemekia Copeland, Anthony Gomes, Queen Bey, Watermelon Slim and the Workers, and Lemuel Sheppard.

Tickets for Flatland Blues Festival are available in Russell at USA Express, Klema Hometown Market, the Chamber of Commerce Office, Russell Main Street Office and Deines Cultural Center. In Hays, tickets may be purchased at Dillons and Doerfler's Harley Davidson. Ticket outlets in Salina are House of Sight and Sound and Dillons. Wichita locations include Dillons at Central and Rock Road and at the Dillons store at Central and Maize. Hutchinson and McPherson Dillons also have tickets for purchase.

Major underwriters for the Third Annual Flatland Blues Festival include U.S. Energy Partners, Russell Vet Service, Holland and Holland and AmericInn. The Festival is also sponsored by United National Bank, KRSL-KCAY, Russell County News, Steve and Kendra Trueblood and Coors. Queen Bey's performance is made possible in part by a grant from the Kansas Arts Commission.

