

Shemekia Copeland is one of six headliners at the Third Annual Flatland Blues Festival June 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> at Memorial Park and County Fair Grasslands in Russell. Copeland's performance will begin at approximately 8:00 pm. The festival is hosted by three non-profit entities: Russell Arts Council, Russell Main Street and Friends of the Deines Cultural Center.

Shemekia is the daughter of late Texas Blues singer/guitarist Johnny "Clyde" Copeland, and seems to have inherited his musical gifts. She sings in a hard-edged, brassy voice that hints heavily at Gospel and R&B influences. Copeland was born in Harlem in 1979 and her father encouraged her to sing right from the beginning, even bringing her up on-stage at the Cotton Club when she was just eight years old. She began to pursue a singing career in earnest at age 16. When her father's health began to decline due to heart disease, he took Shemekia on tour with him as his opening act, which helped establish her name on the blues circuit

She made a splash when she entered the national scene in 1997, when she was just 18. Her second album, *Wicked*, released in 2000, earned her a slew of W.C. Handy Blues Award nominations and she walked off with three: Song of the Year, Blues Album of the Year, and Contemporary Female Artist of the Year. She was nominated this year for a Blues Music Award (formerly W.C. Handy Award) for her 2005 release of *The Soul Truth*. Critics have fawned over her stunning vocals, which burst with energy and passion. CNN calls her "a legend in the making."

At the Flatland Blues Festival, Copeland's performance will be electric but she utilizes traditional acoustic instruments and incorporates songs and rhythms from string band, gospel, work songs and "shouts" of black laborers, country and blues music repertoires. Her vocals are powerful and emotional with the spirit of classic Memphis soul but, at the same time, contemporary and up-to-the-minute. Shemekia herself says, "When people hear 'Blues', they think it's sad music by old men from Mississippi, but Blues has evolved and grown."

Copeland's music has been described as satisfying, original, heartfelt and memorable. Her music favors stories of female strength. Flatland Blues Festival goers who liked Kelley Hunt's style in past years will also like Shemekia Copeland. The Village Voice says, "Young Shemekia is the most soul-shaking, big-voiced blues singer in years, attacking contemporary material like the early Etta James." Her "blast-furnace" voice, also described as "grits-'n-gravy" has earned acclaim in all the major music publications. Copeland has fashioned herself as a powerful, soul-inflected shouter, but is also capable of a subtler range of emotions, and demonstrates a remarkable passion for Delta blues.

Proud to be a blues artist, Shemekia fits nicely amongst the ranks of seasoned blues musicians. Other musicians performing at the Third Annual Flatland Blues

Festival are Queen Bey, Cephas and Wiggins, Lemuel Sheppard, Watermelon Slim and Anthony Gomes.

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.