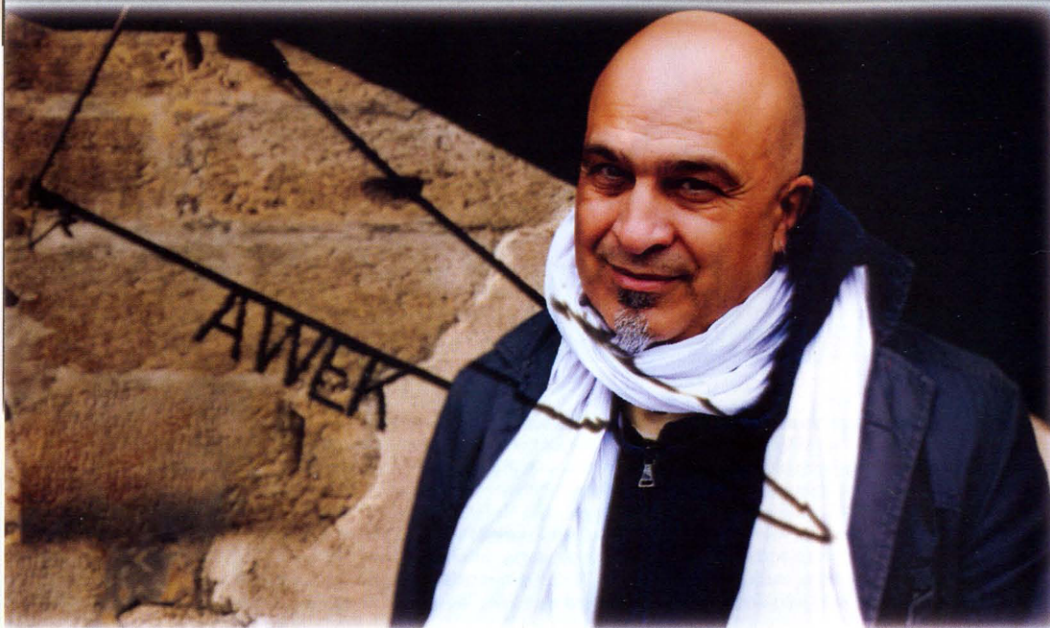


We met in Toulouse.: -The following is what Bernard had to tell me about the Blues in France and about himself and Awek.



Bernard Sellam is the leader of the leading French Blues band Awek. I met Bernard through French Blues radio DJ Clive Rawlings, who is originally from the UK writes Richard Newman.

It's the music that takes you somewhere, we live the spirit of the Blues, we live this life, living in the Blues world is very different from life in the south of France.

I first started listening to English bands in the early 70s and the first gig I saw, the first Blues gig was Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry at the Olympia Paris, which is a very big venue, and when I came out, I realize that The Blues was the music I like best.

Paris is close to England and I have seen Eric Clapton many times, I have seen many bands. The 60s was a great time for music, and now I have just realized just what a big time it was. I was studying the guitar when I was 15. Fingerpicking acoustic Folk music, was very big in Europe then.

I have always had my small world, with my special room, with my computer. My guitars, are my best friends. I like the life outside in the south of France. But I also have my own private world of the Blues.

Early on I was fond of West Coast music, bands such as 'The Grateful Dead' and 'Crosby Stills And Nash'. To me that music was not different from The Blues, it was all music.

Then I discovered people like Frank Zappa, but when I wanted to get more serious about music, to become professional, I chose the Blues as the music for me.

When I started out I was just a guitar player, not as singer. I became a singer 20 years ago, because I was upset with singers, because of their egos.

I found it very difficult to work with some of them so I decided I had to sing for myself.

I listened to 'Led Zeppelin', 'Canned Heat' and 'The Yardbirds', who were all playing Blues on some of the tracks they recorded. I am 52 years old, I was born in 1957 and it was hard to know about the Blues when I was young, there was not much information about bands. I then got interested in Jazz and from there, found the Blues of Eric Clapton and Peter Green.

At first I was in a Soul band, it had seven musicians in it, and it was very expensive to run. That is why I decided to form the Blues band Awek, and I asked the guys and they said sure, but we don't know anything about the blues and I said I would teach them. I started my music work in 1995, but I was writing my own stuff.

I didn't feel that people would take us seriously if we did not write our own songs.

In the Nineties many clubs were closing, so we decided to make a band inside the Soul band. I had given up playing the Blues for 15 years, but I started again, so that we could get gigs, so that we could get more money!

I used to play them music in the car on the way to gigs, it was our laboratory, and they started to learn about the Blues We were playing Eric Clapton's, 'Lay Down Sally' and 'Blues Power' and the Ray Charles song 'I Got A Woman' plus Muddy Waters songs. Slowly the guys began to get into the Blues and they started to buy Blues CDs themselves. I also listened to Little Walter with the guys, on those long car trips.

The Blues in France has only emerged in the last 15 years. Now you can get stuff through the Internet and French people can hear it. Now there are many fine Blues bands in France.

Maybe you English people led the Blues life in the 50s and 60s. England caught the blues at a good time, and so did Germany, but here in France we were more isolated.

In France we were a bit apart, there was a big Jazz scene here and there still is. There were very few people doing the Blues in France in the early 70s.

When I started I didn't think it would last long, I was surprised that it carried on, and then I realize that this band Awek, was made for the Blues.

We have played for up to 3000 people. Our latest album was recorded in Austin, Texas. A friend of mine who was a drummer way back, went to live in there. It was while playing the Blues, at the 'Country Blues Café', that I met up with my friend, and he suggested that we came to Austin to do the new album. Austin was a good place for us, with a good engineer, he was very professional.

In France I had always to explain to the studio, the kind of sound that I wanted. But that is impossible to explain to someone, because there are so many things that need to be right. There are many good engineers in France, but they really are into pop music. When we went to Austin we didn't have to explain anything to the engineers there, they just knew what to do.

Stuart Solomon an engineer from the studio had his own secret sound, he wouldn't tell me what it was. To make a CD like we did, is a lot of work. We recorded live together, because we did not have much time. We recorded 16 songs, but we didn't use all of them.

We had long talks together in Austin in the studio, we all talked about making music. We also talked to each other about politics and life in general, and we showed each other things on YouTube, we talked about everything!

Awek has a band sound, you have to have your own sound, people come up to us and say how much they liked the sound of the band.

Studio versus Stage.

Many people say we love the CD, but we prefer the band on the stage. This is our second CD recorded in the USA. You have to try to do something different to change the sound on different CDs, it's not easy to do that, because our sound has been evolving for 15 years.

When we went to Austin this time, we decided to have special guests on the album, that's the new album called 'It's Rollin'. I didn't want to go back to Austin for this album, but then we decided to go back. That's why we use special guests, so there would be something different.

Playing Live In France

Paris is not a good place for the Blues, but we have played at a festival in the suburbs of Paris, and these days festivals are the big thing.

There are many festivals in France not only in the big cities, but all over the place, and we like to play them. The festival scene is the big scene in France for Blues bands.

English people are very fond of music. I loved Peter Green's early music when I heard it. Eric Clapton was good, but he was not just a Blues guitar player, he played lots of other styles.

For me Peter Green was the one, he was the Blues guitarist that impressed me the most from the English scene.

My favorite band was BB King and I thought that Peter Green played from his heart, just like BB King, and that he didn't play too many notes on his guitar, again just like BB King. Peter Green just had a big heart.

For more information on Awek and to hear some samples of their new excellent album 'It's Rollin' go to:
<http://www.awekblues.com/>

Richard Newman
interviewing Bernard

