



# ROCK SOLID

Rock music history fans around the country know about the annual American Music Masters series that has taken place in Cleveland every autumn for the past 10 years. They know that its week or so of events happen at both Case and at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum, but many may assume that the Rock Hall is just using space at Case.

In fact, the university and the Rock Hall act as partners in putting together the series, which celebrates the lives and careers of musical artists whose influence has had a major impact on music and culture before or at the dawning of the rock-music era, and have contributed to the genre's ongoing evolution.

"No other university has anything like the American Music Masters series, because nobody has an institution like the Rock Hall down the road. So the synergy we've been creating, not just in this program, but in lots of other, smaller programs, has been a really distinctive, distinguishing thing for Case," explains Mary Davis, Case assistant professor of music and the Robson Junior Professor who attended her first American Music Masters conference in 1998, soon after arriving at Case.

Davis is now the coordinator of Case's American Music Masters efforts and teams up with Warren Zanes, vice president of education for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum, who leads the event's team.

## THE AMERICAN MUSIC MASTERS SERIES:

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| 1996 | Hard Travelin': The Life and Legacy of Woody Guthrie          |
| 1997 | Waiting for a Train: Jimmie Rodgers' America                  |
| 1998 | Hellhound on My Trail: Robert Johnson and the Blues           |
| 1999 | At the Swing Cat's Ball: Louis Jordan's Rhythm & Blues        |
| 2000 | Muddy Waters: Got My Mojo Working                             |
| 2001 | Bessie Smith: Empress of the Blues                            |
| 2002 | Honky Tonk Blues: The Music, Life and Legacy of Hank Williams |
| 2003 | Rave On: The Life and Music of Buddy Holly                    |
| 2004 | Shine a Light on Me: The Life and Music of Lead Belly         |
| 2005 | A Change is Gonna Come: The Life and Music of Sam Cooke       |

## HEADLINERS

Nearly 150 artists and groups have performed at AMM concerts, including: Bruce Springsteen, Aretha Franklin, Pete Seeger, B.B. King, the Allman Brothers Band, Elvis Costello, Arlo Guthrie, Alison Krauss, Bo Diddley, Gavin DeGraw, the Indigo Girls, Robert Plant, Harry Belafonte, Los Lobos, Levon Helm (of the Band), Lynyrd Skynyrd, John Prine, Big Bad Voodoo Daddy, Ricky Skaggs, Taj Mahal, the Mannhattans, Ruth Brown, Al Kooper, Bobby Rush, James Cotton, Bonnie Raitt, Dave Pirner (of Soul Asylum), Paul Rodgers (of Bad Company), Ani DiFranco, Tommy Shaw (of Styx), John Mellencamp, Nanci Griffith, Josh White Jr., Odetta, Solomon Burke, the Dixie Hummingbirds, the Blind Boys of Alabama, Peter Wolf (of the J. Geils Band), and Lou Rawls, at last year's event, in his last performance before he died.

The series began in 1996 with a tribute to Woody Guthrie. This event established the model for the series, with a special exhibit and the screening of a movie about Guthrie at the Rock Hall and a conference at Case that included symposia featuring authors, scholars and journalists, and musicians and record industry executives representing several generations.

To close the event, concerts were held at two locations on successive nights, featuring artists ranging from Pete Seeger to Bruce Springsteen to Ani DiFranco. Since then, the program has expanded to include even more lectures and panel discussions at Case during the week preceding the conference.

In fact, it was the Rock Hall's very presence in Cleveland that helped Davis decide to come to Case. "When you have a major university," she says, "and you have an institution like the Rock Hall, which is one of a kind, you have the opportunity to do things that are really exciting."

The number of Case faculty, staff, and students involved in an American Music Masters event varies, depending on who the tribute artist is. Participants can include people from American studies, history, art history and other departments. "And within the music department," Davis says, "we've always had a good base of support."


Davis figures out who could be involved and in what ways, both in the organization of the conference day and in the execution of it, which requires many student volunteers.

She also points out that the people from the university's Office of Conferences and Events are "hugely important," providing help with publicity, logistical planning, and audio-visual needs.

"And, of course, the Rock Hall," Davis adds. "Obviously, without them it wouldn't happen at all. We work together closely, from the beginning, on planning and organizing the event, and shaping the message that we want to get across about the artist. And the Rock Hall has contacts with musicians and music industry people, who are so central not just to the concerts, but to the panel discussions as well."

Zanes has been equally satisfied with the working arrangement. "American Music Masters events are the product of a unique, passionate partnership between a museum and a university," he says. "The collaboration is no surface level affair. From planning to execution, Case faculty and staff get in there and get their hands dirty."

Zanes also teaches a class at Case and several other Rock Hall staff members have lectured in the university's rock-history-related courses.

"On more than one occasion I've had folks from other museums—envious folks, I should add—ask me how we have managed to arrive at such a productive partnership with a university," says Zanes. "The answer is this: We found a university that is actively attempting to engage with the local scene. I credit Case with taking the walk downtown. By this time, there's a well worn path between the museum and University Circle." 

### DAVID BUDIN

*David Budin is a Cleveland-area writer.*