

# BILL RICH

## Legendary Bassist Still Playing The Blues

BY JACK HADLEY

Bassist extraordinaire and Denver resident **BILL RICH** has deep musical roots. Most people are unaware that he even lives here, or know anything about his incredible musical history with some of music's iconic figures: Jimi Hendrix, the much-maligned Buddy Miles, John McLaughlin and Les Paul. He was a member of Paul Butterfield's Better Days (you might have the 1973 recording 'Live At Winterland Ballroom' in your collection), one of the seminal blues bands of that era. An Omaha native, Rich has been playing bass with the Taj Mahal Trio for nearly 40 years and shows no signs of slowing down. I recently caught up with Bill at the Wazee Lounge in Denver:

### PAUL BUTTERFIELD

**JH** *What was it like playing in Better Days?*

**BR** That was cool, great players in that band. Working with Butter, Geoff Muldaur, Amos Garrett, Ronnie Barron, Chris Parker, don't get any better than that. It was nothing but a groove..

### TAJ MAHAL

**JH** *How long have you played with Taj Mahal?*

**BR** My first recording with Taj was in 1971 (Taj Mahal's "The Real Thing," recorded live at the Fillmore East in New York City). I was playing with him before that so it's been more than 38 years.

**JH** *Do you have a lot of freedom with Taj (solos)?*

**BR** Well, lately, the last year or two, I've been getting a lot of solos. I've been with him all this time and I did a bass solo maybe once before. Now I'm getting a chance to step out



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there. But the music...man, you've got to play it for what it is. You don't want to be overplaying.

**JH** *Are you playing with just the Trio?*

**BR** Yeah, the Taj Trio. And the Tuba Band. Taj has always been into a lot of different kinds of music. That's what I like about him. So there's the Phantom Band, the Hula Band. I don't play with them.

**JH** *Are you doing more festivals these days?*

**BR:** In the summer we do festivals. In the winter we do theaters, small clubs, too. So that's a good thing. We do both. I like doing all of them. A lot of times we do these big festivals and the security is tight. You're locked up...can't mingle with people.

**JH** *It seems like a lot of festivals have become more guitar-oriented. A certain kind of blues.*

**BR** Yeah, that's true. Not even that many harmonica players. It's the same in Europe. All these festivals... Montreaux Jazz Festival...North Sea Festival, Glastonbury, they don't limit this stuff any more. And a lot

of the jazz festivals have lots of blues musicians, too. Guitar, horn players.

### HENDRIX

**JH** *Talk to me about the Hendrix thing.*

**BR** Well, I had been playing with The Buddy Miles Express for quite a while (another Omaha musician) and I would run into Hendrix all the time. New York, LA, even Denver. We did some stuff here in Denver. I knew one day we were going to get together. We'd hang out, do a lot of recording. I had been recording a lot of stuff with him at Electric Ladyland (NYC) that was never released. But two or three years ago they finally released some of that material. It was a Martin Scorsese project, "Martin Scorsese Presents Jimi Hendrix".

**JH** *So you were supposed to do the Band Of Gypsies with Hendrix and Buddy. What happened?*

**BR** Well, the Buddy Miles Express had been opening for Hendrix in D.C., Philadelphia and New York

• *BILL RICH continued on pg. 7*