
Subject: Clarence Gatemouth Brown-- passed away after escaping Katrina
Posted by lon on Wed, 14 Sep 2005 04:49:34 GMT

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I think some space should be devoted here to the passing of Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown. Gate, at age 81, was suffering from cancer for some time. He escaped from hurricane Katrina only to die on Sunday a week later. Some say he died of a broken heart because he lost his home. I heard the news Sunday but not until I had on the local blues show broadcast by my friend M. Flynn that I started to think about Gate again. There's lots of material committed to cd by CGMB. I saw him live here about 10 years ago. When I did radio, we played his album with Roy Clark on numerous occasions. Gate's obituary and wiki are readily available on the net as well as many records and cds with Gate playing five instruments plus vocals with groups and big bands. He was the only black man on Hee Haw and not just with Buck Owens in the musical numbers. Gate would be seen in the cornfield for the one liners as well. This, for me is somehow significant. I remember wondering what this guy was doing on a whitebread show like Hee Haw but there he was. In performance Gate dressed high Texas style meaning ten gallon hat, points on the shirts and western boots. A brief spot I saw about him on ABC news as a human interest feature showed him in Texas. So I was a bit surprised to hear he had passed after escaping the hurricane in New Orleans. Blues is an old form and M. Flynn gives the news of those bluesmen who have passed just about every week. But Gate transcended jazz, blues and pop. He plays mandolin, guitar, violin, harmonica (I think) and maybe others. One of the most affecting parts of the one live performance I attended was a version of "La Mare" as a slide presentation on guitar with dobro. There's a lot that I'm leaving out. See if you can find some CGMB music-- especially a title with Roy Clark called "Makin' Music". That album has the best "Take The A Train" you'll ever find. For a long time I thought that Brian Setzer was the only band leader who played guitar and did vocals with a big band. I was wrong. Gate did it first. And when the Brian Setzer Orchestra started to put out recordings I thought wouldn't it be great if Gate could play with Brian while he's still performing. That never happened. Lastly I hope that there are musical tributes done on both blues and jazz shows for Gate. But the public's attention is fleeting. It may be that all I and others can do is hold him in memory as one of the great jazz and bluesmen that America has ever produced.
