

# Interview with James Montgomery

By Joyce Rowley



James Montgomery is indeed the “gentleman of blues.” He graciously chatted with me about his early band days and his latest CD, “Detroit to Delta.” Talking to Montgomery is like taking a blues-y, rock-n-roll tour through time.

Montgomery started a college band when he was majoring in English at Boston University in 1971. “I just stayed with it after graduating,” he said.

I asked him when he first started playing with B.B. King. “I played with B.B. a lot in the early days. We played Paul’s Mall the night it closed [St. Paul’s Mall in Boston in the ‘70s]; we were playing on Long Island the night they caught Son of Sam. That got more applause than we did,” he joked.

Montgomery’s relationship with B.B. King lasted through the next thirty years. He opened for B.B. for his 70th birthday at Capital Center in Concord, New Hampshire and B.B.’s 80th birthday at Symphony Hall.

“For his 80th birthday I wanted to open with the youngest and

the oldest blues and jazz players,” Montgomery said. “So I brought in Grace Kelly who was just 14 or 15 at the time, and Weepin’ Willy who was 85 years old. Grace has now become one of the best young jazz talents. If you ask a jazz player what his biggest thrill would be, it would be to get invited by Wynton Marsalis to play at the [Lincoln] Center. Grace is 19 now and she’s been invited three times to play the Center by Wynton. She’s an amazing young talent.”



James Montgomery and Steven Tyler of Aerosmith.

The James Montgomery Blues Band, now called simply the James Montgomery Band, has played with scads of R&B bands. Montgomery began reeling them off like he was going through a rock-n-roll Who’s Who:

“I’ve opened for Bruce Springsteen, Aerosmith, Bonnie Raitt, the Allman Brothers Band and I played with Mick Jagger on New Year’s (at Trax). I’ve also played with Les Paul and John Lee Hooker.”

His own band includes bass player David Hull, who sat in on the Joe Perry Project (2006 – 2009) and fills in for Aerosmith’s Tommy Hamilton on occasion; George McCann, who’s played with Steve Tyler, and sits in with Dan Akroyd and Jim Belushi’s Blues Brothers; and Seth Pappas, who recently toured with R&B group Baron Switfield and the Savages in Europe.

So what's James Montgomery been up to lately?

"This summer I've been touring with James Cotton, my old teacher; Billy Squiers; and the J.Geils horn section," said Montgomery.

His latest CD "Detroit to Delta" comes out in November on the Open E (Universal) label. On it there's sets with Johnny Winter, the Uptown Horns from J. Geils band, James Cotton, and Aerosmith's Brad Whitford and Joe Kramer. There's even a Bo Diddley song with Montgomery and DMC of Run DMC.

Montgomery said the CD reflects his musical progression from his Detroit upbringing to his recent immersion in the delta blues.

"I did the CD after I was invited by Morgan Freeman to play at his blues club in [Clarksdale] Mississippi. It was the first time I'd been to the Mississippi delta," said Montgomery.

"This is by far the best thing I ever put out," he said.

And that's saying plenty.

James Montgomery will be opening for B.B. King, Sunday, September 4, 2011 at the Zeiterion Performing Arts Center. Tickets are available online at [www.zeiterion.org](http://www.zeiterion.org) and at the ticket office at the Z, 684 Purchase Street, New Bedford, MA or by calling 508-994-2900. For more information on James Montgomery check out the official James Montgomery website!