

Sauce Boss FAQ

Bill Wharton
Phone 850-997-4359
Fax 850-997-1429
billwharton@sauceboss.com
<http://SAUCEBOSS.COM>

Since 1990, the Sauce Boss has cooked gumbo for audiences all over the US and in Canada and Europe, while simultaneously playing his own swampy Florida blues. A Sauce Boss event transcends performance--it's a soul-shouting picnic of rock & roll brotherhood, involving everyone. And at the end of each show, everyone eats. To see a Sauce Boss show, check his schedule at <http://SAUCEBOSS.COM>.

1) Where were you born, where did you grow up and where do you currently make your home?

Born and raised in Orlando, FL. I currently live outside of Tallahassee, FL, in Jefferson County- the only county in Florida without a single stoplight.

2) Can you give us a brief history of your music career? How long have you been performing in public (including pre-gumbo concerts)?

I started performing around the age of 14. At 17 I was playing coffeehouses and nite clubs. I was dodging the beverage agents 'cause I was too young to be in the place. The band leader said, "When the suits come in the front, you go out the back". I have always had some kind of music gig going. When I was young, I'd play anything and everything. But, I always loved the Blues. (See our bio page in the press kit section at sauceboss.com)

3) Do you perform solo or in a band? What kind of music do you play?

I play with a band most always. We play my original bluesy stuff that lives somewhere between the swamp and the beach.

4) How many CDs have you released?

Eleven CDs as of March 2010 – four on Kingsnake Records- a legendary Florida based blues label in the 1990's, and seven on my own label, Burning Disk. My "Recipes" CD has a multimedia cookbook, video and culinary travelogue, as well as a complete blues album, all on the same disc. (We're extremely high tech on a long dirt road.) You can get my CDs, along with our Liquid Summer Hot Sauces, at the website. <sauceboss.com>

5) What do you enjoy most about song writing and performing? Do you find one more satisfying than the other?

I really enjoy both. Being an artist is a constant re-creation of the self --the shedding of the skin and the movement into a new being. It keeps life vital and fresh. When I write a new song, it gives me energy and identity. And to perform my own work is the ultimate expression of myself. I feel lucky and blessed to be able to do my own thing and make a living doing it. I have been stubborn and selfish with my time and energy. I have always walked my own path, and now it's paying off.

6) Could you tell us a bit about your choice of guitars?

The choice was not mine but the guitar's. I did not go to the store with any of these fine instruments in mind, but they came to me, each in its own way.

1. 1933 National Steel Guitar- Left in my front yard by a friend who was leaving town and was trying to lighten his load.

2. 1953 Custom Telecaster (Double cutaway) Given to me by a friend.

3. Fine Resophonic Bill Wharton Special. The guitar named after yers truly. It's a hybrid- a cross between a National and a Les Paul. SWEET!

4. 1959 Les Paul Special (TV Model) I was buying strings in a little music store on Long Island. It was the end of the month. He made me a deal. What could I do?

5. Paul Berger Acoustic 000 style with a cutaway. One of a kind. Paul was one of Martin's top repairmen/luthiers in the 50s and 60s. I watched him make it.

7) I understand that, prior to your music career, you worked for a time as a chef in New Orleans. When and for how long? Did this experience give birth to the idea of cooking pots of gumbo during your concerts?

Never worked as a chef in New Orleans. My major influence in the kitchen was my mother. She was an incredible cook. However, my gumbo recipe came from Shirley Neal (mother of Kenny Neal & wife of Raful Neal). When Raful and I were working on CDs at Kingsnake studios, she was in the kitchen, cooking up a big pot of gumbo. I watched her like a hawk.

8) How do you manage to cook and play at the same time? For musical chefs and culinary guitarists, what challenges does this present?

It is definitely a juggling routine. It brings a new dimension to the word "timing".

9) How did you come up with the idea of producing your own brand of hot sauce and what inspired you to add the element of cooking to your shows?

A friend gave me some peppers from St. Augustine – Datil peppers. At the time I was not very impressed with the selection of hot sauces available. This was in the early 80s. Sooooo, I started growing the Datils and making hot sauce for my own consumption. First thing I knew, all my friends would come over to my house and eat up all my sauce! So I had to make more. But they would still come over and eat it all up. Finally, I decided to myself, "If these guys are gonna eat up all my sauce, I'm gonna put it in bottles and sell it to 'em." Then I began carrying it with me to my gigs. And I'd do a little snake oil routine extolling the virtues of Liquid Summer Hot Sauce. "Yes Sir, Brothers and Sisters, Liquid Summer will change your life! Changed my life and it will CHANGE YOUR LIFE!!!!!" So on our New Year's eve gig of 1990, I decided to prove how good Liquid Summer is by cooking a huge pot of gumbo and dousing it wid da sauce. Over 165,000 bowls later, here we are. (As of March 2010, for current numbers see <http://sauceboss.com>)

10) How did you get your nickname, The Sauce Boss?

I have a buddy in Miami who comes to see me play when I'm in town. One late night at Tobacco Road, I was doing a one man band kind of thing with my old National, my kick drum and hi-hat. Well, I launched into my Liquid Summer rap and proceeded to sell the stuff to all the patrons. I sold a lot of sauce that night. My buddy at the end of the bar said, "You da Sauce Boss." That was 1988.

11) How did you first become involved with helping the homeless?

After making gumbo at the gigs and serving it for free since 1990, I had the feeling that I could do more to help those who could REALLY use a bowl of gumbo. So I formed Planet Gumbo- a non profit organization to feed those in need--body and soul. Our website is <http://planetgumbo.org>. My band and I play for free in homeless shelters all over the country. We make a big pot of gumbo and we bring a message of hope and comfort for some good folks who happen to be down on their luck.

12) Based on your knowledge and experience, are the facilities for homeless people in the United States adequate? How crucial is raising public awareness of their situation to meeting their needs?

No the facilities are often not adequate. I have seen the inside of many shelters. On a cold night, there are often people wall to wall on mats on the floor and still some are not allowed to come in, due to lack of space. Every year many die of hypothermia because they are literally left out in the cold.

As long as the public is ignorant of this problem and its causes and remedies, there will be homelessness. Before I founded Planet Gumbo, I did not know that: fifty percent of the homeless population have jobs, fifty percent are handicapped, thirty-five percent are veterans! I was blind but now I see. I now make sure that my audience is aware of these things. A large part of Planet Gumbo is educating the public, because until there is serious public support for programs that are effective in ending homelessness, there will be many, many, many people who live without homes.

13) As stated on the web site, the goal of Planet Gumbo is to "give hope and sustenance through music and the message of the gumbo." What exactly is the message of the gumbo? Could you expand a bit on your metaphor that "we are all a big pot of gumbo?"

Gumbo is a combination of many things. Okra came from Africa. The roux came from France. The File' (ground sassafras leaves) came from Native American. The crawdads, shrimp, oysters, crabs came from the ponds and gulf waters around Louisiana. The dish "Gumbo" contains the culture as well as the ingredients gathered by the Creole cooks living on the Bayou. The Creole people, like the dish, are a mixture of African American, Native American, French, Spanish, English, and Caribbean peoples. So this is more than a metaphor. This is life – a huge melting pot – a rainbow – a culture AND... it's the future! We should take note of the folks in Nawlins, Lafayette, Breau Bridge, who have been living together with differences for hundreds of years. So here it is. I'm a gumbo. You're a gumbo. All of us together are a big ol' pot of gumbo. And if we can sit down at the table, forget about our differences for a minute, share a meal together, then maybe we can work some of this stuff out.

14) Are you willing to provide our readers the recipe for your famous gumbo?

You know I am! Y'all come on down to <http://sauceboss.com> and pick up the recipe. It's Gooooood!