



# ALIEN BLUES

## Brother Dege rewrites the Delta tradition

by Michael Buffalo Smith

**B**rother Dege Legg is from another planet. I am not making this up. When I suggested the notion to him during our recent Skype conversation, he fully agreed with me, just before launching into a beautiful rant on reptilians, Roswell, UFOs, and Delta blues.

Dege (“Deej”) is an award-winning writer, musician, and journalist born and raised in Cajun country down in the Louisiana swamps. He is a man who possesses a true gift for channeling the spirits of nature and releasing them through his music. Dege is a true artist, a man who is not afraid to “get out of the way,” and let the song write itself, as he told me. When he sits down with his resonator guitar, the time-honored influences of artists such as Robert Johnson and Son House can most definitely be heard, but if you listen closely, you will also hear shadows of punk rock’s glory days, dark and blurry images that once were The Ramones and The Clash.

“There are no rules,” says Dege. “You can do anything you want musically. There’s tradition, and it should be honored, but it should also be wrenched around like an old lawn mower you’re trying to make into a time machine.”

Dege hears music everywhere—in the wind blowing over the lake, under his heels as he walks down a gravel road. Then he plays what he is hearing on his guitar. He reminds me of a musical version of the decidedly bizarre cartoonist Gahan Wilson and his book, *I Paint What I See*, that won me over during the early ’70s.

Back in 1994, Brother Dege got together with a few other beautifully twisted musicians to form Santeria, a group that has absolutely now and forever redefined the label of “Southern rock.” They play a really heavy, Southern sound that incorporates Middle Eastern rhythms, dual-effected

slide guitars, rumbling bass, and two drummers—one from India. Not your typical Skynyrdish Southern rock band by a long shot, but just as damned Southern.

“Santeria was my first band, and we are still together,” says Dege. “The past fifteen years with them has been like an Alice in Swampland adventure, including everything—voodoo curses, UFOs, swamps, rock & roll, car crashes, hurricanes, living in trailer parks with no electricity, and smashed guitars.”

Of course, Santeria is not Dege’s only band. He also performs in an ensemble called Black Bayou Construct.

“Black Bayou is my chill-out band. We go from playing these tasteful piano ballads to sounding like Sonic Youth fighting rednecks in a hurricane—in the same song.”

Of course, there are days when Dege can actually be found without the resonator in his hands. On those days, you are apt to find him sitting under a huge tree in the Louisiana swamps with a pad and pen, soaking up nature and writing. He is, after all, a journalist as well as an author of Southern fiction.

“For years I resisted calling myself a writer, and when I actually did start using it, nobody believed me,” he says.

But make no mistake, Dege is a writer. He has at least one novel under his belt, *The Battle Hymn of the Good Ole Hillbilly Zatan Boys*, a story he says is “like the hillbillies from the movie *Deliverance*, but without the city folk,” and he currently writes for a Louisiana newspaper. Oh, and he recently became a contributor to *Twisted South* magazine.

Whether he is writing books, magazine articles, songs or just playing his resonator, Brother Dege remains an artist who colors outside the lines. The mark of a true artist. A great person once said, “There are those in the music business who ride the waves, and then there are those who create the waves.” Well, sir, Brother Dege don’t surf. ■

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