

PIEDMONT BLŪZ ACOUSTIC DUO - BIO



The **Piedmont Blūz Acoustic Duo** are ambassadors of Country Blues music and the Piedmont style of fingerpicking, and their mission is to help preserve these rural, east coast traditions by educating audiences about this unique aspect of African American culture through musical entertainment. In addition to a host of domestic venues and festivals, Piedmont Blūz has traveled as far as Israel, Ireland, Spain, and Germany to share their music, and are much loved wherever they go. As 2018 inductees into the New York Blues Hall of Fame, this husband and wife duo feel that "there are stories to tell, people to remember, and things that must be said." So, in addition to tickling your ears with delightful music, they weave a bit of history into the presentation of each song.

When asked about the authenticity of their music, the duo will quickly tell you, "We're not trying to preserve songs note for note or word for word. And we're not trying to sound like the original artists either, because that's already been done! We approach each piece from our own perspective and have no qualms about changing words or melodies to suit ourselves. Music is supposed to evolve and, even though we are helping to preserve it, we think we should also have the freedom to infuse it with our own personalities."

A Piedmont Blūz concert isn't just music – it's an experience as they transport you back to the 1920s and 1930s, the hey-day of acoustic Country Blues music. In addition to performing songs from that timeframe, they introduce each piece with an interesting anecdote about either the composer, the time period, or the song itself.

Valerie Turner is a native New Yorker with southern roots in Virginia and Georgia. She plays finger style Country Blues guitar which is a broad genre that includes blues, fiddle tunes, ballads, country and popular songs, ragtime, and gospel. She also dabbles with washboard, spoons, and banjo. Valerie's first Country Blues guitar lessons were with Jack Baker in Greenwich Village and her eclectic repertoire was later influenced by her studies with both John Cephas and Woody Mann. Her specialty is the Piedmont style which is a fingerpicking style, easily recognized by its alternating bass. Valerie's guitar playing is reminiscent of traditional blues greats like Mississippi John Hurt, Etta Baker, and Elizabeth Cotten. She is also the author of *Piedmont Style Country Blues Guitar Basics*, an independently published instructional book on how to play Piedmont style guitar, which was recently acquired by the Library of Congress.

Hailing from Trinidad, **Ben Turner** keeps the beat by blending various washboard techniques into his own unique style. Ben has studied with Washboard Chaz of Louisiana fame as well as with Newman Taylor Baker of the Ebony Hillbillies. Inspired by these two talented percussionists, Ben created his own style using a variety of brushes and thimbles and is a perfect rhythmic accompaniment for Valerie's guitar. Occasionally, he also chimes in on bones or harp for added accents and his subtle touches add just the right amount of texture.