

Robert Mugge's New Film, "Deep Roots: The Art and Music of Bill Steber and Friends"

BY DANIEL LÉON • 28 OCTOBER 2025 • NEWS



If we are interested in the blues, it is impossible to escape the photographs, usually in black and white, of Bill Steber, that can be seen in many publications, especially in *Living Blues*. I have already posted his images on this site, and on July 10, 2019, his photographs illustrated my tribute to David Kimbrough Jr. for *Soul Bag*. Born in 1965 near Centerville, Tennessee (southwest of Nashville), Steber began working in Mississippi from 1992, when he was looking for James "His" Thomas. But he did not only immortalize bluesmen on stage, he met them at home, in their daily lives, while also photographing clubs and festivals, but also scenes of local life. He also focused his goals on churches, on baptisms in rivers, on the followers of voodoo, on traditional agricultural methods including cotton cultivation, in fact, in his own words on his site, on "[anything] that gave birth to the blues or influenced it."



The photos of Bill Steber (who is also a sculptor) are gathered in the remarkable exhibition *Stones in My Pathway* focused on the Delta, and his work has not left director Robert Mugge indifferent, who has just dedicated a 112-minute documentary entitled *Deep Roots: The Art and Music of Bill Steber and Friends*. The film focuses on Steber's journey, but also on the musical traditions of the 1920's and 1930's, both black and white, and on the rural stages of Tennessee and Mississippi. Some of it takes place in Murfreesboro (this time southeast of Nashville) where Steber lives, the other in the Delta, via the Juke Joint Festival in Clarksdale and the Highway 61 Blues Museum in Leland. And to better illustrate the evocations of the blues pioneers, as Steber is also himself an excellent bluesman (singer and multi-instrumentalist, present at the Blues Rules Crissier Festival last June), we see him in action in three bands with which he regularly performs, the Jake Leg Stompers, the Stoop Down Rounders and the Hoodoo Men. The film will be available on DVD and streaming on November 25, 2025. He pre-orders at [this address](#), and in the meantime we can get an idea by looking at the trailer. You can also listen to Steber and Mugge chat about the documentary in [this video](#) recorded for the radio WEVL in Memphis.

Photos : © Robert Mugge.

