

# BIG JOE DUSKIN

## BIOGRAPHY



Blues and boogie pianist Big Joe Duskin is one of the last of the blues' Greatest Generation, the men and women who created the music in the years before World War II, cutting the path for every blues and blues-rock musician to follow.

Like many of his better-known contemporaries, Joe came out of a river city blues scene, in his case, the one that cropped up in Cincinnati on the Ohio River. His father had moved there from Birmingham, AL, where Joe, one of 11 children, was born on Feb 10, 1921.

Joe was always fascinated with music, and took up piano, playing in church for his preacher father. But it was the sound of the itinerant bluesmen passing through, greats such as Roosevelt Sykes, Memphis Slim and boogie woogie king Pete Johnson, who inspired the young pianist. When "the old man" wasn't around, it was blues and boogie woogie that came out of the Duskin family upright.

Reverend Perry Duskin occasionally caught his son playing "the Devil's music" and gave him a beating just about every time, until he finally made Joe promise to stop playing blues and boogie until after his death. Since his dad was pushing 80, the teen-aged Joe felt he could make that concession. But Perry lived to 105 and Joe wound up with careers as a Cincinnati policeman and postal worker instead of bluesman.

But in the early 1970s, at the urging of a young Ohio blues scholar, Steve Tracy, Big Joe began playing again and was soon a hot ticket at festivals around the US and Europe. He released his debut LP, Arhoolie's *Cincinnati Stomp*, in 1979. He recorded several albums for European labels in the 80s and 90s, but 2004's *Big Joe Jumps Again!*, his third studio recording, is only the second time that Duskin has recorded for a US label.

Always popular in Europe, Joe made annual tours through France and Germany throughout the 80s and 90s. Stateside, his festival calendar has included multiple appearances at what are arguably the two most prestigious blues and roots festivals – the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival and the Chicago Blues Festival.

Joe is beloved in his hometown as a mentor who never refused any musician's request to sit in. In 2000, he received a Lifetime Achievement Cammy (Cincinnati Area Pop Music Award), and in July 2004 the Mayor of Cincinnati presented him with a Key to the City, proclaiming "*The City of Cincinnati acknowledges and honors Big Joe Duskin for giving his hometown – and the world – a lifetime's worth of great music.*" And he ain't done yet. Big Joe is still jumping.