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The Brandon Sprague Blues Band of Deadwood will be the headlining act at next weekend's Rockin' RibFest in downtown Yankton. The band has shared the stage with some legendary blues talent, including iconic guitarist B.B. King. (Courtesy Photo)

Bringin' The Blues To Town

Brandon Sprague Blues Band
Headlines Downtown Yankton's
Rockin' RibFest Aug. 31

BY RANDY DOCKENDORF
randy.dockendorf@yankton.net

Deadwood-based blues artist Brandon Sprague has played across the nation with some of the biggest names in the business. But no single experience has touched him quite like his gig as the opening act for the B.B. King tour of 2004.

Knowing of the young musician's ability, King asked Sprague to join him as a solo opening act on the tour. "Brandon plays from the heart and will be part of carrying on the blues torch," King said.

For Sprague, the tour with his icon still seems surreal nearly a decade later.

"It was unbelievable. When you look back at it, you ask yourself, 'Was that a dream? Did this really happen?'" he told the *Press & Dakotan* in a phone interview. "Here I was, working with a hero with the blues. It was like meeting the president. Then, last November, he came to the Deadwood Mountain Grand (casino) and we played together again."

Sprague has performed in Chicago, Dallas, Denver, Houston and New Orleans. He has opened for a number of blues and rock musicians at festivals and metropolitan arenas. In addition, he has performed for the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally since age 17.

Now, the Brandon Sprague Blues Band is preparing for its Aug. 31 debut at Rockin' RibFest in Yankton. The band headlines the Historic Downtown Yankton Association event, taking the stage at 9:15 p.m.

"I have never played Yankton or Vermillion before," Sprague said. "This will be the first time for us in Yankton, and I'm really looking forward to it."

Rockin' RibFest runs from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. on Third Street. The event features bands, food vendors, the amateur rib competition and inflatables for the children. The schedule also includes the "Walk A Mile In Her Shoes" event, raising both funds and awareness for the Yankton Women's and Children's Shelter.

The Bourbon Brothers kick off the RibFest music at 11:30 a.m., followed by Mrs. Begley and the Boys at 1:15 p.m., the Austin Buescher Band at 3:15 p.m., announcement of the amateur rib contest winners at 5:15 p.m. and the Walk A Mile In Her Shoes stage presentation at 5:30 p.m. The evening line-up features Go Figure at 5:50 p.m., Too Drunk To Fish at 7:25 p.m. and the Brandon Sprague Blues Band at 9:15 p.m.

A TRUE HEADLINER

Besides Sprague as lead guitarist and vocalist, the band includes Doug Perry on bass, Fred Epstein on drums and Marty Nelson on guitar. Sprague plays the Fender Stratocaster, dobro guitar, slide guitar and acoustic guitars.

Ben Hanten, one of the RibFest organizers, said the committee is excited to welcome Sprague's band as the headliner for the line-up. Hanten said last year's switch to the earlier Labor Day weekend avoided the cold weather plaguing RibFest in previous years. This year marks the earliest possible RibFest date.

RibFest's weekend may have changed over the years, but the festival will continue offering great entertainment and food. Seven rib vendors stand ready to satisfy appetites.

"The event is popular, and people liked the way things worked out last year," Hanten said. "People enjoy the music and food, and we try to keep it consistent."

Sprague said he likes playing the rib festivals because of the atmosphere.

"It's just so much more laid back, so friendly," he said. "It's a different vibe than the clubs or regular concerts."

Sprague's band gains a new gathering wherever they play. "There will be a lot of people from Omaha and Lincoln who plan on coming up to Yankton. We were at Fargo last weekend, and a few people are coming down from there," he said. "It's awesome. More people are jumping on board and are really following whatever we are doing."

What can the RibFest audience expect from the band? "We'll keep the crowd going. We have a lot of different styles of blues. We run the gamut from Cajun to Texas swing and those kinds of things," he said. "We do a lot of talking with

the audience, but when we get going, we just burn through the music."

Both hard-core blues fans and those unfamiliar with the genre will enjoy the performance, Sprague predicted.

"It seems like our audiences are half-and-half," he said. "You have the people who know what's up and what they are there for. Then, a lot of times, people don't necessarily think they like the blues. But they hear us play and ask, 'We've never been exposed to great stuff like this. Where have I been? I missed this along the way.'"

The band may be making its first trip to Yankton, but Sprague isn't unfamiliar to the area. He opened and toured with the band Indigenus, which began in Marty and has risen to national prominence. One of their first joint appearances oc-

curred at Fort Randall Casino near Pickstown.

"They are great guys," he said of Indigenus. "We had a lot of fun experiences, especially with a lot of guitar playing and jamming every night."

MAKING A NAME

Sprague has played a guitar since he was 8 or 9 years old. He credits his father, Donnie, with providing major exposure to blues artists throughout his life. The elder Sprague — who now serves as his son's manager — operates a record store

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