

FAMILY 'MATT'-ERS

Bluesman Matt O'Ree found inspiration at home

FESTIVAL

By **MARK VOGER**
Staff Writer

Older brothers and sisters may pick on you now and then, but they have their purposes.

Ask guitarist Matt O'Ree, who wasn't even born when many of his musical heroes were coming up.

"I was fortunate to have older siblings that had great album collections," says the Neptune native, 36.

"Most of my influences were from my sisters and my brother — of Jimi Hendrix and Led Zepelin and Neil Young. Hendrix really brought me into the blues side of it — of Albert King and Freddie King and B.B. King."

O'Ree, who specializes in the "cosmic blues" musical genre spearheaded by Hendrix, is set to close the show tonight at the 22nd Annual Red Bank Jazz & Blues Festival, which is scheduled to run through Sunday.

O'Ree's musical education was interrupted at a young age.

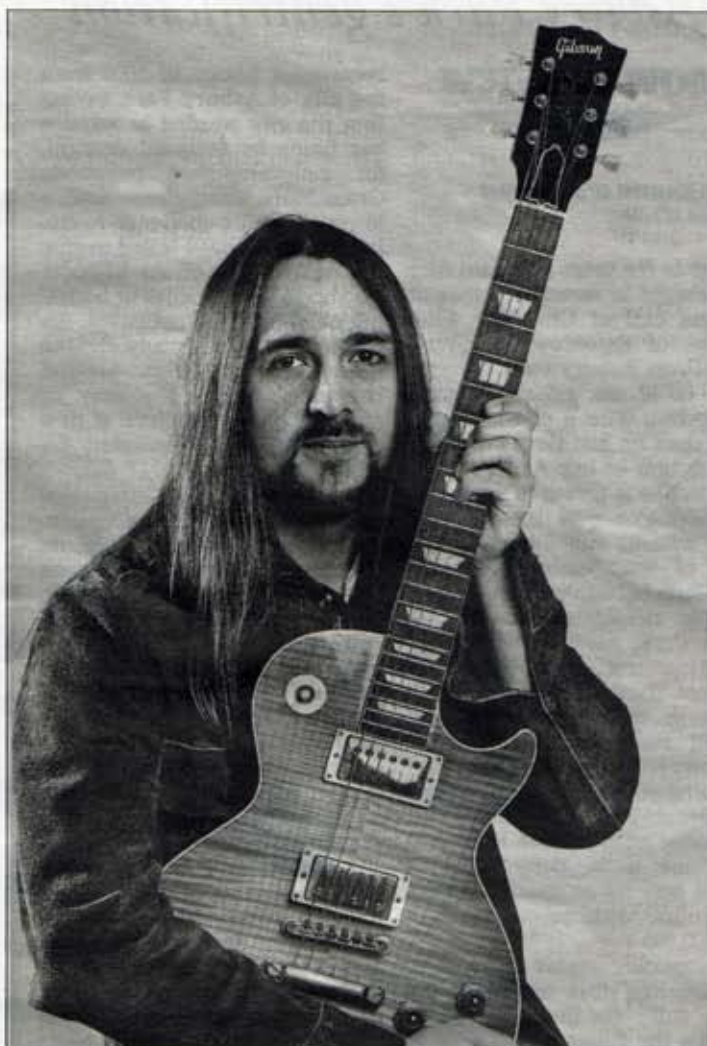
"I started playing guitar when I was 9, but that only lasted for about two weeks," the guitarist says.

"My mom's uncle gave me a guitar as a loaner, which was a Guild double-cutaway six-string electric. My dad was teaching me. You can't really learn something like that from your dad," O'Ree adds with a laugh. "I mean, your dad's not going to think twice about yelling at you when you play it wrong."

Four years later, O'Ree went back to the drawing board — or should we say, "fretboard."

"When I was 13," he recalls, "I finally picked it up on my own and discovered how much I liked it. From there, I was just constantly trying to find transcriptions of songs and chord books and everything else. I taught myself all those years in the beginning."

O'Ree — whose latest release is the CD/DVD "Matt O'Ree



Blues guitarist Matt O'Ree headlines tonight's opening festivities at the Red Bank Jazz & Blues Festival.

MICHAEL SYPNIEWSKI/Staff Photographer

Live" — continued to study the guitar through high school.

"It was just something that came naturally," he says. "I felt so comfortable doing it."

He considers a show he played at New Jersey's Fairleigh Dickinson University at age 16 to be his first "real" gig.

Though O'Ree sings lead vocals with his self-named band, that wasn't *always* the plan.

"I was mostly just a guitar player," he recalls.

"I always kind of wanted to sing, being a fan of Jimi Hendrix and Stevie Ray Vaughan and Rory Gallagher. They were all the guitar player *and* singer. But it really didn't start for me until I was around 19 years old. I was trying to find singers to work with. Obviously, that's a

hard thing to find — one that has some kind of special quality that makes them more than just somebody who sings.

"So actually, out of frustration of trying to find somebody to work with, I started singing. I just started practicing and practicing. I decided, 'Screw it. I'm going to do this.'"

MATT O'REE

Performing at the 22nd Annual Red Bank Jazz & Blues Festival • 8:30 tonight • Marine Park by the Navesink River in Red Bank • Free; donations accepted • www.redbankfestival.com