

# BSCP PROUDLY PRESENTS **FRANK BEY**

## with SPECIAL GUEST GABE STILLMAN BAND

by **ANDREW KEHE**

**K**idney dialysis on Friday. Rest. Travel west from Philly. Take the stage Saturday, then again on Sunday, impeccably dressed as always with cane in hand and a chair to sit on. Perform like there's no tomorrow.

Travel home Sunday night. Kidney dialysis again the next day.

That's how five-time Blues Music Award (BMA) soul blues nominee Frank Bey rolls.

It's been an uphill struggle, but since his burgeoning, some might say surprising, association began in 2016 with Buddy Guy's three-time Grammy winning producer/song writer Tom Hambridge, it's been rolling downhill for a change. – gaining steam on a collision course, possibly, with an elusive BMA next month.

Bey will artfully expose his Hambridge-inspired, soulful blend of blues on April 28 when he brings his Frank Bey Soul Blues Band into Champions Sports Bar & Grill for a show presented by the Blues Society of Central Pennsylvania.

Regional draw, International Blues Challenge finalist and like Bey, Lancaster Roots & Blues hit Gabe



Stillman Band will open the show at 2 p.m.

If the BMA doesn't come, Bey's fifth nomination won't have gone for naught. He's telling his story now of persistence in the face of failing health, poverty and artistic setbacks through the lyrics of Hambridge, who wrote six of the tunes and produced the BMA nominated 2018 release "Back in Business," Bey's first solo release in 13 years.

"It's like the creator all of the sudden placed all these things together and it's brought my career to the front," said the 73-year-old Millen, Georgia native in a phone interview. "I'm not making lot of

money but I'm having one heck of a good time."

"I've been gone for a while, but I'm back in business now.

So many things have happened it's hard to believe I'm still around."

-- "Back in Business Now," title track from the 2018 release "Back in Business."

Bey, who got his break opening for Otis Redding when he was just a teenager, has approached stardom in the past, but circumstances got in the way each time. First it was bad record deal with James Brown that derailed a promising run with his funk band Moorish Vanguard.



That sent Bey into the depths of a different kind of funk – one that led him away from music for 17 years and in perpetual quest for satisfaction in the restaurant and cab-driving sectors.

Years after rekindling his career, Bey cut his first solo album in 1998, but kidney issues derailed any attempts to promote it. Dialysis, a transplant and recovery sidelined Bey for another eight years.

Healthy enough to travel, Bey cut another solo album in 2006 before hooking up with Anthony Paule out of San Francisco and his touring blues band. Together, they produced three CDs, two of them garnering two BMA nominations each, “Soul for Your Blues” in 2014 and “Not Going Away” two years later.

It seemed Bey had found the magic potion. But the relationship soon soured, as had his transplanted kidney. A restricting dialysis schedule, the miles between Paule and Bey - both geographically and artistically – and Bey’s ultimate desire to be the leader and not just a member of the band, led to their breakup.

Bey found himself still in demand but somewhat rudderless when he played a gig in Switzerland that Hambridge stumbled upon.

Hambridge, who has written and/or produced for a who’s-who list of iconic rock, country and blues artists including George Thorogood, ZZ Top, B.B. King, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Meat Loaf, Susan Tedeschi, Johnny Winter and Hank Williams Jr., invited Bey to Nashville to talk about cutting a CD. The two got together in Nashville and Hambridge offered a proposal.

“He said when you get back home, I’m going to send you some songs. If you like them, OK. If you don’t like them, don’t hesitate to say it,” Bey said.

“Two weeks later he sent like three songs. I loved them. They were actually about my life’s story. So, I was amazed. I’m a performer and I’d like to be a writer but I don’t have that gift. He has that gift and he told my story and give it to me to deliver.”

The same session musicians who played on Guy’s Grammy winners were hired to back up Bey on “Back in Business.” Hambridge himself played drums and Bey’s longtime guitarist Jeff Monjack wrote three songs and played as well.

“I love the CD,” Bey said. “I can sing it for a long time because it’s my life story.”

Hambridge’s tie to “Back in Business” is no doubt helping the CD get more plays and streams than what Bey has experienced before. Bey performed at Lancaster Roots & Blues in February, and appearances in general are up, said his manager Tom Dwyer.

Branching into a different medium, Bey is the subject of an unfinished

documentary titled “Ask Me How I Feel,” produced by Dwyer, who was so drawn to Bey and his story that he’s traveled the world with Bey shooting what now totals 140 hours of film.

“Three years ago, I met Frank and heard him perform and my sense was that this guy really has something worth recording,” said Dwyer, who acknowledged the project needs money to complete. A Kickstarter campaign has been established to to accomplish that. “He’s extremely articulate, photogenic and tells stories better than anybody I’ve ever heard.

“The more I get to know him, the more I like him. People who know him and have seen him play really will come great distances to see him perform.”

He will not emit this vibe, but Bey is not a healthy man. Nor is he a rich man, despite his always sharp appearance. It is Dwyer’s hope that the documentary will inspire someone to donate a kidney. But other medical issues, including dental, need to be addressed before Bey even qualifies to receive a kidney.

Bey requires exhausting dialysis three times a week. When on the road far away from home, he needs to arrange visits at a dialysis center.

“He’s hanging in there.” Dwyer said. “It’s truly amazing. He just killed it in Lancaster. It’s amazing how strong he is and how much he gives to the audience.”

Bey’s not about to let an old nemesis rob him of renewed hope and energy. His time is now, he says



– and it's better late than never.

"When I come out there, you are gonna hear my new CD," Bey said. "But most of all, you're gonna hear me from the depth of my inner spirit. That's the way I sing."

To learn more about Frank Bey and to hear his music, go to [www.frankbeymusic.com](http://www.frankbeymusic.com).

To learn more about "Ask Me How I Feel," and the Kickstarter campaign, go to [www.frankbeyfilm.com](http://www.frankbeyfilm.com).

## GABE STILLMAN BAND

It's only April, and it's been a good year already for the Gabe Stillman Band, which came on strong in 2018 to establish itself as a solid festival draw and International Blues Challenge performer.

Hot off a finalist effort at the IBC in January, and a solid performance at the Lancaster Roots & Blues Festival, the band opens for headliner Frank Bey for the second straight night when he takes the stage at 2 p.m. on April 28 at Champions Sports Bar & Grill.

The band, based in Williamsport, is led by Gabe Stillman, a Berklee College of Music grad who took home the prestigious Gibson Guitar Award for best guitarist at the IBC in Memphis. The band is a Billtown Blues Festival staple after having won the Billtown Blues Challenge twice, and is a mainstay on the regional blues festival circuit.

For more on the Gabe Stillman Band, go to [www.gabestillman.com](http://www.gabestillman.com).

