

Official Rules

Natchel' Blues Network (NBN) Blues Challenge

Who Can Enter?

While the Challenge cannot be considered a purely "amateur" contest, the goal of the Challenge is to seek out the best-undiscovered Blues performers in Hampton Roads and the surrounding areas.

The NBN adheres to the Blues Foundation's International Blues Challenge (IBC) criteria for competitor categories, scoring and official eligibility rules. The IBC website makes these details publicly accessible. In the event of a perceived conflict or dispute between the IBC rules and these rules prior to the date of the event, the judgment of the Event Coordinator and the NBN Board of Directors will be considered final. On the day of the event, the decisions of the Event Coordinator will be considered final and are not subject to appeal.

The purpose of the NBN Blues Challenge is to select our nominee(s) for the 34th International Blues Challenge (IBC) which will be held January 16-20, 2018 in Memphis, TN. The NBN will provide limited financial support to the Blues Challenge winner(s) through fundraising opportunities, but the artist(s) are ultimately responsible for their IBC expenses.

The NBN will nominate Blues Challenge winners in each of three categories as their nominee(s) to the Memphis IBC in the artist's category, provided their score equals or exceeds 100 (out of 130). The three categories are Band, Solo/Duo, and Youth.

The highest scoring competitor in each of the categories will receive the NBN nomination to the IBC in their category.

NEW BLUES FOUNDATION RULE: Acts must enter the challenge of their own/home affiliate first (or the closest affiliate based on distance). If they are not successful, they may enter the challenge of no more than 2 affiliates in that year provided those affiliates are within 250 miles of the home affiliate. For the NBN this distance is measured from the NBN registered address zip code 23510.

Band: Any act with three or more musicians. Vocalists are counted as musicians for this competition. Both electric and acoustic instruments are allowed.

Solo/Duo: Any act with one or two musicians. Vocalists are counted as musicians for this competition. Both electric and acoustic instruments are allowed.

Youth Showcase: Any act that all members are under the age of 21 at the time of the International Blues Challenge in Memphis. The Youth Showcase is primarily a "non-competitive" category. The entrants in the Youth category may be solo/duo or band, but do not compete with entrants in the actual Solo/Duo or Band categories. To enter in the

Youth category, all members must be under the age of 21 at the time of the IBC. The Youth category "winners" will perform several showcases and perform in various venues in Memphis during the IBC, but will not "compete" in any competitive category. There is no minimum age stipulated for the competitive Solo/Duo or Band categories, and may compete against more seasoned artists, but it should be understood that youth and talent do not necessarily equate to skill and experience.

Best Self-Produced CD: One entry can be selected for this category. The eligibility period is the same as for the Blues Music Awards. The CD must have been released during November 1, 2016 – October 31, 2017 timeframe. Get details at: <https://blues.org/self-produced-cd-award>

Entry Fee is \$75.00 and must be submitted with application. Additionally, at least two (2) members of the competing acts must be members in good standing of the Natchel' Blues Network. Memberships may be obtained at <http://www.natchelblues.org>.

The NBN will not consider artists for entry into the Blues Challenge who have won two consecutive Blues Challenges, regardless of which Blues Affiliate they competed through. Artists should be aware that the IBC restricts an act to two consecutive and three total appearances at the IBC. After two consecutive appearance, Acts must then sit out at least one year before being eligible to compete again. Essentially, an act under the same name will not be allowed to compete three consecutive years. Sponsorship by different affiliates does not alter the two consecutive appearances restriction.

Eligibility Criteria

Restrictions:

- Any artist whose name has appeared on a final W.C. Handy Blues Award/Blues Foundation Blues Music Award ballot is ineligible. All other musicians who have had peripheral and/or professional contact through performance with a Handy/Blues Music Award nominee, including but not limited to, touring band members and studio musicians, are deemed eligible.
- An individual may not compete in more than one act in any capacity.
- A musician cannot compete in the Band Division and the Solo/Duo Division in the same year.
- At least one member of each competing act must be members of NBN. Memberships are \$25. Membership will be validated prior to formal acceptance of an acts' application to compete in the NBN Blues Challenge.

No other entry restrictions apply. This means that management contracts, booking agent contracts, recording contracts, performance contracts (even those that include regular television or radio broadcast) and nationally distributed recordings have no bearing on eligibility.

The Eligibility Packet

As a condition of eligibility, each competing act is required to submit an application package via email to bobby@bobbyblackhat.com before **Wednesday July 19th, 2017**. The NBN reserves the right to accept entry packets submitted after the deadline due to unforeseen circumstances.

Entrants for the Best Self-Produced CD Category must provide seven (7) CDs to the NBN for consideration no later than October 1, 2017. Mail or otherwise deliver CDs to **Bobby BlackHat Walters, 802 Marly Ct, Newport News, VA 23608**. CDs will not be returned. (Yes, we know the eligibility period extends to 31 Oct, however, submissions MUST be received by the Blues Foundation by November 1, 2016. NBN requires adequate time to review CDs and make the submission deadline so plan your CD production accordingly.)

Due to production lead times, competitors are strongly encouraged to submit their applications as early as possible for the NBN to include act names in publicity material/promotions and to ensure that all necessary equipment is available at the venue in which the Challenge is held.

Prizes

Cash awards will be presented to the top act in each category.

- First place band: cash prize of \$500.00
- First place solo/duo: cash prize of \$250.00
- The First-Place Acts will represent the NBN at the International Blues Challenge (IBC) in Memphis, Tennessee. The 2018 IBC is scheduled for January 16-20, 2018. The challenge winner(s) will be required to perform and host any jams organized by the NBN from the conclusion of the Blues Challenge until Jan 2017, which will also be used as fundraisers for the challenge winner(s).
- Second Place: Gift Certificate
- Third Place: Gift Certificate

Competition

Sets will be 30 minutes long. Each act will be given 10 minutes to take the stage prior to their set and 5 minutes to clear the stage following the end of their set. Points will be deducted for exceeding time allowed in any category. Time is not cumulative – each portion (Set up, Performance, Clear) is recorded separately and taking less time for one does not give additional time for another.

Note: While each artist will have a maximum of 30 minutes, there is no minimum time requirement. Artists are encouraged to present a concise and cohesive presentation designed to showcase their talent.

Each act will be assigned their performance slot by drawing slips of paper with band names on them out of a container or similar unbiased method.

Sets will be scored using the criteria established by the IBC. The judges may or may not be members of NBN and/or The Blues Foundation; membership is neither required nor a disqualifier. Current NBN Officers or Board Members and persons with a familial or professional relationship with any competitor are ineligible to serve as judges.

Staging and Equipment

The NBN will provide backline and sound. The setup on stage will include a standard 5-piece drum kit, guitar amps, and microphones. Drummers may choose to bring their own snare drum, cymbals or pedals, but no extra time will be granted to change out items, and the kit must be returned to original condition prior to clearing the stage. Harmonica players may bring their own harp amp or direct input box. Keyboard players must bring their own keyboards*, however, an amp will be provided. Effects racks and other auxiliary equipment are permitted. Musicians must note any additional or special equipment needed in their eligibility packet.

*Acts are discouraged from using excessively large keyboards (e.g. Hammond B-Series, with or without Leslie), as they will not receive similar consideration from the Blues Foundation to use such instruments.

Competitors are prohibited from bringing their own amplifiers (harp amps excepted.) Exceptions to this prohibition may only be granted pursuant to a formal petition submitted in writing and received by the NBN no less than 30 days prior to the competition. Include this request in the eligibility packet. Any petition for an equipment waiver must include a compelling reason for exemption. The Blues Foundation most likely would not approve similar consideration.

The NBN event coordinator and Board of Directors/Officers reserve the right to approve or restrict any and all equipment an entrant wishes to bring on stage.

Order of Appearance

Category order will be 1) Youth 2) Solo/Duo 3) Band. The order of appearance within each category is random and will be determined the day of the competition by drawing names from a hat/container.

Scoring Criteria

The NBN uses the criteria established by the Blues Foundation for scoring. Categories are: Talent, Blues Content, Stage Presence and Originality. There is a maximum of 10 points awarded in each category.

- 1. Blues Content:** Everyone has his or her own interpretation of what is and is not Blues. Thus, any given three-judge panel will include members with varying opinions of Blues, covering the spectrum of Blues whenever possible, from the most traditional to soul/blues and rock/blues. Bands should pick material carefully. At the Memphis semi-finals and finals, the judges are Blues professionals, not a bar crowd, and are likely to be unimpressed with song selections that are uninspired. (Call this--with all due respect to Sir Mack Rice and Wilson Pickett--the "no Mustang Sally rule.")
- 2. Vocals:** The act's vocal skills.
- 3. Talent:** The act's instrumental skills.
- 4. Originality:** Original work is encouraged. Cover tunes are allowed but playing the recorded rendition lick by lick is discouraged; will not be looked upon favorably by the judges; and will be reflected in scoring.
- 5. Stage Presence:** Over the years, the quality of talent has risen so dramatically that we no longer consider this an "amateur" competition. Most contestants have performed on stage long enough to know that they are not simply playing music, but putting on a show. This category rates how "sellable" a band may be.

To reflect the relative importance of each category in the success of a band, a band's score in each category is weighted. The weighted multipliers will be Blues content (4); talent (3); vocals (3); originality (2) and stage presence (2). The total in each category represents the Weighted Score for that category. Total possible weighted score is 130.

Penalty Points

A Band is penalized one point from its Total Weighted Score (see below) for each ten seconds that it runs overtime. There is no penalty for using less than the allotted time. The penalty for excessive time is applied for each timed portion (Taking Stage, Performing, and Clearing Stage) that is exceeded.

In addition, Blues Challenge participants can lose points for non-compliance with administrative aspects of the competition.

One point will be deducted for the following administrative aspects.

- 1) Online application was filled out completely and accurately. yes no
- 2) Act photo was supplied by the deadline and in the format requested. yes no
- 3) Act bio was supplied by the deadline and in the manner requested. yes no
- 4) Act checked in on time on day of event. yes no
- 5) Act checked in with Event Coordinator at the required time. yes no
- 6) Act representative attended orientation. yes no

* The Event Coordinator has the authority to act on behalf of the NBN to ensure that the event goes smoothly. If a band scheduled to play in a specific slot is not able to perform for whatever reason, the Coordinator will have the authority to deduct a point from the

band's overall weighted score for the competition. The next band scheduled to play will be asked to step into that slot. Should that band, for whatever reason, not be able to perform when asked, the Coordinator has the authority to deduct a point from that band, and so on. With that in mind, the NBN strongly suggests that after a band has met with the Coordinator for their required check-in, they stay in the venue and are available to perform at the Coordinator's direction, regardless of which slot they are scheduled to play. Bands that have missed their designated slot will be allowed to perform later but will still suffer the loss of a point on the weighted score.

These items demonstrate professionalism and seriousness about the competition or the business side of the blues.

Scoring System for Judges

1. All categories and weightings are as previously stated.
2. Each judge will indicate his or her Raw Score (a whole number between 1 and 10) in each category and turn that information over to the scorekeeper.
 - 1-3 Typical of a beginning blues band.
 - 4-5 Typical of a local weekend band.
 - 6-7 Typical of an advanced local band but not yet ready to headline a major blues club.
 - 8-9 Typical of the quality of blues artists who headline major clubs.
 - 10 Typical of those who play the main stage at major festivals such as Chicago Blues Fest or Newport Jazz Festival.
3. The scorekeeper will multiply the Raw Score in each category by the established multiplier to get each judge's Weighted Score in each category for each act.
4. The Weighted Scores from each category for an act are added together to determine the act's Total Weighted Score for each judge.
5. Any penalty points will then be deducted to obtain the acts' Net Weighted Score for each judge.
6. After all acts have been judged and each acts' Net Weighted Score for each judge is calculated, each act will then be ranked for each judge based on that judge's order of scores, with the act receiving the judge's highest Net Weighted Score being given a ranking of 1, and so on for that judge. So, in a competition with five acts, for example, each judge ends up with the acts ranked 1 - 5 based on each judge's personal scoring habits. This results in the acts' Final Ranking Number for each judge.
7. Next, the scorer totals the Final Ranking Number from all judges for each act to determine the Gross Final Ranking. That figure is averaged (divided by the total number of judges) to Achieve the Aggregate Act Ranking.
8. In the case of a tie, the scorer shall calculate the sum of all Total Weighted Scores from all judges for the tied acts. The band with the higher sum of Total Weighted Scores wins.
9. Judges will be strongly encouraged to provide narrative/critiques on their ballots. These notes will be provided to the competitors and are helpful to the acts as they develop.

Notes for Competitors

Band check-in time will be 11:30 am at the scheduled venue.

Orientation

There will be a brief orientation at the venue at 12:00 with the Event Coordinator and Stage Coordinator. During orientation, the Coordinators will review contest rules, introduce key people, and seek to resolve any questions or special problems that contestants may have. This is also when the designated band representatives will draw the previously described slips of paper to determine performance order. Any designated band representative failing to attend the orientation without special arrangement will cause the band to be disqualified.

Hospitality

Refreshments will be sold at the events and are the responsibility of the consumer. The NBN will provide non-alcoholic refreshments (soda, water, tea) for competitors. The NBN is not responsible for refreshments ordered by competitors from venue staff.

There will be no "Guest List" for competitors. All entourage members, friends, family, etc., are expected to pay the event admission fee.

Other Points of Consideration

The NBN official timekeeper will hold up a placard to indicate 3, 2 and 1 minute times remaining during the performance portion. During the taking of the stage and clearing of the stage portions, only the 1 minute remaining placard will be used. The Event Coordinator will assign an official timekeeper. Acts may utilize their own timekeeper, or keep their own time, but only the official timekeeper will be recognized for scoring purposes.

The NBN reserves the right to use any contestant's name, voices, pictures, visages and other likeness for advertising, publishing and promoting the Blues Challenge, NBN, the IBC or The Blues Foundation. The NBN reserves the right to videotape or otherwise record all Blues Challenge performances. The NBN shall retain total ownership of all recordings and programs, and reserves the right to edit the program, the right to broadcast the program, the right to copyright the program and the right to license others to use these rights.

Natchel' Blues Network
Blues Challenge Application

Name of act:

Representative's name:

Mailing address:

City, State Zip code:

Primary Email:

Secondary Email:

Primary Phone: Best time to call:

Secondary Phone: Best time to call:

****The following are not required for entry, but will greatly benefit entry consideration.****

Web Site URL:

SonicBids URL:

Facebook URL:

Soundcloud URL:

ReverbNation URL:

Other pertinent media outlets URL:

*** The following information and material requirements are a very important part of this Application. All questions require a response. ***

What additional equipment will The Act provide and use?

Are you requesting an equipment waiver?

A photograph (conventional media 5" x 7" or larger, digital media in JPG, PNG or TIFF format) of The Act must be submitted. Please identify each member as they appear in the photo, from left to right.

Identify each member of the act in terms of age, role and instrument(s) played:

Bands must provide a stage plot. Be sure to identify all vocal mics and act provided equipment.

Provide a brief biography of the act:

- The undersigned if a challenge winner(s) agrees to perform and host any jams organized by the NBN from the conclusion of the Blues Challenge until Jan 2017, which will also be used as fundraisers for the challenge winner(s).
- The undersigned hereby attests that he/she is, in fact, 18 years of age or older; and is, in fact, the responsible representative for the individual(s) listed elsewhere on this form and identified above by real or stage name, and herein referred to as the act.
- The undersigned hereby attests that no member of the act has been named on a ballot for a Handy or Blues Music Award.
- It is agreed by the spokesperson that he/she and each member of the act do hereby exempt from all liability, the Natchel Blues Network and all persons, organizations, and companies that are directly or indirectly associated with the Natchel' Blues Network Blues Challenge.
- It is further agreed by the spokesperson that he/she and each member of the act do hereby accept full responsibility for all taxes and restrictions to contest prizes received by the act.
- It is further agreed that each member of the act, permits the Natchel Blues Network the right to make use of his/her/their names, voices, pictures, visages, and other likenesses of the act, including any recordings made of the challenge (the program) for the purpose of advertising, publishing, and promoting the Natchel' Blues Network Blues Challenge, through media, including entertainment and music syndicated radio, film, and television shows presented or produced by the Natchel' Blues Network.
- In addition, the spokesperson and each member of the act hereby agrees that the Natchel' Blues Network will retain ownership of the program(s), the right to edit the program(s), the right to broadcast the program(s), the right to copyright the program(s), and the right to license others to use these rights.
- All members of the act understand that, if selected to be the winner of the NBN Blues Challenge, they will be expected to travel to Memphis, TN to compete in the International Blues Competition and represent the NBN with the utmost professionalism and dignity. It is also understood that the act will bear full responsibility for all costs involved in the trip to Memphis. The NBN will host fundraisers to alleviate costs, but cannot be held responsible for funds not raised.
- The undersigned spokesperson hereby acknowledges that each member of the act is knowledgeable of and agrees to abide by the terms herein stated and the rules of the Natchel' Blues Network, as set forth by The Blues Foundation.

Representative's signature

Printed Name: _____

Date: _____

(revised 5/2017)