



Young Chicago bluesman Will Tilson defies expectations



Photo courtesy Will Tilson

Will Tilson

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By Aaron Bedoya comment: @whatsupweekly |

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In high school, a student's time is spoken for from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. on the weekdays, but for freshman Will Tilson, he's still been able to compile quite a music resume.

At the age of nine, Tilson was exposed to creating music by watching his Uncle's band play at various venues, eventually taking the stage to create his own blues. Now 15 years old, Tilson continues to solidify his sound. He won the Windy City Blues Challenge in November; in January he was invited to represent Chicago in the International Blues Challenge at Nashville – both were solo acoustic sets. The young bluesman, now craving more of the “electric/full band sound,” continues to play around Chicago as part of a trio.

Before his recent successes, Tilson was rummaging through records at local shop when the owner Chris Karabas took notice of the musician and invited him to jam. Those sessions were instrumental in creating material for his EP, “Savin’ Up.” What’s Uå chatted with Tilson before his upcoming Neon Desert performance, and asked about choosing songs for his EP and how he’s been getting ready for his first music festival.

Q. Aside from rummaging through records at the local shop, what were you doing before to push you into being a musician?

Well, my uncle had a band. I used to go down to these clubs, and I was about nine or ten. I would just be sitting in on those songs they would be playing and immersed myself into their blues and soul sound. I wasn't as familiar with that type of music at that point, so it motivated me, [and] I just fell in love with it. My uncle helped me a lot.

Q. Tell me about your inspirations. How did that help in choosing your sound?

I just dived into blues records. I remember buying a box set with a bunch of hits from: Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Buddy Guy, and a bunch of blues legends. But as I progressed I decided to dive even deeper: artists from Memphis and then I was introduced to Otis Redding. Once I did that, I would pick up my guitar and try to mimic the process, that's how I learned. It was just music I could relate to.