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Rockland's North Atlantic Blues Festival slides into town July 13-14.

Delta blues, Blues Broads, hot electric guitar, pedal steel guitar, even sacred steel lap guitar—they're all coming to the waterfront in Rockland in July for a weekend of blues. An extensive musical lineup includes Mavis Staples, Duke Robillard, the Holmes Brothers, and Sugar Ray & the Blue Tones.

"The festival has gained a reputation for being the best of the best blues festivals in the country," promoter Jamie Isaacson tells us. "The artists say Maine has one of the best audiences they perform for." Over the years, Rockland has hosted such acclaimed acts as Koko Taylor, Junior Wells, Keb Mo', Robert Cray, Little Milton, Bo Diddley, and "Susan Tedeschi, [who] played at the first N.A.B.F. before anyone had heard of her."

The Lee Boys, a sacred steel band, will perform in Rockland for the first time. According to the Lees' website, sacred steel is "rooted in Gospel but infused with rhythm and blues, jazz, rock, funk, hip-hop, country, and ideas from other nations." Electric lap steel guitar was brought into Florida's House of God Pentecostal church by brothers Willie and Troman Eason, and "over time, this unique sound became the hallmark of the church. The pedal steel guitar was added to the mix and soon became the central instrument."

We caught up with Lee Boys bandleader Alvin Lee at his home in Florida.

Tell us about sacred steel and your family.

My father [Reverend Robert E. Lee] was a minister [in the House of God Pentecostal church]. We were all involved in the music. My father and my brother Glenn both died in 2000, and that's when we decided to take it out of the four walls, out of the church and into the world. Once we started out at music festivals in 2002, we started getting bookings.

Have you ever been this far north?

When we first got started, we went up to Canada, to Canceaux and Halifax. We've been to Winnipeg, Vancouver.

Hot Blue Steel



Ever been to a place as cold as Maine in the winter?

We've been to Chicago! In winter. So yes.

What's Miami got that that Maine doesn't?

Well, Miami's got a wide variety of culture and music.

What do you think of as Maine music?

I'm afraid I don't know the issues there.

This is a long way to drive for a festival weekend.

We're flying to Maine. The festival will give us the amps and everything we need, and they'll have a drum set. We just bring our instruments, our guitars. And the drummer brings his sticks.

You play with a lot of different kinds of musicians.

We play with the Allman Brothers, we know them personally. And the Derek Trucks band. We've played with B.B. King, Buddy Guy, Robert Cray. We opened for Little Richard. People like Sacred Steel. We've jammed with Bob Weir and his band. We usually open for bands or they ask us to jam with them.

How old are you and the band?

I'm 47, my older brother's 49; we go down to 29. I live in Kissimmee, near Disney, with my wife and boys—they're little Lee Boys. But most of my family lives in Miami.

You describe sacred steel music as "not sitting and listening music," and say that dancing is essential.

Well, the music is a tradition, but now it's out! ■