

WHAT'S HOT

HOT SPOT



A class act Corky Siegel (center) and Chamber Blues challenge conventional musical boundaries. The group plays Saturday at Orchestra Hall.

The blues moves uptown

Back in the mid-'60s, Corky Siegel used to play the blues with New Trier grad Jim SchwallI at Pepper's Show Lounge on the South Side, jamming with the likes of Howlin' Wolf, Muddy Waters and Buddy Guy.

He'll be playing the blues in a very different venue and a very different style at 7:30 p.m. Saturday in Chicago's Orchestra Hall when Corky Siegel's Chamber Blues headlines a concert line-up including a reunion of the Siegel/Schwall band. Call (312) 525-7793.

Siegel first mixed traditional blues with classical music in 1967 at the urging of Seiji Ozawa, who was guest conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra that summer at Ravinia.

"He said, I'd like your band to jam with my band," Siegel recalled.

Classical composer William Russo wrote "Three Pieces for Blues Band and Symphony" that were such a success the Siegel/Schwall band performed it with the New York Philharmonic and the Boston and San Francisco symphony orchestras and recorded it for Deutsche Grammophon.

Even so, Siegel considered

blending classical and blues little more than a novelty until he began composing the music himself. First in 1976 for Arthur Fiedler's San Francisco Symphony, then in 1983 for the Grant Park Symphony.

While working on the Grant Park piece, the idea for chamber blues "exploded in my mind," Siegel remembered.

Chamber blues is not, strictly speaking, classical music or the blues. It's a combination of the two, exploring the territory "where blues and classical meet—and they do meet, that's the surprise."

Siegel's composition uses musical notation that blends the blues piano and harmonica into the intricate patterns of the classical string quartet for a lofty, soulful sound.

"It took five years to write, but it was incredibly fulfilling," he said. The results have also been incredibly successful.

He and the West End String Quartet, with percussionist Frank Donaldson, have been touring with his compositions for the past five years. This is the first time, however, that they've played Orchestra Hall.

The guys down at Pepper's surely would have been impressed.