Q: I think of the most famous musician to come out of Worcester in the last 50 years. You could name a big band full of jazz cats such as Jaki Byard, Don Fagenson and Barbara Carroll. Off the top of your head, you'd most likely name Duke Levine. But he is largely a player with only regional following.

A: You could name a whole bunch of rock 'n' rollers such as those who supported Joe Cocker — namely, Cliff Goodwin, Mitch Chakour and John Riley.

Q: Last year, Ken Pino spent six years with Johnny Copeland. Marc Barnicle, Craig McIntyre and Michael O'Connell are touring with Shirley Lewis.

A: Remember Orpheus? And Jamie Brockett...

Q: What about Joanna Connor? She grew up in Worcester. Who is she? She is a blues diva who, in storybook fashion, caught a Greyhound to Chicago — to the blues mecca of the universe to study with the masters. She did that. It was almost a decade ago. Since then she has toured the world, has three albums under her own name with a fourth one on the way. Her latest, in fact, is "Living on the Road." She's even entered in the recent edition of the Big Book of Blues, a biographical encyclopedia published by Penguin Books. "Joanna Connor is a singer and guitarist known for her searing slide work. Like Rory Block, Sue Foley and Bonnie Raitt, Joanna has given contemporary blues guitar a refreshing female slant."

A: A fiery young player who calls herself Goddess, Guitar goddess," she laughed, correcting my sexist remark.

Q: "My playing is getting better. You know, I've been messing around way too. We really featured the guitar playing. It's from playing with good musicians, it is just from doing it so much and..."

A: "...and it sounds like it. She also sings her heart out on "At the Dark End of the Street." Her band has seven covers, ranging from roadhouse classics: Bonnie Raitt, Ry Cooder, Lowell George and Aretha Franklin — shout out and her guitar heroes — Luther Allison, Buddy Guy and Jeff Beck ring out. Especially the gods and goddesses: Bonnie Raitt, Ry Cooder, Lowell George and Johnny Winter. All the ghosts show up.

Q: The live album is all new stuff, nothing from other albums."

A: "I didn't feel like my career was old enough to do something like that. Basically, some of the songs we had been doing, and some of the songs we learned for the record."

Q: The album features three originals and seven covers, ranging from roadhouse rocks like Delbert McClinton's "My Baby's Lovin" and Johnny Copeland's "Boogie Woogie Nighthawk" to songs from the woman's perspective such as "Good Woman Gone Bad," "Wildfire Woman" and her own "Jalapeno Mama."

A: "She also sings her heart out on "At the Dark End of the Street." Her band has been with her for a couple of years now, and it sounds like it.

Q: This band sounds like a real band, then?

A: "This band sounds like a real band. We all get along and everybody is really cooperative and willing to try new things and take criticism or contribute ideas. You know, we are on the road so much that it is really important to like each other. And we do. I have no problem with them about me being a woman. Some men really have a hard time dealing with that. They don't. So it is like a little family.

That same year, while organizing the first edition of her own band, Connor was hired by saxophonist A.C. Reed, who took Connor out on tour. Her reputation blossomed further when she smoked at a benefit concert for blues queen Koko Taylor.

Two years later, Connor officially arrived with the Blind Pig release of her debut, Believe It. The album was awarded critical acclaim internationally. Today the Joanna Connor Band is a fixture on the blues circuit around the world.

"This year was probably our busiest year ever," Connor said. "We were on the road from like January to October just nonstop. We went to Europe three times in that period. My son traveled with us all summer. He's 7. He loved it. He plays drums and he played with us every night." Connor's second album, Fight, was awarded a biographi- cally acclaimed Year in the Worcester Magazine readers poll. The following year, she left for Chicago. Almost immediately, Connor got swept up in the Windy City's active blues scene. She got to jam with musicians who had idolized all her life — Buddy Guy, Otis Rush and James Cotton. Her first gig was with the late great slide guitarist Johnny Littlejohn. In 1983, she joined Dion Payton and his popular 43rd St. Band. The band is featured on the Alligator compilation New Bluesbloods, and critics hailed her performance at the 1987 Chicago Blues Festival.

Radio station WCUI, 91.3 FM, as host for the show Blues His Biscuits.

Connor turned professional at the age of 19, forming the Pino/Connor band with guitarist Ken Pino. A band that once featured bass ace Wolf Gimandes and drummer Kennard Johnson, who recorded extensively with James Cotton. The band was a mainstay at Ralph's and Gilrein's and worked all over New England. In 1983, Connor was named "Best R&B Vocalist of the Year" in the Worcester Magazine readers poll. The following year, she left for Chicago. Almost immediately, Connor got swept up in the Windy City's active blues scene. She got to jam with musicians who had idolized all her life — Buddy Guy, Otis Rush and James Cotton. Her first gig was with the late great slide guitarist Johnny Littlejohn. In 1983, she joined Dion Payton and his popular 43rd St. Band. The band is featured on the Alligator compilation New Bluesbloods, and critics hailed her performance at the 1987 Chicago Blues Festival.

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