

# BSWPA BLUESLETTER

*Blues News You Can Use ... From the Burgh*



**BSWPA NEWSLETTER**

**VOLUME 12, ISSUE 1**

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## ***The Train Roars Through...always a 'winning' and wild performance!!!***



**Victor Wainright**...is always a tremendous force on his own. Team him up with his amazing band, The Train, and you are in for a wild musical journey! At a recent sold out show, the crowd anxiously awaited for THE Victor Wainright to take the stage. Suddenly, a giant shadow loomed large, side stage. The crowd immediately broke into uproarious clapping and cheering! "Their" Victor Wainright was in the house!!!

The Victor Wainright 'pre-show ritual' then sets the tone for the evening. Victor gives his signature wave to the crowd as he strolls across the stage to his trusty keyboard. He adjusts his hat. One hand on the brim and one hand on the back, readying for his powerful romp with the crowd. He stretches his suspenders like a prize fighter readying for the big 'fight'. Victor then takes his place at that famous keyboard soon to let loose with a frenzy of tunes. The ritual continues as he stretches his hands, tantalizing the audience... all are familiar with the fury that will soon be unleashed! He looks down at his keyboard as if sizing up the task at hand. He then looks mischievously up. Victor then looks straight at the crowd, sizing them up. He begins making it personal, very personal. As always this performer begins each show with a downhome and endearing VW smile. He reaches for his keyboard...hands poised. An explosion of music suddenly occurs!!! Away Victor goes with the audience in tow. The crowd is totally under 'his spell' as he works his amazing magic. Instantly, the many attendees become his family, his amazing Blues family! The following is what has been said about Victor Wainright!

♪"Wainwright serves as an electrifying guide to a good time-spinning tales, telling his listeners how to beat the blues, and meticulously conjuring raw soul and energy out of his acoustic piano. He displays a sharp sense of humor and a knack for storytelling... every track is brilliant." -Living Blues Magazine.

♪"Victor Wainwright is a world champion piano player, two times over! Not only is Victor one of the greatest blues piano players in the business, he's also a world class entertainer and vocalist." - Blues Revue Magazine.

♪ "Victor Wainwright, winner of this year's Pine Top Perkins Piano Player Award at the BMA's, is a force to be reckoned with on a piano. He IS honky-tonk and boogie, with a dose of rolling thunder. Wainwright's playing is simply beautiful madness." -American Blues Scene.

♪ "Savannah, GA native Victor Wainwright is all about boogie woogie piano, deep soul, and a voice that recalls Dr. John at his best. He is a blues star, a tremendous player." - Chicago Blues Guide

Enclosed is what **Victor Wainright** shared in a recent conversation:

**Jonnye:** You have a very storied past concerning how and why you play. Please tell us who inspired you and how you plan to honor that memory.

**Victor:** I learned to play the piano from my Grandfather. He was bigger than life and he and my father are the main reasons I play music today. My Grandfather passed this last

December, but every night I come on stage, I truly believe he comes on with me. He loved performing more than anything!

**Jonnye:** Your family told you to go to college. You soon found yourself being an air traffic controller. Once you found Memphis (your base), it seems that Memphis found/discovered you. You decided to follow your passion for your 'night gig'. Tell us about your early Memphis experience and what 'clicked' for you. How is controlling the planes in the air similar to guiding the band and the fans on land.

**Victor:** The early days of performing in Memphis on Beale Street while at the same time waking up and being an Air Traffic Controller were really tough for me. I've always had a strong passion for music as long as I can remember, but my family felt it was important for me to have a career choice outside of music as well. They knew how hard it is making a living playing an instrument. When I graduated college in Daytona Beach, Florida, the FAA called me up and offered me a job. They moved me to Memphis, TN. Once here, it was like a slow countdown started. Two and a half years later, and I was at one of the biggest crossroads of my life. Will I play music? Or stay an Air Traffic Controller? The decision was personally pulling me apart. On one hand, I had already gained ground in Memphis with a good band having a lot of fun. On the other hand, I had this very safe, high paying but very stressful job. The two jobs couldn't be more different. I could risk everything to quit and play music. That decision didn't come easy for me knowing that my family, who were also musicians, put me through college to help me have a strong future with lots of possibilities. I also owned a house and had responsibilities. The thing is, Memphis made that decision a little easier for me. I had working gigs. At that time, I think almost 12 years ago now, Beale Street was slammed! It was like the IBC's every weekend, with clubs and the street packed tight with all sorts of people. I had a regular gig at Wet Willie's and a steady working relationship with the club, Rum Boogie. I had as many gigs as I needed at the time, which were more than I could handle thinking back. It didn't take but a couple times of me waking up super tired and coming to work as an Air Traffic Controller after playing all night on Beale for me to recognize that that was not safe. In fact, it was too dangerous to continue. I loved playing with my band and things were heating up for me quick! Looking back, one similarity between being in ATC and also managing my music career, is that sometimes you have to make quick decisions, and stick by them, confident that you've made the right choice. Now, I know I made the right choice.

**Jonnye:** How do you manage to keep your energy level high when you give your out and out at each event...night after night?

**Victor:** I often wonder this myself when it's time for me to find energy to do other things! The crowd and fans of this music are what directly give me the energy to continue doing this.

**Jonnye:** Having won so many Pinetop Perkins awards for "Pianist of the Year", how do you find new paths to follow? Do you feel pressured to grow and to 'stay ahead of the pack'?

**Victor:** I've always felt some pressure to pioneer my own path and not follow directly behind anyone else in how things "have always been done." I think this comes from my Grandad, and right now this is true more than ever. Luckily, I currently have a band that I can fully express myself musically with. We share ideas and concepts that are very 3.

much on the edge. This has helped us grow a nice platform for having fun experimenting with this music and staying out in front of the wave. The options are limitless. The music we create, I hope, is uniquely ours, but shared and loved by many.

**Jonnye:** You have done many workshops and have also been a featured host at the Pinetop Perkins scholarship camp. What is it that you identify with when you work with those young people? What is it that you hope to 'inspire' in them?

**Victor:** My only goal with doing any of these has always been to show how much fun music is. It's never been about certain notes, but more about the feeling behind those notes. I want others to feel the same joy I do when I play.

**Jonnye:** Spending so much time on the road and at gigs, how do you find 'your space' and inner peace during those long 'runs'? Any good stories that you would like to share about the perils/adventures of being on the road in a travelling band?

**Victor:** All I can say is that sometimes the very best thing you can do, is put your headphones on, look out at the world as it passes by from the bus window, and be ok with yourself. :)

**Jonnye:** How does Victor Wainwright spend time off?

**Victor:** Mostly with my pup Riley. He's a three-year-old Boston Terrier. We spend all waking hours together when I'm home... even when taking a shower or playing the piano!

**Jonnye:** Who is the newest member of your entourage.... the little spotted guy?

**Victor:** Riley is indeed!

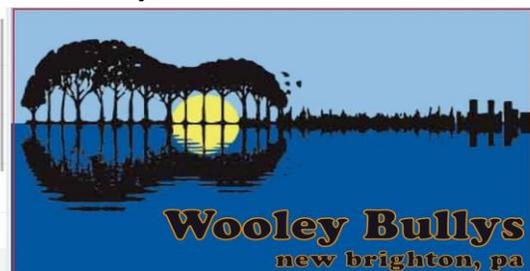
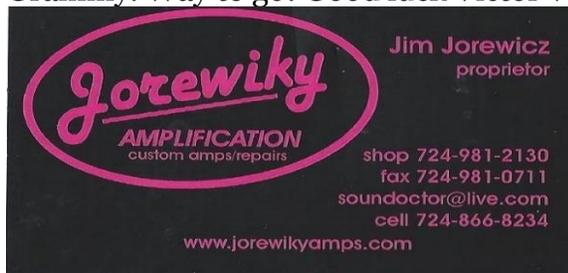
**Jonnye:** Tell us about your newest CD.

**Victor:** The self-titled "Victor Wainwright and The Train" is the first album in a series where our goal is to play music that sounds and feels super familiar, while at the same time, delivering a joy that is uniquely different. We are curious musicians, and I followed that musical curiosity through the entire process. I'm very proud of the ground we have covered and the joy we have captured on that record. I hope as people listen that the music jumps out at them and gives them a big hug! It's time to smile, let go, and take a ride.

**Jonnye:** At the end of the day, what makes YOU, Victor Wainwright, feel accomplished?

**Victor:** When I get back to my hotel room after a big show, and close that door, it's imperative that I feel like we did a great job out on that stage, or I literally cannot sleep. Luckily and thankfully with the band of friends I have now, I get lots of sleep. :)

At press time, Victor Wainwright was nominated for the Best Contemporary Blues Album Grammy. Way to go! Good luck Victor Wainwright! ~Jonnye Weber





**THE BLUES SOCIETY  
OF WESTERN PA  
PRESENTS**

# **THE 15TH ANNUAL BLUES CHALLENGE**

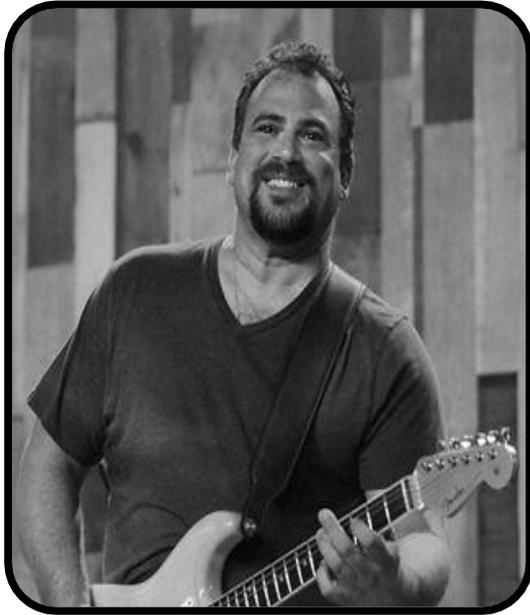


Featuring the region's best blues artists competing for a chance to represent BSWPA at the 2020 International Blues Challenge

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**SATURDAY, APRIL 27, 2019**  
**CORNERSTONE @ TONIDALE**  
7001 STEUBENVILLE PIKE | OAKDALE, PA  
DOORS @ 1PM | SHOW @ 2PM  
\$10 BSWPA MEMBERS | \$12 PUBLIC





**The Blues Society of Western PA  
Blues Challenge  
After Party**

**The Jeff Fetterman Band**

**(2018 Band Challenge Winner)**

**Saturday, April 27, 2019**

**Pub at Tonidale**

**7001 Steubenville Pike**

**Oakdale, PA 15071**

**(next door to the Cornerstone at  
Tonidale where the Challenge will be  
held.)**

**10:00 pm – 1:30 am**

**Food and beverages will be available**

**NO COVER**

**A Brief Conversation with JERRON “BLIND BOY” PAXTON**

When asked if I would conduct a short public interview with Jerron “Blind Boy” Paxton at the 2018 Highmark Blues and Heritage Festival at Pittsburgh’s August Wilson Center,



I jumped at the chance. Being a huge fan of Traditional American Music, this incredibly talented artist was most definitely on my radar. My first exposure to Jerron was while visiting friends during Blues Week at the Augusta Heritage Center at Davis & Elkins College in Elkins, WV a few years back. This engaging young man is impossible to ignore as his exuberance and energetic persona, not to mention his amazing scope of talent, command the attention of anyone nearby.

Though the conditions at the inaugural Highmark Blues and Heritage Festival were less than favorable for a public interview – chock that up to growing pains for the young event – we managed to find a spot that would be somewhat suitable for such a talk. And being the gracious man that he is, Jerron did his best to accommodate me, along with the folks who wanted to learn more about him and his story.

Jerron Paxton plays a style of music that sounds transported straight out of the 1920s and upon hearing it, if you didn’t know better, you might double check your calendar to

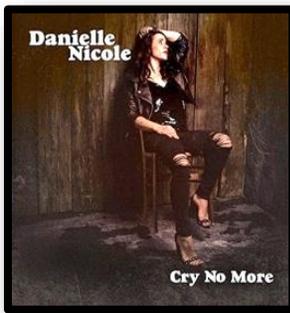
make sure. With deep familial roots in Louisiana, it's no wonder the musical traditions of yesteryear in the Deep South played such a big part in Jerron's development. His family relocated to South Central Los Angeles, CA in the mid-50s. Born in 1989, he was exposed to traditional music everywhere he turned; from the radios of older relatives and neighbors to the songs his Grandmother sang around home. At twelve years of age, he began his study of music with the fiddle, a venture that he readily admits was at times painful for all within earshot. After the initial trial with the fiddle, he set it aside and picked up the banjo followed by the guitar, piano, harmonica, Cajun accordion and bones, eventually revisiting the fiddle. (When I asked him if there were any other instruments he would like to learn, he just smiled a wide grin and shook his head, explaining that he thought he has enough on his plate for now.) He moved to upstate New York in 2007 and now makes his home in New York City.

Blind Boy's proficiency on a variety of traditional instruments, combined with a vocal quality that sounds like it was plucked right out of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, brings to mind the term "old soul" when looking for the perfect way to describe him and his music. During the shortest of conversations with Jerron, one gets the same impression – this young man's wisdom belies his age. When on the subject of the traditional music he's been drawn to throughout his life, be it ragtime, hokum, old-time, French reels, Appalachian mountain music or blues, he speaks of "music that wasn't meant to be sold" and "music that matches the earth." He's also drawn to traditional music from ethnicities across the globe – real music written and played by real people about real life experiences. And "real" he is! Jerron Paxton has played small clubs to major festivals all over the planet. When I asked about his venue preferences and his favorite thing about performing, he simply said it was the people that make it special. He did tell me that spending time and performing in Israel stands out as an intimately special experience for him, considering his Jewish roots. Once again, tradition bubbles to the surface.

Aside from touring and performing literally around the globe, some of Jerron's other credits include an appearance at the Leadbelly Fest at Carnegie Hall in early 2016 and the 2017 PBS musical documentary, *The American Epic Sessions*. He is also the Artistic Director for the Port Townsend Acoustic Blues Workshop in Port Townsend, WA. He has a fine record available as well, "Jerron Paxton – Recorded Music for Your Entertainment" and there are plenty of listening options out there, including a wonderful performance featured on the Beale Street Caravan podcast available on Spotify.

I walked away from the interview feeling I not only learned more about Jerron "Blind Boy" Paxton, but also about traditional American music and the people who live it and play it. And perhaps I even learned a little about myself... ~Charlie Barath



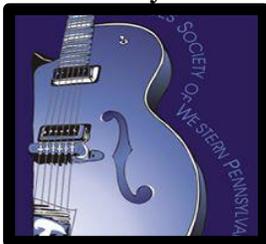


### **Cry No More Danielle Nicole Concord Records**

**Cry No More**, the Grammy nominated contemporary Blues album, is the most recent by Danielle Nicole, an accomplished Blues vocalist and bassist. With this album, Nicole showcases her range in vocals and depths of the Blues. With many seasoned artists featured on the album, including Kenny Wayne Shepherd, Walter Trout, Nick Schnebelen, Luther Dickinson, Sonny Landreth, and

Brandon Miller (Nicole's touring guitarist) the listener will be exposed to many different perspectives on the Blues and with producer Tony Braunagel on drums, Johnny Lee Schell on guitar, and Danielle Nicole on bass and vocals. Nine of the fourteen tracks are original, while some were co-written with Tony Braunagel, and there are a few covers of notable artists.

The album starts off with *Crawl*, a heavy rock infused track, featuring Nicole's Brother, Nick Schnebelen, on guitar. The track also showcases Nicole's vocal ability. Sonny Landreth is featured playing slide guitar on the emotionally charged blues and roots song, *I'm Going Home*. The Soul inspired *Hot Spell* is a previously unrecorded song given to Nicole by Soul legend Bill Withers during a recording session. Nicole's Funkesque bassline lays down the foundation for this soulful slow-jam. The fourth track, *Burnin' For You* opens with organ and Walter Trout on guitar sets up a Bluesy song full of strong drum beats and harmonies. *Cry No More*, the title track, begins with Mike Kelly Finnigan's playing organ and leads into a passionate song about moving on. *Bobby*, the only acoustic track, has some Folky Country tones and was written by Nicole for her late father. It offers a different medium than any of the other tracks on the album, featuring acoustic guitar and tambourine; and substituting pounding drums for quiet brushwork. *Save Me* spotlights Kenny Wayne Shepherd, in a Blues Rock charged tune. Shepherd adds his own twist to guitar on this song, through his signature licks and solos. *How Come U Don't Call Me Anymore* gives a new feel to the Prince original, substituting just piano for a full band with Nicole's vocal range highlighted on this track. The final track, *Lord I Just Can't Keep From Crying*, is an old Blues tune by Blind Willie Johnson, and features Luther Dickinson of Black Crowes fame. The swampy Blues song has hints of Gospel and includes classic guitar tones and slide guitar solos. In conclusion, the many styles and mediums used in this album deliver something for all Music Fans to enjoy. I would recommend checking this out to any Blues Fans looking for a new album to listen to. ~Pierce Dipner (2019 BSWPA's International Blues Youth Showcase Representative in Memphis, TN) ~*Added note*: At press time, Danielle Nichole's *Cry for Me* was nominated for the Best Contemporary Blues Album Grammy.



#### **Mark your calendars and follow the BSWPA to:**

- **Franklin Blues Fest, Franklin, PA....June 15, 16...to benefit music in the schools**
- **Pittsburgh Blues & Roots Fest, Cheswick, PA ...July 27, 28...to benefit Autism and Band Together Pittsburgh**



## **The Women in Blues...Choosing the cards that they are dealt! All amazing, all paving their way in the Blues world...their way!**

It was an early morning event when Marie Trout hosted The Women in Blues segment on the Legendary Rhythm and Blues Cruise. More amazing, it played out before a full house. The panel, Shemikia Copeland, Danielle Nichole, Eden Brent, Nellie Tyler Travis and Dawn Tyler Watson, waited for Marie Trout to shuffle her deck of questions to see what would be coming their way.

Marie Trout as narrator began by throwing the first Ace into the mix by stating that Mamie Smith was the first woman in Blues to 'break through' with her recording, "Crazy Blues". Mamie, defying the norm at the time, had exuded a power and strength that was an inspiration for all future blues women. Marie Trout further explained that Mamie was an amazing woman who suffered from abandonment and melancholy but had the ability to express the **joy** that music brought to her life. That JOY allowed Mamie Smith to 'connect' with her audience. That amazing Blues woman had a new style and inspired women to sing the blues in their own way with their own words.

*When the panel was asked who or what their inspiration had been...the responses included:*

Shemika Copeland said that she was missing her Dad (Johnny Copeland) on a regular basis. She had looked to Ruthie Brown and Koko Taylor for guidance. Shemika added that she was constantly competing with herself to better her craft. She added that she was second generation Blues. The Blues had been calling to her, quickly adding that the Blues runs through her blood. When she was nine years old, she saw her father on stage in Spain. She realized that he was a big deal. To her, he was Dad. On stage, he came to life. That moment has since been 'imprinted in her soul and mind'. Shemika said that in the beginning she was afraid to sing. She never wanted to sing but found that signing helped her to cope with the pain that came into her life and it helped her to cope. Laughing, the songstress said, "I save money on therapy. I let it out on stage." Marie Trout interjected, "While you are working through your issues, you allow your audience to work through their issues also." Marie added, "Blues connects people. There is an authenticity and honesty in the Blues community."

A smiling Eden Brent stated that her family had been sharecroppers in Mississippi. Her grandfather had packed up all their goods on mules and headed to new opportunities. She laughingly said, "When I came along, I was literally born with a silver spoon." Eden, suddenly serious, said that she had always wanted to be a musician. Her mentor was Boogaloo James. He had 'music in his hands'. Smiling, she said that it was a good education for her. Boogaloo had taught her to 'really play'. He had taught her to 'let go and just let music happen.'

Miss Nelle leaned in towards the crowd and stated that she sang on Quincy Jones' door step. Things were not easy for a country girl that had moved to Los Angeles to be close to the action and opportunities. As she wrestled with 'casting couch issues', her wise grandmother's words were always echoing in her mind... 'do not lose your morals and

you can always come back and sing in the church.' Koko Taylor had been her mentor while doing a six-year stint in Chicago and had been a second mother to her. Originally she had been highly involved in Top 40's and gospel. The Blues began calling to her. She soon realized that the blues and gospel were very close cousins. Nellie stated, 'I sang the wrong words with the Blues. My timing was off.' She knew that she had to learn to sing the Blues. Nellie claimed that it was a real process since it was foreign to what she had been doing. Once she 'got the hang of it' she began making music in a big heartfelt Blues way.

Canadian Dawn Tyler Watson took her turn. Her music appreciation was very different between her ties in Canada and the United States. Trained in England, she found it very different to write and sing music in Canada. She had to learn how to communicate in French and create energy on stage when she first entered the music front in Montreal. She earnestly declared that winning the 2017 International Blues Challenge was a journey. First England, then Canada, then the IBC's. She had been inspired by so many worldwide acts during that competition and was 'shocked' that her band was chosen as the winner. During her time in Europe, she found out how different Blues was there. The Europeans know about the Blues and its history. Excitedly she exclaimed... "*The Blues chose me!!!*" She had studied and sang R&B, jazz, soul compilations and music theory. She, as a woman, had needed help to learn to front a band. She explained that as a singer, the 'guys' did not think that she knew music. I knew 'how to speak the language of music knowledge' but had to learn how to implement that. I had known how ensembles had worked, having possessed a jazz background. I had to draw on my training and 'learn how to create a show'.

Danielle Nichole said that she played Bass in her siblings' band to keep the family band together. Reflecting on her beginnings on Bass, she laughed remembering what she had said to her brothers, "If it has strings, I can play it." Her early lessons were about walking that bass and remembering the fret board. I tried singing while playing. I had to learn as a singer and bass player that I had to 'Find my lane, keep straight, keep it in the pocket'. I was told to feel the notes of the Bass. I learned Bass by default, but I fell in love with playing bass. The Bass is the heartbeat of the band, the core and it is very necessary. When asked about Trampled Under Foot having run its course, Danielle said that she was on a new journey. Bands go through things together. They create bonds that carry them to new found strengths. Her new adventures will draw on those experiences to focus on the positive. She added that she has a new respect for focusing on the good. She is now working at finding a new path to determine what to do about that.

*Marie soon visited songwriting.*

Danielle, when asked about her new tenacity for songwriting, stated that each song tells a story. She now knows that she needs to collaborate at times outside of her circle to gain perspective and not be too detail oriented, losing the meaning of 'her story'. 10.

Dawn said that songwriting is a process that comes from down deep. She exclaimed that it felt good at times to express herself through her words in song.

*Marie Trout asked, "What are you doing to get young people to the Blues?"*

Nellie took the helm by talking about the doings at Columbia University. She elaborated about The Fernando Jones projects in Chicago. Shemika Copeland talked about Blues in the Schools. She said that young people need to hear words on social issues that interest them.

*Marie asked the group what makes women singers (from their experiences) better than the male singers.*

Shemekia said that you have to say "NO" when asked to work without your band. Say NO to working for less money than the guys. Say NO to compromising your songs. You cannot accept that you and your music can be devalued. Nellie said that women must learn to accept a lot while 'coming into your own'. She insisted that, 'While paying your dues, you learn to stand up for what you are and what you do'. Marie insisted that 'we' in the audience have to show up at shows to support these women, all women. Our moderator added, 'That is on US to create demand'.

*When asked about the challenge of women leading a band, the following resulted.*

Dawn commented that it is a challenge for a female to be a band leader. She believed that you take care of the band and nurture joy. You care about each other. You share and work as a unit. Nellie said that it was an art not to be bossy to command the band's attention. You must learn to get your point across and meld the band. Danielle added that the band leader has to be able to stand up and be able to say that the band is not playing their part right if that is what is needed. Laughingly, Danielle added that as a woman you need to tell a man what needs to be done, not 'momming' him by letting him know that you are not his mom but the one paying him. Shemekia shared that she has been blessed with men surrounding her that treat her like family and take care of her. She and her band insist on displaying respect.

It was an eye-opening morning. Lessons were learned. We had personal glimpses of the women behind the blues...acting as women, working as women, being women. Marie closed the talk by saying 'that all of the Blues women are strong, vocal and independent. They have given the Blues a Voice and us, a great experience!'. ~Jonnye



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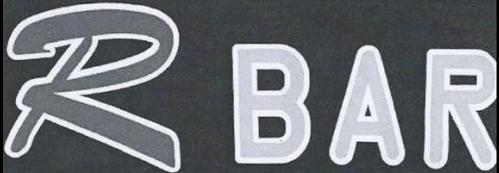
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