

Sports & Entertainment

New documentary explores “Bobby Rush: King of the Chitlin Circuit” thru an incredible life of blues legend

Fresh off his Oscar’s debut with a performance for the film *SINNERS* Alongside Miles Caton, Raphael Saadiq, Buddy Guy, Brittany Howard, and more

LOS ANGELES, March 23, 2026 – Mississippi Public Broadcasting and 72 Music Mgmt. announce the upcoming release of a new, captivating documentary film about music legend Bobby Rush, titled, **King of the Chitlin’ Circuit**. The film explores the legendary life of 92-year-old blues icon Bobby Rush and the relentless spirit that has fueled his 70 plus year career. The film is a deeply personal portrait of resilience and purpose—a journey through memory, music, and the road, spotlighting Rush’s striking stories of ambition, loss, and unyielding determination across seven decades. Even after filming the documentary covering 91 years of life, his career highs continued with participation on the hit film *SINNERS* and performing at the Academy Awards alongside **Raphael Saadiq, Miles Caton, Buddy Guy, Brittany Howard**, and more. Directed by **Ryan Coogler**, *SINNERS* made history at the 2026 Academy Awards by securing a record-breaking 16 nominations, the most ever for a single film. The film earned four Academy Awards including Best Original Score, Best Actor, Best Original Screenplay and Best Cinematography.

Directed by Al Warren and produced by Taiwo Gaynor, *King of the Chitlin’ Circuit* moves fluidly between the pulse of live shows and the dreamlike rhythm of life on tour, the film captures the highs and lows of a bluesman’s life on the road, from his electrifying performances to his late-night reflections and the quiet moments in between that reveal the man behind the music. “I wish I’d had the chance to do something like this when I was a young man, but it’s never too late to tell your story and express how you feel,” said Bobby Rush. “This film captures things about me that I might never have shared. My hope is that this becomes one of the greatest things that’s ever happened not just to me, but to any Black man in my position—and really, to anyone, Black or white, from Mississippi to Maine, who wants to tell their story.”

From Jim Crow and the Chitlin Circuit to the Blues Hall of Fame A Blues Hall of Famer with 3 Grammy Awards and 16 Blues Music Awards under his belt, Rush has been singing, playing, composing, and producing the blues since the early 1950s.

His infectious style incorporates elements of Mississippi Delta blues, funk, and southern soul, as well as a bawdy, comedic sense about blues tropes that consistently thrills audiences worldwide. From Jim Crow-era juke joints in the Deep South to Rush playing behind a curtain in Chicago to conceal his skin color, and his ascent performing with legendary blues artists and friends Muddy Waters, Howlin’ Wolf, Little Walter, and Jimmy Reed, Rush’s life is the stuff of American mythology, marked by incredible highs, heartbreaking lows, and powerful insights into the essence of life that will enrapture and inspire audiences for a long time to come.

“I grew up in Jackson, Mississippi where Bobby Rush moved through the air like weather,” said Director/Editor Al Warren. “I didn’t know his history yet, but I knew his face from the newspaper, his name from billboards, and the sense that a man with confidence like that could tilt a whole town a few degrees. Later I decided I wanted to follow Bobby and portray him as he is: an otherworldly talent, a world traveler, an artist forever in mo-



Legendary Bobby Rush (Photo: Courtesy: Mississippi Public Broadcasting and 72 Music Mgmt.)

tion. The film is a snapshot of his life and the spirit that keeps Bobby Rush in motion and refuses to dim.”

From Humble Beginnings to the Global Stage to the Oscars The film stars Bobby Rush telling the story of his life, shot over a two-year period. King of the Chitlin’ Circuit traces Rush’s life and blues journey, documenting his relentless regimen of nonstop performances, studio sessions, and personal interactions across the US and the world, which includes archival footage and photos of the bluesman’s electrifying and raucous performances, spanning a 70-year career.

Rush provides personal anecdotes and heartfelt reflections on his life—from birth in 1933 in Carquit/Homer, Louisiana and growing up on his family’s farm picking cotton and living in a rural home without electricity or indoor plumbing, then moving to Arkansas in the 1940s and on to Chicago in the early 1950s. Rush reminisces about playing his first shows in Little Rock with his first band, Bobby Rush and the Four Jivers, gigging in the blues scene in Chicago, and building a touring career through the juke joints on the Chitlin’ Circuit, largely in the South .

He released his first record in 1964 and began to establish an unparalleled reputation as an entertainer through nonstop touring, especially after his first radio hit “Chicken Heads” rose up the Billboard R&B chart in 1971. His recording career journeyed through a 45 for Checker/Chess, his first LP “Rush Hour” with the iconic Gamble & Huff of Philly Int’l, and on to his current home, Nashville’s Thirty Tigers. Rush has always been a prolific writer. He made a deal with Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff in the late 70s to become a staff writer and to write and record his first album. Aside from penning several big records for himself like “Chicken Heads”, “Bowlegged Woman, Knockneed Man”, “I Ain’t Studdin’ Ya”, and “Sue”, he has written and produced for a few others that have impacted blues history and pop culture. For the 70s group Southside Movement, he penned the song “I’ve Been Watching You” which was later sampled on major records by The Beastie Boys, Erykah Badu, Wyclef Jean, and Beck.

Based in Jackson, Mississippi since the early ‘80s, he kept a packed tour calendar playing 300 concerts a year along the Chitlin’ Circuit, a storied network of African American clubs that arose during the segregation era. In 2000 he earned his first Grammy nomination and soon after was featured in the PBS series “The Blues.” This began his commercial crossover. In his career, he has performed for President Bill Clinton and alongside music icons including, James Brown, Little Richard, Bonnie Raitt, B.B. King, and Buddy Guy.

The Blues docuseries directed by Martin Scorsese and produced by Clint Eastwood, featured Rush in the segment “The Road to Memphis” and aired for decades on PBS, cementing his position in the Blues even more.

This segment led to Rolling Stone Magazine crowning him the “King of the Chitlin’ Circuit.”

In 2014 he was featured in the documentary film “Take Me to the River” featuring Terrence Howard, Snoop Dogg, Mavis Staples, and others. Rush also played himself in Netflix’s 2019 hit biopic “Dolemite is My Name”, a film by Eddie Murphy that tells the story of Rudy Ray Moore making the film Dolemite.

His impact is as far-reaching as China where he became the first blues artist to perform at the Great Wall in 2007.

A few years ago, he penned a critically acclaimed autobiography, *I Ain’t Studdin’ Ya: My American Blues Story* (along with writer Herb Powell) and currently is the subject of a mu-

He released his first record in 1964 and began to establish an unparalleled reputation as an entertainer through nonstop touring, especially after his first radio hit “Chicken Heads” rose up the Billboard R&B chart in 1971. His recording career journeyed through a 45 for Checker/Chess, his first LP “Rush Hour” with the iconic Gamble & Huff of Philly Int’l, and on to his current home, Nashville’s Thirty Tigers.

sical in development called Slip-pin’ Through The Cracks with sights on Broadway.

Rush has toured in most major markets around the world, including Sydney, Australia; Paris, France; Tokyo, Japan; Shanghai, China; Johannesburg, South Africa; Berlin, Germany; Rome, Italy; Barcelona, Spain; Lucerne, Switzerland; New York, New York; Chicago, Illinois; Memphis, Tennessee; Los Angeles, California; to Jackson, Mississippi.

Most recently, Rush contributed music to *SINNERS*, the 2025 Southern gothic film directed by Ryan Coogler and starring Michael B. Jordan, where a 1930s Mississippi juke joint’s blues music attracts vampires, leading

to a supernatural showdown that blends Black folklore, Delta blues, and horror.

Rush’s performance on the “Sinners” soundtrack, which debuted at #1 on Billboard’s Soundtracks Chart features his trademark harmonica on the Little Walter song “Juke.” Rush also wrote and recorded a second song that appears in the film only, helped Ryan Coogler re-write one line of dialog, “that’s as funky as a Mississippi donkey,” which came from a previously released song of his, “Funk o’ de Funk” on his first Grammy winning album, Porcupine Meat (2016), and spent one day on set consulting the actor Delroy Lindo for his Oscar-nominated role of “Delta Slim”. Lindo commented, “He coached me through certain passages, right down to my hands, my body. And then when we shot the scene, Bobby was off camera, also coaching, and I was watching him out of the corner of my eye and hoping that nobody would see that I was doing that,” and “He gave me a pathway. Part of the process of interacting with a man like Bobby Rush, he was just talking to me about his life, which enhanced the experience and informed how I approached what I was doing.”

SINNERS went on to gross \$370M at the box office worldwide while earning 4 Oscar wins among a record breaking 16 nominations.

Steadfastly committed to the African American audiences and culture that sustained him for decades, Rush has become one of the most prominent advocates for the blues tradition, saying, “It’s the root of all music, it’s the mother of all music. If you don’t like the blues, you probably don’t like your mama.”

Rush was 91 when principal production for the film ended.

The film will air on Mississippi Public Broadcasting in August, with national distribution information to be announced this fall.

Producer Taiwo Gaynor said about Bobby Rush and the film, “One of the most impactful things Bobby shared with me during his first interview for the film was when asked, ‘what is the most important thing in life,’ Bobby took a few moments and said, ‘the most important thing in my life is to still have my memory. Not money or status, but memories’, because he knew, who you are is tied to your memories and the stories that live there.”

Director and Editor: Al Warren, Director of Photography (DP): Robby Piantanida, Producer: Taiwo Gaynor, Associate Producer: Jeff DeLia

Bobby Rush is repped by 72 Music Mgmt. and the Kurland Agency (for concerts).

Lon Haber & Co is handling PR.

