

MerleFest Remembers Richard Eddy Watson



Photo ©Jim Gavenus

Richard Eddy Watson, age 48, passed away June 1, 2015, at his home in Watauga County's Deep Gap community where he was born and raised. Richard was born July 20, 1966, the son of Geneva Sarah Greene Watson Hennessee and the late Eddy Merle Watson. He was an accomplished musician, playing the guitar in the blues style of his father, and performing often with his grandfather, the legendary Doc Watson.

"The entire MerleFest family was saddened to learn of the passing of Richard Watson," said Ted Hagaman, director of MerleFest. "Richard has been a fixture at MerleFest for many years, helping to carry on the Watson legacy. He was a talented musician, and he will be missed," Hagaman added.

Richard first performed at MerleFest in 1991. He continued performing with Doc Watson at MerleFest and various venues until Doc's death in 2012. Richard continued to perform at MerleFest up through this year's festival in April.

While growing up, Richard occasionally toured with Merle and Doc across the country and in Europe. His front-porch style of picking led to many great musical performances and a 1992 recording, "Feeling the Blues," which Richard dedicated to his father, and the Grammy-nominated "Third Generation Blues" album with Doc in 1999.

Talking about his grandson Richard, Doc once said, "I could retire, but my grandson Richard plays a good blues guitar. One of the most gratifying things that happened to me after Merle left is the fact that Merle's son Richard started playing the guitar."

When asked about his famous grandfather in an interview for the September 1999 issue of *Guitar Player*, Richard said, "I'm intimidated by him. He teaches me something new every time we sit down together."

Richard said about the festival named for Merle, "I'm just happy that MerleFest happened in memory of Dad. He'd be overwhelmed and find it hard to express how much he appreciated it. He would be surprised at how many people turn out for the festival and follow his music. I'm glad for all of my Dad's many friends and loved ones to gather together and enjoy the music." Richard always enjoyed seeing new artists at MerleFest, visiting with friends, and picking with the blues players.

Doc admired his grandson and wasn't shy about saying so. Doc said, "He has a job he has to hold down and a family to look after... but he loves the music with a passion. I'm proud of him for two reasons. He's got a wonderful personality, just like his dad had. He loves his family and he loves me and his mam'ma (RosaLee) awful good. The other reason is that he's a fine musician and he's finally got over stage fright. He has a lot of Merle's attributes."

The blossoming of Richard Watson into an artist as confident on stage as he was off was evidenced in his appearances at MerleFest. He became a formidable blues artist with all the modest and appreciative personal charm of his dad.