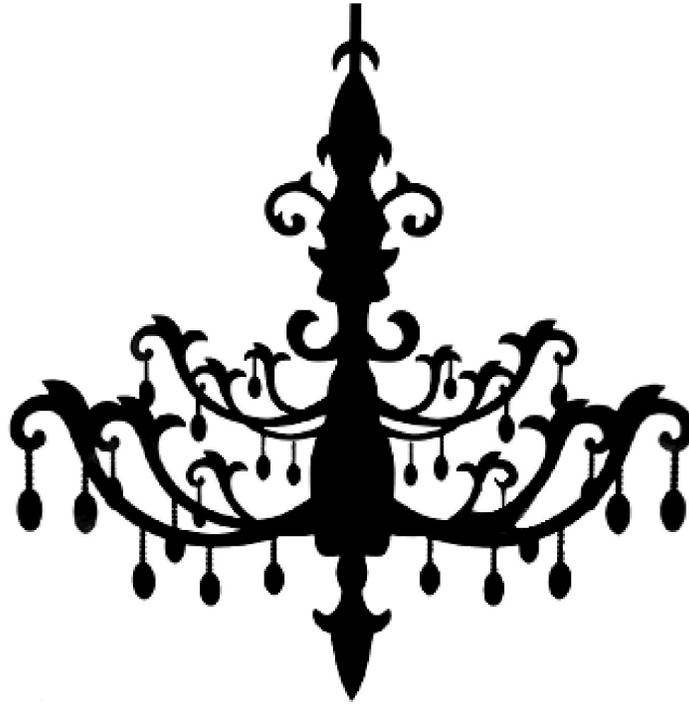


WALTER PARKS

swamp by chandelier

The soundtrack and stories of the most blissful place on earth



Guitarist and singer Walter Parks, the longtime sideman for Woodstock legend *Richie Havens* has created *Swamp By Chandelier* – a new solo tour that’s both a concert and a historical experience. Replete with storytelling, skillful guitar playing and soulfully operatic singing, *Swamp By Chandelier* is a presentation of Parks' own compositions interwoven with a few *Richie Havens* classics and an exciting reinterpretation of music that Parks researched in the Library of Congress Folklife Collection.

During the F.D.R. years, when Alan Lomax was recording blues in the Mississippi Delta, naturalist Francis Harper was recording the music and stories of the southeast Georgia swamper who lived in the Okefinokee before it was declared a national wildlife refuge. For this project, Parks has transcribed and modernized the swamp hollers – single voice melodies sung by hunters and farmers that signaled to family of a safe return home.

There’s an odd parallel between the Northeast Florida swamps and marshes where Parks grew up and New York City where he now lives. In both settings, a well-needed and reassuring tranquility is always there for those who seek beyond the ever-present danger. *Swamp by Chandelier*, is therefore a soundtrack to the swamp – a metaphor for everyday life, in celebration of beauty and edge living side-by-side.

Having left Jacksonville for New York City in 1989, Parks had hoped to leave his roots behind and make a name for himself on totally fresh terms by forming the popular cello/guitar duo *The Nudes*. In spite of best efforts, fellow musicians and audiences heard a swampy vibe in Walter’s playing, so in quest of a unique style to which every artist aspires, he eventually embraced what came naturally and founded *Swamp Cabbage* his current electric trio.

The Inspiration for *Swamp By Chandelier* – Walter Parks

“As a Boy Scout growing up in the Jacksonville, Florida area, I often camped on Billy’s Island in Georgia’s Okefinokee Swamp. Out there where no one currently lives, I recall seeing a modest graveyard, rusted machinery and railroad tracks that had surrendered to forest growth – all obviating that long ago certain people knew the swamp as more than a weekend camp-site. If people lived out there, I reasoned, they must have also made music out there.

I learned that the Georgia Crackers (a proudly accepted title) made three types of music – banjo/fiddle music, (sounding similar to Appalachian music), shaped note/sacred harp singing and hollers. Distinct from the country yodels of the Carolinas and Virginia, the Okefinokee holler melodies interested me the most as they had an operatic and almost jazz quality. Hollers were a musical way that a hunter would let his family know that he was returning safely home. Sometimes the holler would simply be used to drive cattle. In the *Library of Congress American Folklife Collection* I found tapes of such hollers that were recorded in the Okefinokee during the F.D.R. era.

Inspired and intrigued, I undertook transcribing the holler’s melodies that a father and his son had sung in 1944. Both Tom and Wade Chesser began exactly on a C note which I find fascinating assuming that there was no pitch pipe available in the middle of the woods. I felt a chill wondering if I was the first person to ever commit their vocal sounds to musical notation on paper. The beautiful sonic qualities of The Chesser hollers are quinessentially southern, symbolize the best of the part of the south that I call home and have inspired *Swamp By Chandelier* at its heart. Once charted, when I translated the Chesser melodies to guitar, I found them eerily similar to the guitar leads of Duane Allman who would come much later. For *Swamp By Chandelier* I have decided to not attempt to replicate the hollers. Rather I will reinterpret the original recordings, giving them new life, via my voice, my guitar and electronic ambient treatments.

As out of place as might be an elegant chandelier suspended in the rustic realm of the swamp one could say the same of human presence in it through the years. Initially a Seminole tribe homeland, the Okefinokee Swamp later served as refuge for escape slaves and white country-folk alike who wanted to make their own way outside of the plantation system. Sadly, “settlement” of the swamp would nearly be its ruin due to cypress logging and overhunting until 1937 when The Okefinokee National Wildlife Refuge was created. By 1958 all permanent residents had left, unable to protect livestock from natural predators. With stories and with music *Swamp By Chandelier* compares what was happening in the Okefinokee during the late 1700’s through the early 1900’s to what was happening throughout the entire country.

Swamp By Chandelier is a one-person show – me alone onstage with three electric guitars, three acoustics and a few amps. I travel with a few props – a chandelier or two and a cloth sculpture designed by *The Experience Collective* in Savannah, Georgia that represents spanish moss.

In addition to the reimagined swamp hollers, for this project I’ve composed two instrumental pieces that combine classical, blues, country and jazz elements in a unique way. To give the show lift I play some Swamp Cabbage up-tempo favorites and to honor *Richie Havens*, my former mentor and employer, I’ll share a few songs that we used to perform together.

In 1793 William Bartram described the swamp as “a most blissful spot on the earth”. Hopefully in 2016, *Swamp By Chandelier* will guide your imagination to see, hear and feel that this is still so.