

# Chasin' down a Hoodoo there

## Swamp-rock blues and beyond

By **BARRY GRAMLICH**  
STAFF WRITER

The Mississippi Delta comes to Elmwood Park on Saturday night, so go ahead, make your way through the cypress, roll on down the river, and wet a line for that catfish. The Papa Hoodoo Medicine Show was born on the bayou, and its co-founder, "Poor Bob" Sushko of Cliffside Park, is paddling the johnboat.

A student of blues origins in America and the west coast of Africa, Sushko bills his new project as "New Jersey's only swamp-jazz band." While the Papa Hoodoo sound is built on a foundation of Delta blues, it takes you on a jamming journey more along the lines of a Phish concert.

"We take the music way out," says Sushko, 42, who's been twangin' out the licks on his Fender Telecaster for almost 30 years. "Usually it leaves people with their mouths open. That's the satisfying thing." So fan away the vapor and tiptoe through the reeds to the Underpass. The Hoodoo lineup

boasts a bevy of accomplished musicians, with co-founder Danny "Doc" Lane (guitar), "Professor" Wes Jensen (electric percussion), "Capt. J." Roosa (keyboard, blues harp), and "Reverend Bill" Cristiani (bass). Cristiani recently played with Blues Traveler frontman John Popper, Roosa was a mainstay of Yasgur's Farm, and Lane gained prominence in the Grateful Dead tribute band Avalon Ballroom.

Sushko, who studied under King Crimson guitarist Robert Fripp, says it's discouraging when club owners turn up their noses when they learn Hoodoo's a blues band. "You're looking for gigs and you hear, 'Oh, no, Sushko says. 'But we're not [Eric] Clapton or Stevie Ray Vaughan. We even throw in some demented back-porch electric drumming that sounds like a sitar. Our core audience is 20 to 50 years old.'" Papa Hoodoo recently laid down some tracks at Bennett Studios in Englewood for an upcoming CD. One track, "Ode to Mountain",

is burgeoning swamp-rock with a nod to Lane's good friend, Leslie West of Mountain. Another, "King Solomon Hill," is Sushko's tribute to the legendary blues performer (born Joe Holmes, 1897-1949) from Louisiana who, according to folklore, played slide guitar with a cow bone. The title is a metaphor for a mountain, not the man, and it becomes "a place you go to be saved."



Papa Hoodoo's co-founder "Poor Bob" Sushko, far right, says the group takes the music "way out."

**WHO:** Papa Hoodoo Medicine Show.

**WHAT:** Delta blues.

**WHEN:** Saturday.

**WHERE:** The Underpass, 158 Market St., Elmwood Park. (201) 796-5060; theunderpass.com.

**HOW MUCH:** \$5.

"I've got a pretty good library at home that deals with all those voodoo African rhythms, but the blues is indeed a traditional American art form," Sushko says. "From Son House to Robert Johnson to Freddie King, you can hear them all in us." Sushko doesn't deny that the band wants to carry the torch for revered musicians who don't get their due. A part-time guitar teacher, he cringes when he sees his young students laying down rhythms on "electronic modules with a thousand different grooves" instead of finding real musicians to play the blues. "Maybe it's because there's no true musicians left," Sushko says. "There's too much technology, too many distractions.

For me, growing up was sitting on the back porch with a guitar and a pick. I didn't choose the guitar, it chose me. It's the only thing I know how to do. "Same with the rest of the guys in the band. We're all musically educated. We blast through the set list. There's a lot of knowledge going on when we're onstage."

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