

When delta blues ran into Georgian soul

JOHNNY Boy James is rallying against the rise of piped music and non-descript chain pubs.

The 21-year-old is on a mission to instigate music nights around North Kent and London in a bid to "bring some soul" to our pubs, cafes and clubs – and he's taking his guitar with him.

The guitarist, who runs a monthly roots night at The Ivy Leaf, Dartford, has his sights set on further venues, including one opening in Orpington this Sunday and another possibly in the pipeline for a cafe in Bexley Village.

Using the name B.B Slim's Chitlin' Club (a reference to the 19th century American clubs that welcomed black performers), the nights attract blues, folk, bluegrass and other roots performers.

"Our night at the Ivy Leaf in Dartford has gathered a really enthusiastic following, but I'm in the dark about the Orpington gig," said the musician known off stage as John Appleyard – an aspiring musician who works shifts at the Mick Jagger Centre.

"People have been coming because they know there'll be consistently good music."

The Ivy Leaf's acoustic night has been running since last summer, but young Johnny Boy is restless and wants BB's club to conquer venues further afield.

His new-found enthusiasm for promoting gigs comes on the back of his love-affair with roots music. With enviable starry-eyes, the fan of Ray Charles and Woody Guthrie reveals his aspiration to travel Europe with his guitar discovering back street German blues bars.

With idealism – or perhaps a promoter's expert hustle – he added: "I really want these nights to help local businesses, family-run places – to get punters

in for them and expose more people to live music. "I admit I hate places like Starbucks and JD Wetherspoons – they don't go in for things like that. They don't have any character."

Having spent the last five years polishing his blues scales on guitar, harmonica and banjo, the former North West Kent College student has been attending jam nights around London, and has now found a companion to perform with.

Ikem, a teaching assistant at Woolwich Polytechnic, provides a deep soulful voice to bring a gospel sound to Appleyard's traditional and delta blues playing – an interesting combination that they hope will catch an ear or two in Orpington.

The 20-year-old from Crayford has Nigerian Heritage, but is greatly influenced by his years growing up in New York, then later Georgia.

"We moved into the Bronx when I was a kid," he said. "It was different living there – it was weird because I was a really skinny, big-headed English kid. Everyone was really brash, like you see in films, so it was daunting, but a challenge. I didn't even understand what most people were saying half the time."

"From the day I moved to New York I got into the US culture, but my biggest musical influence over there came from church. My mother studied to be a minister there."

Hence, the trad blues/gospel crossover was born at a house party Johnny Boy crashed five years ago in Crayford. Though it's not only their music that provides a pleasant variance. Thanks to his time immersed in American culture-shock with his "classic over-achieving" mother, Ikem has an urbane confidence that contrasts notably with his partner's earnestness.

"At the moment I am trying to share my passion through these nights," said the guitarist. "But eventually my dream would be to have my own venue to help others." A true romantic to the last.

● **B.B Slim's Chitlin' Club next comes to The Ivy Leaf on January 27. For details, email chitlinclub@hotmail.co.uk.**

Jules Cooper



MIXING STYLES: Johnny Boy James and Ikem at Flavour of Morocco in Bexley Village. **Inset,** the promoter with his guitar, though he also plays banjo and the harmonica.

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Columbo embarks on career as shabby 'tec

CORONATION Street stars join the legendary Lieutenant Columbo on stage at The Orchard, Dartford

Brian Capron and Alexandra Boyd join Middle Ground Theatre Company's production of *Prescription: Murder*, featuring Lieutenant Columbo in his first-ever case, from February 15 to February 19.

The Flemming's marriage is in trouble. On returning from a late-night consultation, Doctor Flemming (Brian Capron) has to soothe his angry wife with the promise of a long overdue vacation.

When she is found dead, Columbo is brought in to investigate and the seeds of doubt are planted in his mind.

Capron is probably best known for his role as serial killer Richard Hillman in *Coro-*

nation Street, a role for which he won "Best Actor" at the British Soap Awards.

No stranger to Dartford, he has recently been seen on The Orchard stage in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* and *Stepping Out*.

Joined by Alexandra Boyd, best known for playing Clarissa Mason in *Coronation Street*, the Weatherfield pair will find themselves under the scrutiny of John Guerrasio's Lieutenant Columbo. Born and bred in Brooklyn, the original setting of Columbo's first-ever case, Guerrasio fits perfectly into the cast.

Tickets for *Prescription: Murder* start at £18.50 and can be booked from www.orchardtheatre.co.uk or by calling the ticket office on 01322 220000.