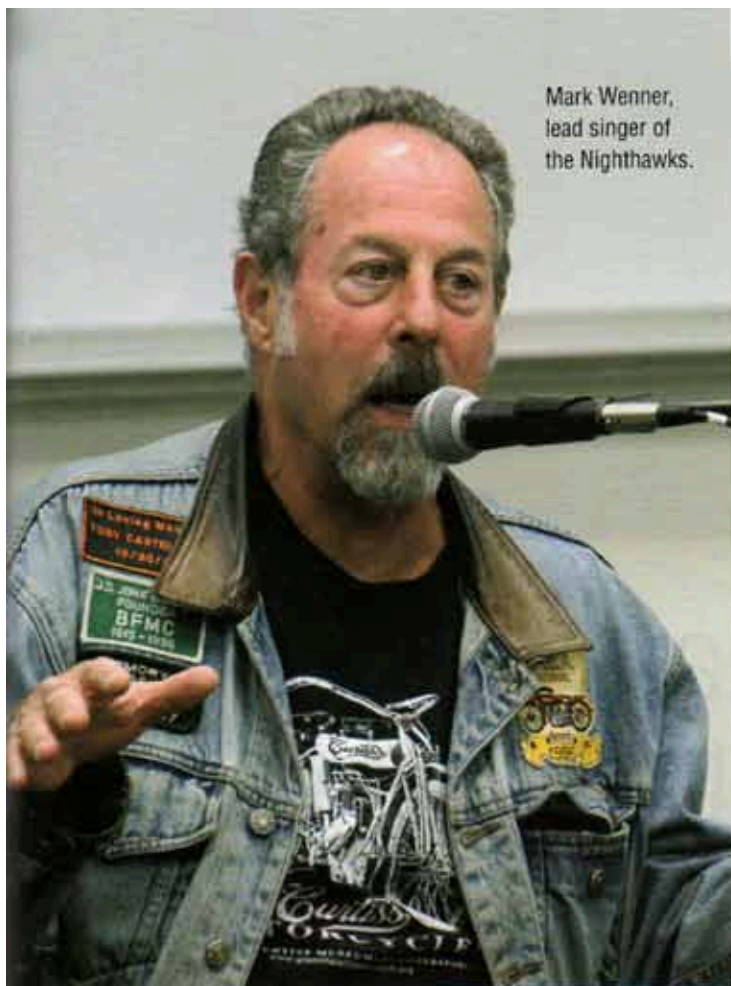


Mark Wenner,
lead singer of
the Nighthawks.



Playing the Blues

Musician Reflects on a Career in the Music Industry

A number of blues legends – including B.B. King, Lonnie Brooks and the late Muddy Waters – passed through Washington, D.C., in the 1970s and 1980s. But a quartet known as The Nighthawks was always there. Today the ensemble plays an estimated 200 shows per year in the nation's capital and around the country.

During a recent visit to Le Moyne, Mark Wenner, The Nighthawks founder, harpist and lead singer, offered insight into what has allowed the band to endure for nearly four decades. Persistence is the most important factor, he said, but The Nighthawks also have been buoyed by the fact they love what they do, learn from their mistakes and adapt to the times.

"I'm having more fun now, and I think I'm playing better," Wenner said. "In some ways I've spent all this time just to get to this point."

At the invitation of Professor of Communication and Film Studies Mike Streissguth, Wenner addressed the approximately 40 students enrolled in the music concentration within the new Department of Communication and Film Studies.

"He really gave them a direct lesson in the ups and downs of the music industry," Streissguth said. "I think the students learned that you can make a living in the music industry without having to inhabit the upper echelons of the business. You don't have to be Paul McCartney or Kenny Chesney to have a successful career in music."

As an undergraduate at Columbia University in the 1960s, Wenner initially planned a career as an author, and hoped to write the great American novel. However, there was something in music that called to him and that he found impossible to ignore. A classmate taught him to play the harmonica and music became his focus. After several years in New York, he returned to Washington and founded The Nighthawks in 1972. Since then the band, which has had very few personnel changes, has recorded 21 albums including *Still Wild*, *Rock this House* and *Side Pocket Shot*.

Wenner has witnessed changes in the music industry over the years. For instance, he said, now that artists have the ability to market and sell their work online, record labels aren't as integral to their success as they were in the past.

Some things remain the same, though. After nearly 40 years, Wenner still loves to perform.

"It's a rush. I'm addicted to it," he said. "I think I would go crazy if I didn't have a chance to do what I do."