

Little Toby Walker in New Haven

News-Times Staff

Little Toby Walker is literally a blues traveler. The artist, who will perform at First Presbyterian Church in New Haven tonight, has spent the majority of his days on the road "" whether honing his skills at an early age by traveling to meet musicians he admired, or touring to promote his own music.

"I always was, and continue to be, (filled with) wanderlust," he said in an interview last week.

Walker's love for traveling started at the age of 14 when he taught himself to play the guitar and discovered the works of such writers as Jack Kerouac, John Steinbeck, and traveling musicians like Woody Guthrie. "(They) further fueled my desire to combine music with traveling."

His passion to take to the road and perform eventually took Walker to the Mississippi Delta, Virginia, and the Carolinas, where he immersed himself in musicians' stories and their music.

"I started to make these trips"? where I located some of the old time musicians who were very generous and open about showing me their little tricks," he explained.

Walker's passion and dedication has truly paid off. The musician, who plays a variety of blues, ragtime, country and guitar roots music, is the

winner of Memphis' 2002 International Blues Challenge Award, and his tunes can be heard on the charts (notably on XM radio).

His current album is called "Just Rolled In," and like his others, it highlights his love for the guitar and traveling.

"The best thing about playing the guitar is the constant learning and teaching process," he explained.

Case in point: Walker gives back to an instrument that has given him so much by holding workshops at Hot Tuna's Jorma Kaukonen's Fur Peach Ranch in Ohio. He's also taught for Carnegie Hall's prestigious "American Roots" program, and maintains a private teaching practice in his northern Jersey home.

Walker said he's looking forward to his upcoming performance in New Haven like he does every performance he gives. "I'm actually always excited about doing a show no matter where I'm playing. I get more of a kick out of watching folks having a good time out of my performance than they probably do," he explained.

Walker said his show is highlighted by original songs, some covers, jokes, and naturally, a lot of storytelling. Summing up, Walker said, "When people ask me what I do for a living, I tell them I drive around the U.S. and England sightseeing and get to play the guitar at night."