

Reviews

Eric Johnson
Eric Johnson, guitar; Kyle Brock, bass; Tommy Taylor, drums.
Eastgate Live, Friday, Feb. 6

Austin's Eric Johnson has been highly acclaimed by many guitarists, including fellow Austinite Stevie Ray Vaughan, as one of the finest guitar players today.

Any doubts about such a claim were easily put to rest Friday night at Eastgate Live, as Johnson's musical virtuosity became quite apparent during his performance there.

A large crowd was on hand to greet this very talented musician. In fact, the line outside the door of the club had already begun to form by 7 p.m., an hour before the club opens. Once inside, it was

evident that the crowd size had passed the standing room only mark.

The music began around 9 p.m., with opening act Corrie Bergeron, a College Station singer and guitarist. Bergeron performed a 45-minute set of folk and rock songs, covering material by artists ranging from Bob Dylan to Pink Floyd. Bergeron's performance was well-received by the audience,

who applauded enthusiastically after each song. At some points, the performance turned into a sing-along, most notably on Bergeron's very inspired rendition of Don McLean's "American Pie."

Other highlights of Bergeron's performance included his versions of Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Proud Mary" and Pink Floyd's "Wish You Were Here."

When Johnson made it to the stage about 10 p.m. for the start of his show, the crowd went wild. The show opened with the instrumental "Souful Terrain," from Johnson's debut album "Tones." This opening song gave the crowd a good indication of what they could expect for the remainder of the evening: some of the most skillful, dynamic guitar, accompanied by solid backing from bassist Kyle Brock and drummer Tommy Taylor.

Johnson's guitar style is hard to pin down as any one thing. It is best described as fusion, a combination of jazz and rock. Johnson's sound, however, avoids the tediousness that characterizes much fusion.

"Trail of Tears" and "Emerald Eyes," also from Johnson's album, were brilliantly performed. All three musicians are remarkably talented, yet it is Johnson that shines the brightest. He is apparently a musical

perfectionist who strives to get everything right. Between songs, Johnson adjusted his amplifier and checked the tuning of his guitar, constantly striving for that "just right sound."

Johnson paid homage to one of his musical influences, Jimi Hendrix, with cover versions of "May This Be Love" and the classic "Manic Depression." The band's renditions of these two songs were nothing short of remarkable, and the original rock guitar master himself might have envied Johnson's six-string mastery.

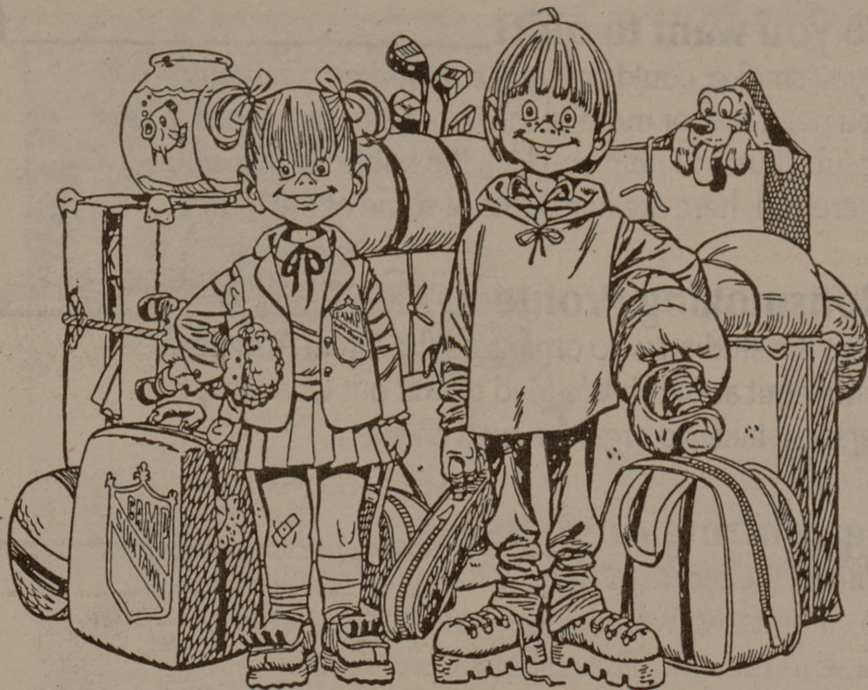
Johnson is a gifted vocalist as well, but his remarkable guitar skills often overshadow that fact. Songs like "Bristol Shore" and "Trail of Tears" featured great vocals as well fine musicianship.

After an hour of songs that included material from "Tones" and a fast-paced country instrumental, Johnson pulled out all stops with his instrumental "Zap," which was nominated for a Grammy award for best rock instrumental in 1986.

Johnson's fingers flew across his guitar's fretboard during a brilliant guitar solo that made "Zap" the highlight of an evening full of musical excellence that never let up for a moment.

Review by Shane Hall

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