

Musical reunion 'exploits' Warhol

Reed, Cale speak out in bare-knuckled tribute

Lou Reed/John Cale
Songs For Drella
Sire/Warner Bros.

By JOHN RIGHTER
Of The Battalion Staff

It's been almost twenty years since Lou Reed walked out of the Atlantic Recording Studio during the recording of the Velvet Underground's *Loaded*.

In the previous five years, Reed and company had created one of the most distinctive and original sounds on vinyl, leaving a legacy that would re-emerge in the music of the Cars, Jonathan Richman and the Modern Lovers, Talking Heads, Jesus and Mary Chain and countless others.

In the mid-60s, legendary artist and innovator Andy Warhol took Reed and his work under wing and packaged it into his famous mixed-media event, *Exploding Plastic Inevitable*.

One of Warhol's contributions to the Velvet Underground and the outfit's *Exploding Plastic Inevitable* was John Cale.

Cale, like Underground-diva Nico, was an Englishman, who interestingly, brought a contemporary-

classic approach to the fully-modern (and New York flavored) Velvet Underground.

Songs For Drella is Reed and Cale's reunion after a twenty-year layoff begun by Reed's boot of Cale from the Underground after *White Light, White Heat*.

The triangle of Reed, Cale and Warhol (Warhol only produced the first Underground album), and the influence (mostly indirect) that the trio has had on modern art is fully exploited within the biographical *Drella*.

Drella (a nickname of Warhol's — a combination of Dracula and Cinderella) is the story of Warhol's life (slightly fictionalized) put to words and music.

The mostly spoken-word album was originally a commissioned piece from the Brooklyn Academy of Music and The Arts that Reed and Cale performed in its entirety for the academy last year.

Drella, though a biographical piece on Warhol, is more accurately and completely an introspection on the lives of Reed, Cale and Warhol.

Reed's dialogue on addictions and creative insecurity cleanse his soul as purely as Warhol's. A man befallen to heroin, shotty releases and industry ostracization, Reed finally bounced back in 1989 with the remarkable *New York*.

Free of many hindering vices, Reed followed a string of hideous, shallow releases with a biting, intricate look at New York, the playground for his artistic wanderings.

Drella builds on *New York's* success, adding a more personal feel, reminiscent of Pink Floyd's *The Wall* or *Final Cut*. Cale, while allowing Reed to course the album's direction, beautifully supports the album's minimalist aura.

Reed and Cale are the album's lone performers, neglecting the traditional rhythm section of bass and

drums. Interchanging viola and keyboards with Reed's stinging guitar, Cale contrasts Reed's tough, New York prose with the civility of his classical, English upbringing.

Throughout *Drella*, the Underground roots are unmistakable. It was as much Cale's influence as Warhol's that distinguished the Underground's innovative beginnings through the group's collage of metal-grunge, shock-filled with distortion, with the group's dreamier, pastel songs.

It was also Cale who introduced poetry by chainsaw ("The Gift"), a contrast that solidified the spoken word in modern music.

In *Drella*, Reed plays the urban tough well, allowing Cale to smooth out his roughened edges.

For a performer so pathetically lost for most of the last 15 years, it is extremely satisfying to witness Reed follow the amazing *New York* with the equally strong *Drella*.

The fact that Cale contributes aura and spoken word to the bare-knuckle profaning of Reed, only strengthens an album artistically worthy as a tribute to Warhol. But then, it really is a tribute to Warhol, Reed and Cale.



Guitarist Eric Johnson jams to a near sell-out crowd at Club Farenheit Friday night.

Photo by Scott D. Weaver

Aspiring guitarists beware

Johnson's talent, depth overwhelms reviewer's dislike for his musical taste

Guitarist, band prepare for tour

By JOHN MABRY
Of The Battalion Staff

I do not like Eric Johnson's music. That's a statement that sounds like a forerunner to a sure-fire bad review of his Friday night show at Club Farenheit.

My personal taste in music, however, didn't affect my ability to appreciate Johnson's incredible musical talent, which he effortlessly displayed in a generous 16-song set that wowed both the audience and myself.

Let's get one thing straight before I continue: Eric Johnson can play the guitar. Well, so well, in fact, that any aspiring young guitarist will go home and throw his instrument in the trash after seeing his show. Is that clear enough?

Using his incredible "second voice," a Fender Stratocaster, Johnson kicked off the show at about 10:30 p.m. with a stunning guitar solo, which segued into "Friends," from his 1986 Grammy-nominated album, *Tones*.

The sheer volume of the two stacks of speakers may have been annoying to some, but it was apparent that the near-sellout crowd enjoyed every delicious decibel.

Johnson continued the show with "Trademark," a number off his second album, *Ah Via Musicom*, that was a more structured, pleasing song, and showed off Johnson's ability as a talented songwriter.

Johnson really got into the third number, "High Landrons," which included another guitar solo that left the audience speechless. Like the first number, "High Landrons" showcased Johnson's formidable ability as a vocalist as well as a hot-shot guitarist.

Johnson showed off his surprising versatility as an acoustic guitarist with "April, Come She Will," an old Simon and Garfunkel tune that was a nursery rhyme set to music. He continued the acoustic set with the beautifully introspective "Song for George."

Johnson's minimal backup, consisting of Kyle Brock on bass and the wonderfully animated Tommy Taylor on drums, provided the perfect support for Johnson's musical mastery.

Nevertheless, it was Johnson's show, from beginning to end, with only a short bass solo given to Brock on "Alpine."

Johnson began the first of two encores with the refreshingly different "Steve's Boogie," from *Ah Via Musicom*, a country-flavored, foot-stomping number with an infectious beat that kept the audience moving.

For those of you who know who Eddie Van Halen is, Eric Johnson is as good as that. No, seriously. If you don't believe me, then you haven't seen him.

Senior journalism major Patrick Hayes contributed to this story.

Austin guitar guru Eric Johnson and bandmates Tommy Taylor, drummer, and Kyle Brock, bassist, visited College Station Friday night at Club Farenheit to promote their latest album, *Ah Via Musicom*.

The album title means "by way of music communication," and, Eric says, is a change from his 1986 Grammy nominee, *Tones*.

"We're stepping out more on the new album, trying to get more of a live feel, but still retaining the polish of the studio," he said.

The new album is finding a home with music lovers all over the country.

Already it has sold more copies in a month than *Tones* did in two years, and it is quickly closing in on the *Billboard* Top 100 Chart.

With the success of the new album behind him, Johnson is preparing to tour all over the country, and a European tour is also in the works.

But Austin is obviously where Johnson feels at home. He has been a part of Austin's live-music scene for over ten years, performing at the Aquafest and as the first rock artist to perform on the city's popular country live-music program, "Austin City Limits."

• John Mabry

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