

Damn right we got the blues!

Buddy Guy

Mandel Hall

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Ethan Taylor Sellers

Voices Major Mojo Motif

Buddy Guy was introduced to the capacity crowd at Mandel Hall by the Major Activities Board's John Deligiannis as "a living legend" this past Saturday, a term usually applied by well-meaning admirers to artists who may be past their prime. Guy, turning 59 in July, is no relic. As his January 21 engagement here at the U of C assuredly demonstrated, he is a vital performer whose best work may still be in front of him.

From the moment he walked on stage and began with Robert Johnson's "Sweet Home Chicago," Guy held the crowd's full attention and devotion with effortless grace developed no doubt by decades of stage experience. His command of the audience was perhaps most convincingly demonstrated by his second, completely improvised song, which he played at so low a volume that the 60 cycle hum emanating from the speakers was clearly audible. So complete was the audience's attention to the performance that every note was audible.

During his two hour set, Buddy played a myriad of roles which included guitar hero, authoritative vocal interpreter, impressionist, blues lecturer, and vocal coach. The latter role came into play when Guy stopped the band, and said, "You're all students here right? Well, then, you have no business singing out of tune," later reassuring the adoring crowd that he was only joking.

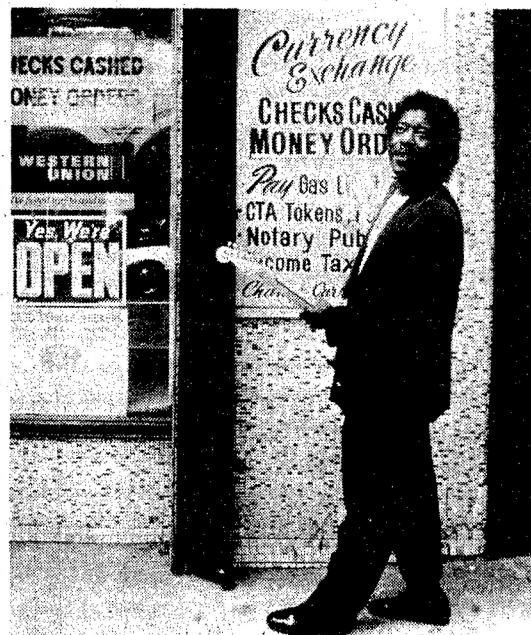
Guy's own vocals were nuanced and confident, and betrayed little, if any, trace

of the cold to which he fleetingly referred to towards the beginning of the set, asking the audience to "help" him sing. Throughout the set, he displayed uncanny vocal control as he moved effortlessly through several octaves with timbral variation that ranged from a whispered croon on his version of John Hiatt's "Feels Like Rain" to a full-on blues wail on Eddie Boyd's "Five Long Years."

The crowd met and surpassed his request for vocal "help" by singing along with virtually every song, including the title track from Guy's new album, *Slippin' In*. At one point in the show, a female audience member in the front row added her own bluesily sonorous line in response to Guy's own singing. Guy, displaying what appeared to have been shock at her vocal prowess, let out a pleasantly surprised, "Aw, shit!" to the audience's amusement.

Buddy Guy also substantiated his role as guitar hero as well, letting loose all manner of tasty leads from his black and white polka-dotted Strat. Ranging from tasteful fills to torrents of screaming notes, Guy's playing was the model of intelligent guitar heroism and never forgot to yield to the demands of the song.

A distinctive performer in his own right, Guy nevertheless offered up accurate and at times hilarious impressions of the playing and vocals of numerous other bluesmen, playing Howlin' Wolf's "Got



CAROLINE GREYSHOCK

Buddy Guy: living large.

My Mojo Workin'," Muddy Water's "Hoochie Coochie Man" and a reverently dedicated performance of Stevie Ray Vaughan's "Cold Shot," during which he took one of his legendary wireless guitar system—assisted walks through the crowded hall.

Particularly entertaining were Guy's rendition of Cream's "Strange Brew" and his ensuing anecdote about Clapton, which concluded with Guy affirming his respect and appreciation for Clapton's part in garnering a larger audience for the blues. This point was not lost on the Mandel Hall crowd, who applauded loudly, perhaps because Clapton's recordings represent many members of the Mandel Hall audience's introduction to the blues.

A generous, as well as virtuosic performer, Guy occasionally turned over the

spotlight to members of his supporting band, which he announced was not "the best band around, but the best band around 'til the best band come around." His supporting guitarist demonstrated his own vocal and guitar prowess during "I Just Play It Cool" and an fiery improvisation which I believe I overheard him announcing to the other band members was "in D."

Also engaging were a booty-shaking bass and drums duet and the remarkably charismatic drummer's solo shot. Admittedly, some blues purists would argue that such displays are inappropriate, but their level of musicianship was so invigorating that such concerns are trivial. Furthermore, it is precisely Buddy Guy's aversion to blues purist atavism which permits him to remain relevant long after some other artists have been relegated to the inquiries of musicologists.

Opening act Howard and the White Boys delivered a promising set of blues-funk with nods to Allman/Clapton/Hendrix-esque guitar heroism without slavish imitation, even interpolating quotes from "Purple Haze" and "Voodoo Chile" into instrumental sections, to the crowd's delight. Supported by a solid rhythm section, the two guitarists engaged in a duel which saw one guitarist pulling out the other's patch cord to the audience's amusement.

I must apologize if it appears that I have been gushing with praise throughout the article, but I can promise that an audience of several hundred will corroborate my account. Buddy was even heard to whisper to his manager while walking off stage, "I wish it could be like this every night!" The best way to sum up the evening is as follows: though I have learned a few things about music from books and classes, Saturday night was an education.