

STREET SCENE

Big Sugar celebrates latest album release



CHRISTINA FUOCO

Standing on a stage at Joe Louis Arena, Big Sugar players Gordie Johnson and Kelly Hoppe are starstruck. Johnson and pompadoured keyboardist Hoppe, both winners of natives, glance around at the championship flags hanging from the rafters.

They're even thrilled when they see part of the ice sticking out from a makeshift wood floor. Fashionably stylish with his Hugo Boss red sweater, dark pants and bright red cowboy boots, Johnson is one band member who feels at home in the Joe.

"Some of the crew are die-hard Maple Leafs fans but they're gonna just have to bite the bullet today because me and Kelly are so (in awe), walking around the place going, 'Oh, look at the picture of Gordie Howe,'" singer/guitarist Johnson said while picking at his guitar.

Big Sugar was in town April 17-19 to play during the "Made in Hockeytown Rally" at the Joe. The group, which also includes bassist Garry Lowe, returns to the arena Saturday, May 1, to celebrate the release of its latest album "Heated" at the Magic Bag in Ferndale.

"Heated" boils with rock and blues influences as well as '70s classic rock, reggae and psychedelia. Johnson, who produced "Heated," attributed the

variety to "hundreds of gigs a year and different personnel." "Different people have come through the band over the years and they all leave their influence. They all leave their mark," said Johnson, who has also produced Govt. Mule and Chris Duarte.

Toronto, the city in which he has lived for 10 years, has also had a hand in Big Sugar's music.

"Since I've been living in Toronto for 10 years, I really got into reggae music 'cause it's a really strong community there. It's the largest concentration of West Indians outside of Jamaica. That was just a natural resource that was just there waiting for me in Toronto. That brought a lot of reggae music into our sound, like working with Garry."

Music has been a lifelong aspiration for Johnson, 35. Growing up in Windsor, his musical preferences were Jimi Hendrix, Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath and Deep Purple. As he got older, he indulged in Miles Davis, Charlie Parker, John Lee Hooker, and acoustic blues.

"When I was 8 years old, I was telling my mom, 'Don't worry about that D on my report card. I know I'll never need mathematics 'cause I'm going to be a rock star.' Parents don't want to hear that when you're 8 years old," he said with a smile, stray hairs hanging over his right eye.

"They love it now. They see our videos on TV. They've got platinum records hanging on

their wall with their name on it. They're a little more understanding now. It's only taken them 20 years to convince them."

The real sign of success, he explained, appeared during a drive through Detroit.

"When I was a little kid I grew up listening to stations like the RIF (WEIF 101.1-FM), all the FM rock stations in Detroit, man, from the time I was 6, 7 years old. All of a sudden to hear our song on the RIF driving through Detroit is like, it's making me crazy."

Big Sugar and Keller Williams perform Saturday, May 1, Magic Bag, 2292 Woodward Ave., in Ferndale. Doors open at 8 p.m. for the 18 and older show. Tickets are \$8 in advance. For more information, call (248) 544-3030 or visit <http://www.themagicbag.com>.

Edge good-bye

DJs from WXDZ-FM (The Edge) are saying good-bye to listeners on Saturday, May 1, with a live Internet broadcast from the attic of former morning show host Spike. The former Edge radio personalities will spin on the net, via Real Audio at <http://www.radioedge.com>, from 8 p.m. to 2 a.m. Spike said they may slip in a few previously unheard "Edge Sessions." SV3 Media Group of Rochester Hills is donating its services for the event. A chat room will be set up for listeners to chat live with the DJs and each other.

Cyber news



Celebrating release: The rock band Big Sugar — from left, Kelly Hoppe, keyboard and sax, Garry Lowe, bass, Gordie Johnson, guitars and vocals — is having a CD release party in support of its latest album "Heated" (Capricorn) on Saturday, May 1, at the Magic Bag in Ferndale.

Amazon.com is offering free digital downloads of two new recordings from Sarah McLachlan's upcoming live album "Mirrored," due out on Arista/Netwerk June 15. Live versions of "Building a Mystery" and "I Will Remember You" may be downloaded from <http://www.amazon.com/sarah-exclusive>. Coal Chamber is taking time out from mixing its upcoming

Roadrunner release "Chamber Music" to chat with fans at 11 p.m. Thursday, April 29, via <http://www.sonienet.com/channels> or http://chat.yahoo.com. Coal Chamber is tentatively scheduled to play Detroit's State Theatre with ICP and Kool Keith on Friday, July 2.

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George Friend, Black Beauty live for the blues

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO
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Happiness slowly creeps across the face of blues guitarist George Friend. During an impromptu soundcheck between sets by Harbinger's Mile and Jill Jack at the Magic Bag, Friend keeps his head down, engulfed in the blues.

When the crowd rises to their feet as he and Black Beauty hit the stage, Friend looks up pleasantly surprised. When special guest Thornetta Davis confidently struts on stage, they go crazy.

"It was scary," Friend said enthusiastically. "After we finished that first song by Booker T and the MGs, everybody just jumped out of their seats. It was great. It's a rush."

That's pretty much the reaction every time Black Beauty plays. At the Lower Town Grill in Plymouth, fans hit the dance floor when Black Beauty plays songs off its debut CD "Senor Smoke."

Friend began writing the material a year ago and of the eight songs he penned, five made it on the CD.

"I was just starting to get used to writing songs. I had never really written that much before. It was scary to say the least. I started to get the hang of it and I started writing material for Thornetta too. I started to feel more comfortable with it," Friend explained.

At first, Friend was focusing on writing rockabilly and jump blues songs. When he eased up on his self-imposed limitations, the music kept coming.

"They (the songs) were all right, they just felt like I was trying to do something instead of just writing a song and letting it be what it is. That's why the CD was a little more varied. My influences definitely came through once I just let it flow."

The opening track "Beaten Down" has all the swagger of Keith Richards while surf owns the seductive "Gonna Do It." The eight minute and 11 second

title track winds its way through rock, blues and soul.

Holding the reins

Friend has "played all sorts of different kinds of music" since he was a child growing up in Marquette. Upon graduation in 1983, he moved to San Francisco for four years with his band Pedding, a "quirky kind of pop, new wave, like the Talking Heads and Devo. It was kind of a funny band."

In 1988 he returned to Michigan, this time settling in Detroit where he studied jazz at Wayne State University. Expanding his already vast musical resume, Friend booked up with Alex Trajano and formed the avant jazz act Blue Dog in 1988. Friend then spent time in Spunking Bone and the Sun Messengers before getting caught in the Twistin' Tarantulas' web.

For 1-1/2 years, Friend played with the Tarantulas. When he left the band, he looked to old friend Thornetta Davis, with

whom he had played in the Sun Messengers. Friend formed Black Beauty in early 1998.

"I formed this band to do a wider variety of music instead of just doing rockabilly or whatever we were doing, jump blues. I really had an interest in doing more Chicago blues and funk and different things," he said.

Davis plays select gigs with Black Beauty, which also includes bassist Jim Simonson of Detroit and drummer Todd Glass, formerly of the Twistin' Tarantulas, of Westland. In January, keyboardist Chris Codiah, who won Outstanding Blues Instrumentalist and Outstanding R&B/Urban/Funk Instrumentalist at the Detroit Music Awards April 23, joined the band.

There's a mutual admiration thing going on between Black Beauty and Davis, who is working on her sophomore effort. When she's not performing with Black Beauty, the band is backing her.

"She loves us," Friend said.

Davis was also on board for the Scandinavian tour Black Beauty did with rockabilly singer Robert Gordon.

"They're just nuts about rockabilly over there. We played in Helsinki for 1,200 people, and another small town in Finland with another 1,200 kids. There were kids there just 16 years old with giant pompadours and leather jackets. Every single kid was dressed up."

No matter what he's playing, Friend knows the blues is in his heart.

"I had always been listening

to a lot more blues records. I never played it a lot. I really enjoy the music. I feel like everything that I've played comes pretty much from there."

Black Beauty performs at 7 p.m. Friday-Saturday, April 30-May 1, at Fox and Hounds, 1560 Woodward Ave., Bloomfield Hills. The free show is all ages, call (248) 644-4900; 9 p.m. Friday, May 7, at Memphis Smoke, 100 S. Main St., Royal Oak. The 21 and older show is free, call (248) 543-4300. Black Beauty's Web site is <http://www.bkb-beauty.com>.

SEAN CONNERY CATHERINE ZETA-JONES

THE TRAP IS SET

ENTRAPMENT

STARTS FRIDAY!

AMC ABBEY 8	AMC ABBEY 10	AMC ABBEY 12
AMC ABBEY 14	AMC ABBEY 16	AMC ABBEY 18
AMC ABBEY 20	AMC ABBEY 22	AMC ABBEY 24
AMC ABBEY 26	AMC ABBEY 28	AMC ABBEY 30
AMC ABBEY 32	AMC ABBEY 34	AMC ABBEY 36
AMC ABBEY 38	AMC ABBEY 40	AMC ABBEY 42
AMC ABBEY 44	AMC ABBEY 46	AMC ABBEY 48
AMC ABBEY 50	AMC ABBEY 52	AMC ABBEY 54
AMC ABBEY 56	AMC ABBEY 58	AMC ABBEY 60
AMC ABBEY 62	AMC ABBEY 64	AMC ABBEY 66
AMC ABBEY 68	AMC ABBEY 70	AMC ABBEY 72
AMC ABBEY 74	AMC ABBEY 76	AMC ABBEY 78
AMC ABBEY 80	AMC ABBEY 82	AMC ABBEY 84
AMC ABBEY 86	AMC ABBEY 88	AMC ABBEY 90
AMC ABBEY 92	AMC ABBEY 94	AMC ABBEY 96
AMC ABBEY 98	AMC ABBEY 100	AMC ABBEY 102

"HIP, EDGY AND HOWLINGLY FUNNY!"

"HILARIOUS! SPADE IS ON FIRE WITH HIS RAZOR SHARP WIT."

"AMAZINGLY FUNNY."

David Spade
Sophie Marceau

Lost & Found

One of these dogs must be Spade.

PO-1 www.lostandfound.com

AMC ABBEY 8	AMC ABBEY 10	AMC ABBEY 12
AMC ABBEY 14	AMC ABBEY 16	AMC ABBEY 18
AMC ABBEY 20	AMC ABBEY 22	AMC ABBEY 24
AMC ABBEY 26	AMC ABBEY 28	AMC ABBEY 30
AMC ABBEY 32	AMC ABBEY 34	AMC ABBEY 36
AMC ABBEY 38	AMC ABBEY 40	AMC ABBEY 42
AMC ABBEY 44	AMC ABBEY 46	AMC ABBEY 48
AMC ABBEY 50	AMC ABBEY 52	AMC ABBEY 54
AMC ABBEY 56	AMC ABBEY 58	AMC ABBEY 60
AMC ABBEY 62	AMC ABBEY 64	AMC ABBEY 66
AMC ABBEY 68	AMC ABBEY 70	AMC ABBEY 72
AMC ABBEY 74	AMC ABBEY 76	AMC ABBEY 78
AMC ABBEY 80	AMC ABBEY 82	AMC ABBEY 84
AMC ABBEY 86	AMC ABBEY 88	AMC ABBEY 90
AMC ABBEY 92	AMC ABBEY 94	AMC ABBEY 96
AMC ABBEY 98	AMC ABBEY 100	AMC ABBEY 102

"A SICK AND TWISTED LAUGH RIOT!"

The comedy hit that's the funniest film of the season

IDLE HANDS

STARTS FRIDAY APRIL 30

AMC ABBEY 8	AMC ABBEY 10	AMC ABBEY 12
AMC ABBEY 14	AMC ABBEY 16	AMC ABBEY 18
AMC ABBEY 20	AMC ABBEY 22	AMC ABBEY 24
AMC ABBEY 26	AMC ABBEY 28	AMC ABBEY 30
AMC ABBEY 32	AMC ABBEY 34	AMC ABBEY 36
AMC ABBEY 38	AMC ABBEY 40	AMC ABBEY 42
AMC ABBEY 44	AMC ABBEY 46	AMC ABBEY 48
AMC ABBEY 50	AMC ABBEY 52	AMC ABBEY 54
AMC ABBEY 56	AMC ABBEY 58	AMC ABBEY 60
AMC ABBEY 62	AMC ABBEY 64	AMC ABBEY 66
AMC ABBEY 68	AMC ABBEY 70	AMC ABBEY 72
AMC ABBEY 74	AMC ABBEY 76	AMC ABBEY 78
AMC ABBEY 80	AMC ABBEY 82	AMC ABBEY 84
AMC ABBEY 86	AMC ABBEY 88	AMC ABBEY 90
AMC ABBEY 92	AMC ABBEY 94	AMC ABBEY 96
AMC ABBEY 98	AMC ABBEY 100	AMC ABBEY 102