

BUDDY GUY BLOWS RIVERWIND AWAY

Chicago bluesman shows why he's a Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Famer

By Doug Hill
For The Transcript

Buddy Guy's Legends is in downtown Chicago. It's a bar, restaurant and music venue owned by the famous bluesman and just blocks away from the Chess Records Studio preserved in the Willie Dixon Blues Heaven Foundation.

Guy was far from the Windy City where he still resides when he played a show at Norman's Riverwind Casino's Showplace Theatre last Friday. The energetic 83-year-old guitarist and vocalist delivered

a performance that would have been admirable for a master musician one third his age. It was obviously a matter of pride for Guy and that maybe key to his decades of success. The fact is worthy of exploration before detailing the Norman concert.

Born and raised by sharecroppers in Lettsworth, Louisiana, Guy picked cotton as a child but also taught himself to play a two-string diddley bow. He proudly memorialized that part of his life in "Thank Me Someday" (Jive Records, 2010) by telling his sister fed-up with the noise those words. "I kept my family up all night/ And now they're thanking me every day," Guy sings.

At age 21 Guy was part of the Great Migration.

After only a year in Chi he had a Cobra Records deal and made it onto Muddy Waters' radar. Guy played as a session guitarist for that luminary along with a dozen others in the Chess Records Studio on Michigan Avenue. A lot to be proud of already for a young man in a city full of talented musicians. Where Guy came from and how virtuosity propelled him into the upper echelons of the rock and blues music worlds are reflected in his albums of the last decade. "Living Proof" and "Born to Play Guitar" are a couple of those.

Eight Grammys, a 2003 National Medal of Arts, 23 W.C. Handy Awards and 2005's induction into the Rock n Roll Hall of Fame along with performing

for President Obama and First Lady Michelle render none of it boast. Possibly even greater than industry recognition is the absolute reverence that musicians such as B.B. King, Eric Clapton and Jeff Beck have shown for Guy over the years. Take a look at Guy's guest performance with the Rolling Stones doing Muddy Waters' "Champagne and Reefer" in Martin Scorsese's 2008 documentary "Shine a Light."

It's genuine affection on stage from Mick Jagger who is actually upstaged by Guy's potent vocals. Stroll into Buddy Guy's Legends, 700 S. Wabash Avenue and feel the pride. The joint is sparkling, the live local blues music is good even at noon and they're not just

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Blues master Buddy Guy performed in concert last Friday at Riverwind Casino.

Guy:

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going through the motions in that kitchen. The soul food served there is 100% legit. Undoubtedly the boss wouldn't stand for it being any other way. And that's the level of quality demonstrated at Riverwind.

Buddy Guy opened his show in Norman performing the title track from his 1991 album, "Damn Right, I've Got the Blues." He was backed by a keyboardist, drummer, bassist and guitarist. Guy was sole vocalist and played guitar on every number and sitar on one.

"Hello Oklahoma, did I play that too loud," he hollered to his audience. "I can play it so funky you can smell it."

Guy's animated performance was nothing

short of remarkable. Wearing a pair of custom embroidered overalls with "Buddy" stitched over the pocket, he was a lithe and commanding presence. Making reference to the stormy evening outside, Guy played his 1993 "Feels Like Rain." He often segued from song into spoken word about his childhood and career.

"I didn't know what running water was until I was 17," Guy intoned. "And nothing about no [expletive] Kentucky Fried Chicken. Mama sent me out in the yard to catch a chicken."

Twice Guy made tongue in cheek references for hip hop being to blame for

why he was profane. A few times the bluesman would encourage his audience to sing along and then alternately berate or praise the chorus. Guy gave a short history lesson.

"It was the Rolling Stones who got Howlin' Wolf and Muddy Waters on the Shindig TV show back in the 60s," he said. "None of them American producers knew who they were."

Guy jumped off the stage and strolled all the way to the back of the theater playing guitar along the way.

"You can hate me all you want," he sang. "But you can't stop me from loving you."

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