

## **From Blues in Britain Magazine: A Review of the Orkney Islands Blues Festival**

The Alaskan *Son Henry Band* deserved the standing ovation they received for a set which comprised sensational versions of *Hoochie Coochie Man*, *So Long*, *Sweet Thing*, *Glenn Highway Blues* and *My Babe*, the latter played at 100 mph with the tambourine almost flying off the hi-hat cymbal. Son Henry is the consummate front man, a show-off who uses anything he can lay his hands on, including ashtrays, to use as a slide for his guitar which he mainly plays laptop style like Jeff Healey. His rapport with the audience is superb, generating great banter which enhances the atmosphere.

## **Orkney Blues Festival September 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> 2005 Blues Matters Magazine**

Having been unable to catch the *Son Henry Band* at either Dundee or Arbroath Festivals (but with high expectations after hearing so much about his performances) I relished the chance to see him here on the Saturday afternoon. And he certainly lived up to his recommendations! Playing both electric slide and a lap slide guitar in various tunings, he and his band produced a lively and engaging set with some unusual twists (such as setting Houndog Taylor's "Give Me Back My Wig" over a Texas swampy groove, or utilising a glass ashtray as both head wear and slide!) Alaskan-born Henry did a sterling job for the crowd in Stromness, before heading to Kirkwall to open for Peter Green and the British Blues Allstars. I trust the glass in his car survived the excitement of that trip!

## **Son Henry Band, at the Blue Lamp, Aberdeen Blues Matters Magazine**

A Son Henry gig is a taste of Texas, a little bit of Alaska. Solo, he plays with an acute feel for the rhythms and anger of the delta, in turns subtle and ferocious, hollering and stomping in time with the eerie call of the bottleneck, on the strings of his beat-up '32 National. How does this translate to a three-piece electric band? It's a totally different, yet still completely authentic vibe: Roadhouse USA, coming to a town near you.

This is not a showcase for the next virtuoso wannabe; Son, Les Taylor and Mike Oxley are all business- a tight, accomplished, unassuming collective, dedicated to finding your particular blues itch- and scratching it. The set list is.....open to alteration! You like Chicago? How much and how old? Country blues? How stripped, how far south do you go? Maybe Rory or EC are more your thing? No problem, just a few seconds to decide on a key and agree the groove.....

No arguments, no pre-arranged extended solos, no formula- just three experienced musicians who make it look easy and sound great- astonishing, since this is only their fourth gig together.

Mike's bass has more than the usual number of strings, as befits a man with wide musical tastes. He handles funky reworkings of "Killing Floor" and "Reconsider Baby" with ease, even takes a modest solo, after a couple of hours. Les is from the Charlie Watts school of rock solid, understated drummers, except that he smiles a great deal more, usually at Son's latest change of mood.

Yeah, Mr. Henry defies categorisation. He's a lanky guy in snakeskin boots. When he's really into it, the glasses come flying off the end of his nose and the Strat disappears behind his head. He's a friendly communicator, laughs a lot, doesn't take himself too seriously, happily shares the spotlight with guest performers, like tonight's local harp hero, Spider McKenzie. 30 years of live performances guarantee an easy command of material as diverse as the audience might request. Tonight we had a little BB, some Muddy, some Sonny Boy, some Elmore..... Son sprinkles in material from his latest CD, "Glenn Highway Blues" every now and then - earthy slide shuffles, tender blues poems to his wife, stories about the life of a travelling bluesman in a cold northerly state, where the bears outnumber the people.

Of course, being this versatile comes at a cost. Son is a guitar junkie and Ebay is his connection! What better excuse could there be for acquiring and playing a handsome array of classic instruments ('the firewood collection'), than to play the widest possible selection of styles? Not just well-worn Fenders and Gibsons, mind- Son is that rarest of creatures, a Lap-Steel blues player. His National 'New Yorker'

adds the killer tones of a David Lindley but employed in an altogether darker manner than on those Jackson Browne records. "Bring it on home" and 'Hoochie-Coochie Man' with a California twist. Slide playing is a black art at the best of times; Son Henry tweaks your preconceptions, with good technique and feel, before changing pace again.....you liked that? Now try this! Texas twang? Sure. Minor keys from Memphis? Certainly. Scat vocals? Wait a moment.....

He's with us for a while- a couple of years, maybe. Don't miss the chance to soak up some genuine guitar blues, whichever kind you prefer- on CD, in solo concert but especially when he sets up for work with "all the toys" around him and a band worthy of the material. They'll be at the Arbroath Festival next weekend and in Orkney later this year; check <http://www.sonhenry.com> for details. Judging by the impact they made at the recent Dundee Blues Bonanza, I'd say one of these weekends should be an essential destination for the discerning music lover;-) Take your dancing shoes and don't expect an early night.

## **Anchorage Press, A roomful of blues**

It's tough to say when Son Henry's Fifth Annual Blues for My Brother concert peaked. It may have been when headliner Ottomatic Slim (Otto Lenz of Massachusetts) jumped off the Fourth Avenue Theater stage during his first solo and kept blowing on his harp amidst the crowded dance floor. Or maybe it was in the middle of Melissa Bledsoe Fisher's intricate electric piano solo during Big Robert Tyler's vocal set. Or when Blue Lisa Monroe brought her Texas accent to the words "you can have my husband, but please don't mess with my man."

The Friday, November 11, concert was a veritable blues summit in front of an appreciative audience and for a good cause. Son Henry (aka Karl Henry) has promoted Blues For My Brother for the benefit of Catholic Social Services' Brother Francis Shelter for five years now. In the words of emcee Mike McCormick, "you gotta be wicked, wicked good to this man" both for Henry's patronage and his musicianship. Henry returned for this year's show after spending the better part of 2005 traveling in South America and Europe. Recently he's been hosting a jam session at The Blue Lamp in his new home base of Aberdeen, Scotland.

Friday night's show might have peaked when Henry took a stool on the stage to play his lap guitar and sing "I'm a bad, bad boy." Or maybe it was when Henry traded licks with guitarist Stu Schulman during Tyler's performance of "Have You Ever Seen a One-Eyed Woman Cry?"...