

Rory Gallagher: the show....



photo by Dave Garrett

Fierce and aggressive on stage, Rory Gallagher is soft-spoken and friendly when not performing.

Feature by Dave Garrett

It was incredible! Rory Gallagher never ceased to amaze the audience right from his first number "Messing With The Kid" through to his second encore, "Walking on Hot Coals."

Throughout Saturday night's concert at the Fieldhouse Gallagher proved himself as a tremendously exciting and versatile performer. He is fierce and aggressive when rock and rolling his way through such tunes as "Laundromat" or "Bullfrog Blues." His blues and slide guitar work are both powerful and precise, and when armed with merely an acoustic guitar, he becomes intensely intimate with his audience. He never stops working for his audience, and he regularly and honestly thanks them for their appreciation. The

words, "Hope you enjoy it..." introduce many songs. Gallagher simply never seems to run out of energy.

"Messing With The Kid" set the standard for the show. Like all of the familiar Gallagher tunes it was played as well or better than in previous appearances. Everything was together; each note was executed with the confidence of talented and experienced musicians.

Rory Gallagher's basic roots are in blues, and a good portion of the concert was dedicated to some very fine blues playing. Gallagher's specialty in this field is slide guitar. He put it to full use, pulling every emotion and feeling from his instrument that the style is famed for.

Gallagher also knew just when to put the electric guitar

aside and do a couple of acoustic numbers. "Pistol Slappin' Blues" and "Too Much Alcohol" provided a timely change in tempo before returning to rock and roll and the build towards an outstanding climax.

The concert came to its close with the traditional Gallagher ending, "Bullfrog Blues." The rendition we received of this old standard was absolutely startling - it was high class rock and roll in every sense. Gallagher charged all

over the stage, brandishing his guitar like a machine gun. He and keyboardist Lou Martin played war with each other, Gallagher lunging across the piano at him; Martin retaliating by tipping the piano on edge and playing like a madman. It seemed it was never going to end until Gallagher, leaping through the air, brought the song to its incredible finish.

The band retreated quickly, leaving Gallagher alone onstage to wave and shake hands with his fans. He left to a

standing ovation from a crowd that had actually been on its feet since the first song. Finally, after several minutes of bedlam, the band returned to do two encores.

Not an exceptionally large crowd, (only about 2000) most seemed to be dedicated Rory Gallagher fans. Those that did attend his latest Accident production certainly received their money's worth; those that weren't there missed one of the best concerts in some time.

...and the man himself

Rory Gallagher rose to fame in Europe during the late sixties with a group known as Taste. When Taste disbanded in 1970 he went on to form his own band and is now breaking in on the North American market.

Harvey Borley and Chuck Gowing (of Accident Productions and Concert Assistance) helped set up a Gateway interview with Gallagher shortly after his Saturday night concert in the Fieldhouse. The wild and woolly guitarist of the stage turned out to be, back-stage, a friendly, soft-spoken individual. Dressed in jeans and a sweater, he was relaxing with friends and the rest of the band.

DG: Let's start at the beginning. What were some of your early influences, what music did you first listen to?

RORY: Well, let me see, Lonny Donegan, ever heard of him? He's skiffle king. He did "Does Your Chewing Gum Lose Its Flavor?", "Rock on the Line", all those old Woodie Guthrie type material. Ah, Lonny Donegan, Elvis Presley, Buddy Holly, Eddie Cochran, Gene Vincent, and then later on Muddy Waters, Jimmy Reed; all that conglomeration. I listened to everyone I could hear, so I don't have any one at influence. I still like all the old rockers. My favourite blues would be Leadbelly, Scuffle Blackwell, Blind Boy Fuller, Muddy Waters, Junior Wells. You know, I don't have any one idol that I could say, well, he's my model.

DG: A lot of the Southern blues artists then; that's basically where your blues roots come

from, is it?

RORY: My blues influence? Oh I would imagine so, that's where it developed; sure, that's where the influence comes from. But I kind of got to it back to front through rock and roll and through skiffle, but you gotta get to it some way.

DG: So you took the blues, rock, and skiffle and put it all together.

RORY: Ya, I took the blues, the blues would be the dominant influence though since the mid sixties. Before that I used to play rock and roll, which is still influencing me, but in terms of material and lyrically and so on, the blues eventually became the strong influence.

DG: Can we talk about your early bands? I understand the Fontanna Show band was your first professional band; you were about 15 when you joined that, weren't you?

RORY: Ya, I stayed in school till I was 17 or 18, but they were a professional band, and I sort of jumped in and out of school and pretended I was ill for weeks on end. I managed to blend both together, so that was my first semi-professional to professional band, the Fontanna. Before that I played with school groups and all odds and sods. After that I had a three piece group in Germany for a couple of weeks. Then Taste followed right after that. That's really it.

DG: When did you form the band you're playing with now?

RORY: Ah, let me see ... 1971. I did the first sort of album, on Polydor, recorded March and February of that year. Then I had Gerry McAvooy on bass, who's still with me, and Wilger Campbell, on drums. He left after about a year. Then Rod De'Ath joined in '72 with Lou Martin, keyboards, and they've been there, in the band since '72. So, it's been about three years going ... quite a long time.

DG: Are the other band members from Ireland as well?

RORY: Ya, except the drummer, the drummer's from Wales. So we're all Celts. (laughs)

DG: That old Fender guitar you have, you've been using it for some time now, I think. How long have you had it, and where did you get it?

RORY: I got it in Cork. It was about the second Fender guitar in Ireland. I got it second hand 'cause the guy that owned it wanted a red one like Hank Marvin of the Shadows. He had it for about six months, and then eventually he gave it up and I got it. I got it in about '63. I've had it ever since, it's about 12 years.

DG: Where do you draw your influences today? Who else do you listen to?

RORY: Ah, I wouldn't say I've any real influence nowadays; I mean I have inspirations and favorite artists. But most artists get to the point where they're not strongly influenced by anyone any more. I like John Hammond,

Little Feet, all the people, I still like Muddy Waters, Junior Wells, Tony Joe White, Martin Carthy, Burt Johns, lots of people. I'm still listening, you know.

DG: How do you see your band in the framework of things? Where do you see it going?

RORY: It's very hard to sort of see yourself within the whole spectrum. I don't know; we're just doing our thing and I can vaguely see where we are in it. All we're missing now is some real decent success in terms of records. We're had moderate success here, even more success in Europe with records. But I think the next album and we've got a new record label now as well ... and a combination of all these things. I think we will get that big album which should really put us on to a new level, which we will be glad to get to. We've had a strong following live, but we need a big album to make it concrete.

DG: Who are you recording on now?

RORY: Chrysalis.

DG: How do you go about doing your studio work? Do you write in the studio or write and rehearse it, then record, or what?

RORY: We write most of it and rehearse most of it, then do it in the studio. I'd say we rehearse and write most of it by about, well, on the latest album - which will be out in about two weeks - we rehearsed and wrote most of it; say 80 to 90 per cent. There's always one or two strays that come in at the last day. Most of it was done before we entered the studio, which is the best way to do it.

DG: What is the new album called?

RORY: It's called "Against the Grain".

DG: What are your feelings on the situation in Ireland now?

RORY: Ah... Oh God, what can I say? I mean, what way do you want me to answer? I mean naturally I want some kind of peaceful end to it all. I'd like a kind of united Ireland actually myself; most Irishmen would. I just hope it comes soon and peacefully, 'cause the way it's going on now is just getting ... getting bad. The obvious answer.

DG: You still live in Ireland; it's still considered home?

RORY: Oh ya. I live in London when I'm working. If I'm not working I go home. I always write all the songs over there as well. It's just sort of, well I don't know, I always get the inspiration there, and all the rest of it.

DG: Is there anything you'd like to say in closing?

RORY: Ah, I don't know ... I've run out of witty commentaries. I hope they pass their exams (everyone laughs). Ya, don't spend too much of your grants, and what? Be an example to your fellow countrymen (laughs).

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