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John Lee Hooker at the Moon

by Michael Brennan

Those blues fans who missed John Lee Hooker at the Misty Moon last week, missed not only a wonderful show but the presence of a great musician. The moment he sang the opening chorus one could feel the uncompromising intensity of his music. John Lee Hooker is his music. He lived the blues, he sang the blues, and he grew from the blues. More than merely a sound or a style, the blues for him is an honest expression of his experience. After hearing so many bland, powder-puff blues bands lately, the rough urban blues of John Lee Hooker was a delight.

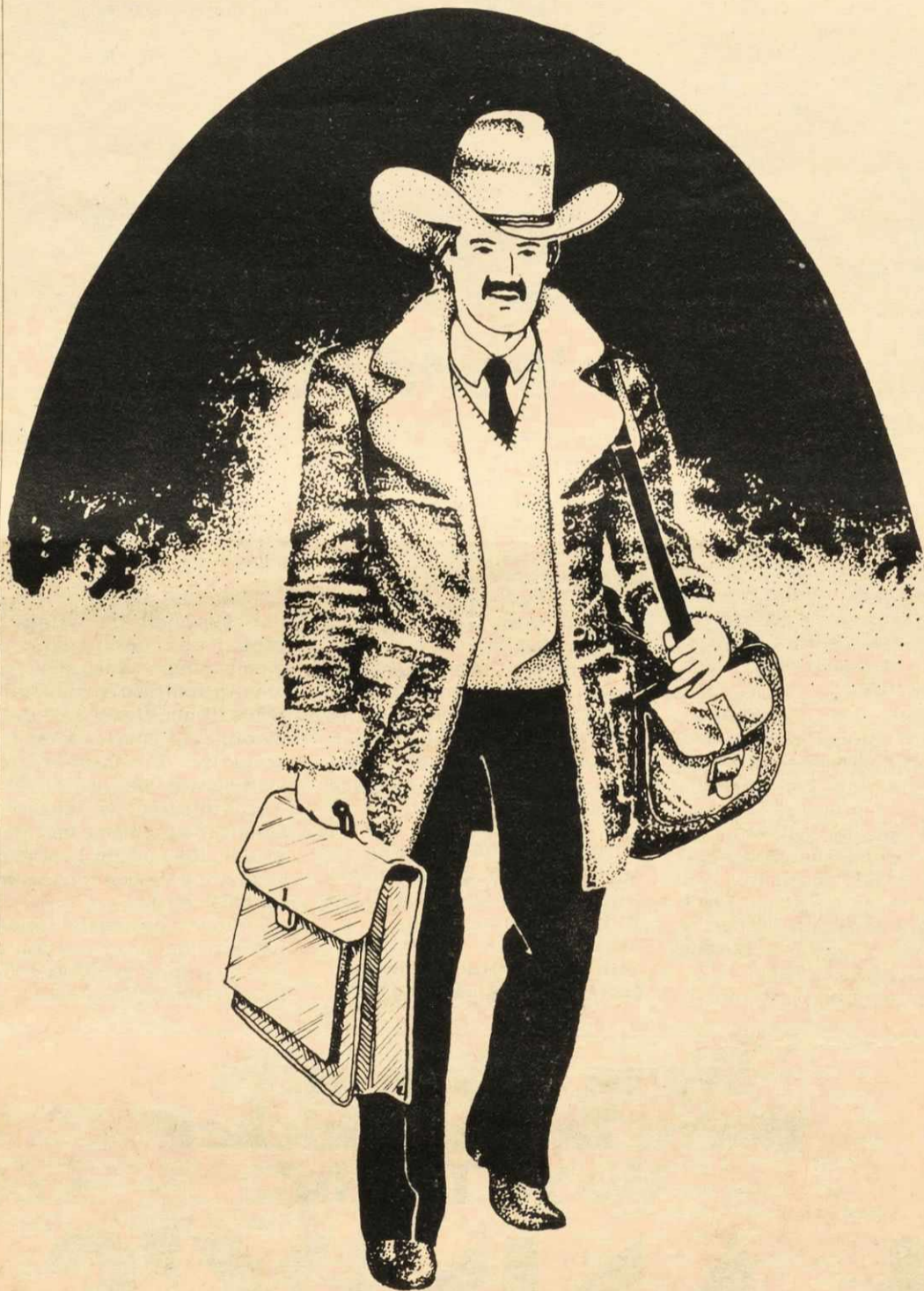
It seem superfluous to talk of being too old to rock'n'roll after witnessing the energy of Hooker, who is well into his fifties. He has been playing professionally since 1948 but not a bit of his spirit has withered. He will probably keep on rocking until he is seventy. It took him no time to find a groove. The first numbers moved slowly with a light country swing, but the rhythm was infectious and seductive. What was immediate was the ring of his guitar; clatters of notes played with a rap of his fingers. The sound clanged through the room with an amazing distinction. The way Hooker would lean with his guitar was really wonderful. Soon, he was swaying rigorously in his seat and pushing the band to its limit. With a slight nod of his head, he motioned which player to solo and the look Hooker would give meant that that player had to come up with something that moved.

The band (The Ellis Brothers with Joe Murphy) however, just

couldn't equal the power or sensibility of Hooker, though they certainly deserved credit because they hadn't played behind Hooker before and basically followed his lead. There's no question that they were pushed to perform at their very best, but they lacked the subtlety and edge of good blues musicians. Their sound was much too ordinary and unoriginal to really spark any inspiration in either Hooker or the audience. Still, it was adequate and they sustained a good steady rhythm.

The final number of the set was a roaring climax. It was a hot shuffle and Hooker's voice was screaming with jubilant emotion. The intensity of his face alone expressed the wholeness of his experience and understanding; the mystery of him, the seriousness of him, and the overwhelming vitality of him. There he was, looking like a black gangster out of the fifties - white hat, white tie, white shoes, and a dark pinstripe suit - and shaking like a kid. He took off his guitar, took the mike off the stand, and began strutting around like a chicken crying into the mike with all the force of his being: "Yeahhh, Boogie!...C'mon, Boogie...OOO let me hear that piano rain!...C'mon, rain piano!" He must have sent a jolt of pure excitement through everyone.

The blues for John Lee Hooker enable him to overcome much of the suffering portrayed in his songs and to express a sincere love of life. If he comes again, don't let the absurd seating arrangement at the Misty Moon turn you off. John Lee Hooker shouldn't be missed.



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INFORMATION MEETING

Weldon Law Building, Room 212

October 22, 7:30 p.m.

David Sogge, CUSO staff from Mozambique will speak and show slides of **Present Developments in Mozambique.**