

entertainment

HARVEST JAZZ AND BLUES '94

Big Sugar

by Mark Savoie

It boggles the mind and wilts the imagination to realise that the Social Club charged just \$5 to see Big Sugar in the ballroom last Friday night, while the Student Union charged \$12 to see the house band in the cafeteria last night. That's right; for just \$5, UNB students got to see a thoroughly explosive night of kickass blues.

When most of us think of the blues, we think of performers

like John Lee Hooker, BB King, and Muddy Waters. That ain't Big Sugar. You could hear elements of these legendary names in what they were doing, but the sheer sonic pace of Big Sugar leaves the legends far behind. Some purists may find themselves offended by this band, since Big Sugar's Mosh Pit Blues is such a radical departure from what you would have found at the Dutch Mason Tribute or with

Eddie Kirkland. However, as lead singer and lead guitar Gordie Johnson evinced, "I hope we're the future of the blues. I've got nothing but reverence for the earlier names, but I don't want to hear someone who sounds exactly like Muddy Waters every time."

Big Sugar is a Toronto based band composed of Gordie Johnson on vocals and lead, Garry Lowe on the bass, Kelly Hoppe on harp and sax, and Stich Wynston on drums. The observant among you may have noticed that Wynston was on campus for last year's Harvest Jazz and Blues Festival as a member of the Shuffle Demons.

The show started off with "I'm a Ram," a hit of their latest CD, *500 Pounds*. This tune set the tone for the evening, as the audience immediately responded to the devastating volume of the

band. From there the band kept up their aggressive assault on the audience's stamina, with even their more traditional bluesy numbers forcing the mosh pit to maintain a rapid pace for the full two hours.

Enough cannot be said about the guitar ability of Gordie Johnson. He cites Jimi Hendrix as one of his influences, and this becomes apparent as he starts playing his slide guitar with whatever was handy; things

like a beer bottle or a microphone stand.

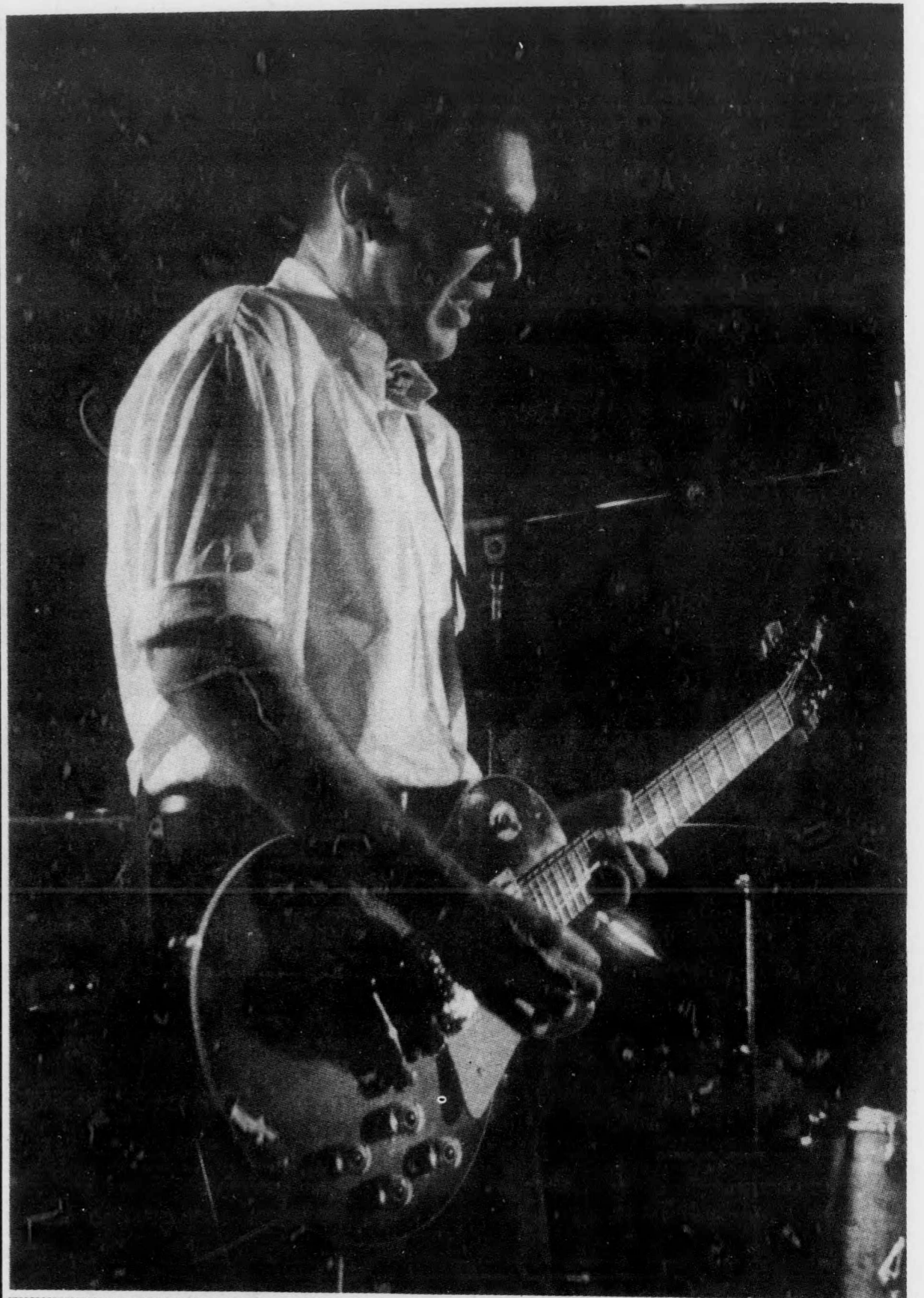
Equally impressive was the harp of Kelly Hoppe. Hoppe's age and coke bottle glasses make one wonder what he's doing in such a high adrenaline band, but all consideration of his age and appearance went out the window once he started wailing on his harp.

The crowd response was amazingly appreciative among the crowd in the ballroom.

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There was, however, a little bit of space unoccupied on the perimeters of the floor, making one wonder what in hell the crowd listening to dance music in the main body of the Social Club were waiting for.

The only complaint of the evening was the late start made by the band. The Festival program advertised the show as starting at 9:30. Instead, the band didn't begin playing until 11:45, with the doors to the ballroom opening just an hour before that. This disappointed and angered a noticeable portion of the crowd clustered near the stage. Every other performance I have attended during the festivals of the last two years have started at or about their advertised time, but not at the Social Club. It is, of course, good business to let as many people get as drunk as possible before the show starts, but it also demonstrates the Social Club's continued arrogant lack of respect for its clientele.



On Top: Big Sugar guitarist Gordie Johnson hammers out a riff **Bottom:** Thursday night Jam at the Exchange included Big Sugar and Roger Howse. *Paul Myzak photos.*