

Dutch no treat

By MARK PIESANEN

A Montreal music critic recently referred to the *Dutch Mason Blues Band* as, "a well-oiled Mack truck roaring down the blues highway." Intrigued by that image I sought out Dutch Mason as he took a detour last through and wheeled his band through a week's stand at the Middle Deck. To me, Dutch Mason seemed more like a tired old clunker coasting down a dead-end street. I felt ripped off by his performance; call it blues highway robbery.

The drummer spilled his drink on the mixing board and shorted out the sound system.

I arrived between sets and had to wait for over an hour before the band came on. They played two warm-up numbers while Dutch sat in the crowd, haranguing the band and harrasing the waitresses. Soon after Dutch began, the drummer spilled his drink on the mixing board and shorted out the sound system.

The audience was forced to listen to Dutch tell raunchy jokes until the P.A. dried out. Dutch only sang three songs before he took another break.

Throughout the entire set, band members walked off stage and disappeared into the crowd. Dutch, for instance, would bowl something into the microphone and then wander off the stage to get another drink. At one point Mason's harp player pulled up a chair and delivered the rest of his performance while sitting at nearby table. It seemed like the band would have preferred to sit and get well-oiled with the crowd rather than play music.

The band closed their second set with Bo Diddley, a two chord rock and roll standard that Dutch stretched out for twenty minutes. Don't get me wrong, I like that song. My roommate and I play it in our living room all the time but I expected more from the "King of Canadian Blues" than that too often covered number.

During this drawn out rendition, Dutch introduced a guest organ player. ("I'm gonna bring up a guy with a little organ. About the size of mine") Unfortunately he had not yet arrived. When he did show up it was discovered that none of his equipment had been set up.

After a painfully long and involved display of impromptu roadie technique, the newly arrived keyboard player jiggled a faulty extension cord which shorted out the entire lighting system. A veteran band member showed him how to position the cord properly so that it would not short. Meanwhile, the rest of the band kept pounding away at Bo Diddley's two chords.

"I dunno . . . maybe I'll take up another fuckin' instrument."

Dutch Mason, the gear-jammer who keeps this greasy blues freightliner rumbling along, has been plagued with psoriatic arthritis for the past year and is no longer able to play guitar. I asked Dutch about the consequences of his condition. "I dunno," he replied, "maybe I'll take up another fuckin' instrument, like the fuckin' organ or something."

During his gigs at the Middle Deck, Mason seemed preoccupied with his desire to experiment with new instruments. He snatched a harmonica from his harp player and began to bleat and squeak into the mike. He gave up shortly thereafter and passed both harp and mike to a drunken friend sitting in the front row, who by the way, is blessed with the ability to stick an entire harmonica in his mouth.

"Blues singers are around until they die."

Mason's voice is a deep growl that is custom made for the blues. When everything is working right, his band is a hot little unit. However, the sloppy manner in which the *Dutch Mason Blues Band* blundered through last month's gigs suggests that they haven't adjusted to the loss of Mason's guitar playing, or that Dutch himself isn't quite comfortable with his new role on stage. When asked whether he would consider other avenues, Dutch told me, "Can you see me wearing leather pants and singing rock and roll? There aren't many fifty year old rock and roll singers, but blues singers are around until they die." If Dutch Mason hopes to have an audience until then . . . i) he had better fucking well smarten up. ii) he had better start living up to his reputation and/or iii) he needs to attract new listeners. To do that Mason has to start delivering tighter, more impressive performances than those I witnessed last month.



"Can you see me wearing leather pants and singing rock and roll?" Photo by Elvis Rotten/DAL Photo

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