

MOJO RISING

Guitar Center crowns a new king of the blues at Guitarmageddon VII. By Chris Gill

IT WAS B.B. KING WHO once said that everybody gets the blues. While that may be true, not everyone can play the blues, and even fewer can play well enough to become a finalist at Guitar Center's Guitarmageddon King of the Blues contest. A lucky seven contestants survived knockout rounds at in-store, district and regional levels, beating thousands of contenders to secure a spot onstage at Chicago's House of Blues. There, on June 8, they competed for the coveted "King of the Blues" title and several cool prizes, including a 2006 Scion tC and a Gibson '59 Les Paul reissue, worth a total of \$47,500.

Although this was the first Guitarmageddon in the contest's seven-year history devoted to a single genre of music, the finalists made up a surprisingly diverse bunch that ranged in age from 16 to 53. Guitar Center made several improvements

to the final showdown, such as hiring an ace band, led by former Dwight Yoakam guitarist/producer Pete Anderson, to accompany the contestants and having the original king of the blues, B.B. King, perform a headline concert after the winner was announced.

"It was a great crop of players," said Anderson. "They all stretched beyond the parameters of basic blues and brought their own flavor. They walked out in front of all those people, plugged in and played their hearts out. That's ballsy."

Guitar Center selected an impressive lineup of judges as well, including legendary Howlin' Wolf/Muddy Waters guitarist Hubert Sumlin, the father-and-son blues guitar duo of Lonnie Brooks and Ronnie Brooks (who cannot book coinciding individual tours in Japan without serious confusion), Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee and former Traffic guitarist Dave

Mason, Cheap Trick guitarist Rick Nielsen and singer Marcy Levy (Shakespeare's Sister, co-writer of Clapton's "Lay Down Sally"). Alligator Records founder Bruce Iglauer contributed his impeccable talent-spotting skills, while Paul Green of School of Rock and Steve Pasek of Blues University added a scholarly perspective. Finally, there was me, representing *Guitar World* and the great unwashed.

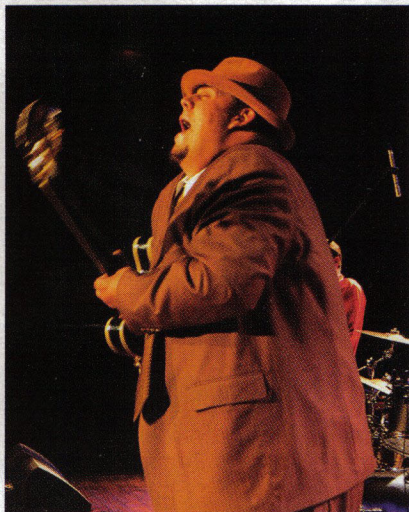
Each contestant was judged for originality, technique, style, stage presence and overall performance, with a maximum of 10 points for each category. The finalists performed first on electric guitar, with the accompaniment of the Pete Anderson Band, and then on acoustic guitar, solo.



ROBERT KNIGHT (ALL)



Opposite page: "King of the Blues" winner Matt O'Ree; (inset) John Mayer and B.B. King. This page: (clockwise from top left) O'Ree, Guitarageddon finalists, Steve Harper, Clinton Taylor Moon and Gino Matteo



The first contestant, Gino Matteo of La Habra, California, impressed in seconds with his huge tone and B.B.-worthy vibrato and note bends. Wearing a slick suit, this sharp-dressed man led the band through a swinging uptown blues performance, dropping to his knees to wrench every last drop of emotion from his Epiphone. While thankfully no Stevie Ray clones made it to the finals, Gregg Miller of Braintree, Massachusetts, evoked a bit of Stevie flair with his soul patch and some gritty playing that was as stirring as a Texas twister.

Next up were the youngest contestants of the group, 19-year-old Clinton Taylor Moon and 16-year-old Adrian DiMatteo. Both were extremely proficient players, technically, but like many other teen blues prodigies, they needed a little more of that elusive blues feeling and grit. "Once they've slept in the van a few years, they'll be unstoppable," said Anderson.

Local favorite Laith Al-Saadi of Ann Arbor, Michigan, brought along a healthy-sized group of supporters and was considered the best musician of the night by several judges. His performance evoked Danny Gatton and Buddy Guy at their best, but his rather stiff stage presence may have cost him the crown. Future contestants take note: even the most

esteemed blues guitarists employ a bit of shtick, whether it's playing guitar behind the head à la Stevie Ray Vaughan and T-Bone Walker, using a beer bottle to play slide like Danny Gatton or roaming through the audience like Buddy Guy. Loosen up, Laith (and don't diss the winner on your web site)!

Revealing the influence of Larry Carlton and Robben Ford, 53-year-old Steve Harper from Memphis, Tennessee, performed a sophisticated, jazzy style of blues. But just as Steve Martin commented that you can't sing

"They were all up there playing with heart and soul. That's the blues."

—Hubert Sumlin

a depressing song while playing a banjo, you can't truly play the blues while wearing a Hawaiian shirt.

Matt O'Ree, the final contestant, was the most rock-inspired player of the night, delivering a fiery performance that evoked his hero, Rory Gallagher. O'Ree got a leg up on the competition both figuratively, by being the only contestant to incorporate slide playing, and literally, by draping his left leg over the neck without missing a note. Drawing

enthusiastic applause from the audience, O'Ree also impressed the judges enough to sweep the "King of the Blues" title.

"I was impressed with everyone who made it to the final round," said O'Ree. "I learned a lot from the other players and how I could improve my own playing. I wanted to put on an entertaining show as well as pay tribute to all of the blues greats that influenced me. The greatest moment was being alone onstage playing acoustic. How many chances do you get to play to a packed house at the House of Blues and have the whole stage to yourself? At that point I knew it was all up to me if I wanted to win."

In addition to winning several cool prizes, O'Ree also earned the opportunity to record several tracks with Pete Anderson, which will be released on CD and sold at Guitar Center stores. He's also received offers from several well-known artist managers as well.

Guitar Center's Guitarageddon King of the Blues contest lived up to its promise of discovering the finest up-and-coming blues guitarists in America. Most of the contestants have released their own CDs, so if you're

looking out for new and original blues talent enter the contestants' names in Google and check them out.

"These guys were some beautiful musicians," said Hubert Sumlin, providing his stamp of blues approval. "If you love what you're doing, you can be the best if you want to. You can tell that these guys truly love the blues because they were all up there playing with heart and soul. That's the blues. That's what it's all about." ■

Get the inside scoop on what's happening this month in the guitar world!

NEW MUSIC

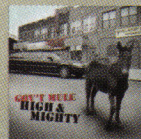
FOR THE FULL STORY ON THESE NEW RELEASES, VISIT GUITARWORLD.COM



From The Big Apple To The Big Easy: A Concert For New Orleans

(RHINO/WMG)

On August 22, 2006, Rhino Entertainment, in association with MSG Entertainment will release a double disc DVD of the landmark Katrina benefit concert, "From the Big Apple to the Big Easy: The Concert For New Orleans, which was held on September 20th, 2005 at Madison Square Garden to support the long-term relief and rebuilding efforts following Hurricane Katrina. As expected, all the net proceeds from this MSG Katrina concert DVD, soon to be released, will go to Katrina victims. The recording is a 2 disc DVD, priced at \$24.95; release date is Aug 22, 2006. www.fromthebigappletothebigeasy.com



Gov't Mule

High & Mighty

(ATO RECORDS)

Big riffs, massive grooves, and expansive improvisations are the hallmarks of Gov't Mule's legendary live shows. Likewise, their well-crafted songs feature larger-than-life characters bearing life's heaviest burdens. With their new ATO Records release *High & Mighty*, produced by guitarist Warren Haynes and Gordie Johnson (former leader of Canada's acclaimed Big Sugar), Gov't Mule effectively bridges the gaps between rock and improvisational music. Laced with influences from blues, folk, reggae, soul and jazz, *High & Mighty* has appeal for everyone, yet stubbornly refuses to be categorized. Most of all, *High & Mighty* is big, both in scope and in sound. Built upon the rock solid foundation of 12 original songs and clocking in at well over an hour, the disc boasts an urgent, in-your-face sound reminiscent of the band's thunderous live concerts. www.atorecords.com



Audioslave

Revelations

(SONYBMG)

Audioslave has announced a September 5th release date for *Revelations*, their highly anticipated new album. In a recent interview with *RollingStone.com*, Tom Morello described the record as "Led Zeppelin meets Earth, Wind and Fire," adding that it's a "big hard rock record with a funky bottom." Among the album's many highlights is the groove-driven lead single, "Original Fire," and "Wide Awake," about the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. "It's probably Audioslave's most political song to date," says Morello.

The band recorded *Revelations* at Henson Studios in Los Angeles with

acclaimed producer Brendan O'Brien. O'Brien, whose myriad credits include Pearl Jam and Bruce Spingsteen, mixed Audioslave's *Out of Exile* record and the *Live in Cuba* CD and DVD. The full track listing for *Revelations* is as follows: "Revelations," "One And The Same," "Sound of a Gun," "Until We Fall," "Original Fire," "Broken City," "Somedays," "Shape of Things To Come," "Jewel of the Summertime," "Wide Awake," "Nothing Left To Say But Goodbye" and "Moth." www.audioslave.com



Dream Theater

Score

(RHINO)

Dream Theater's latest live CD and DVD "SCORE" is scheduled for release on August 29th, 2006, on Rhino Records. The 3-CD and 2-DVD sets will be available separately. Both versions will contain the entire "20th Anniversary World Tour" grand finale recorded live at Radio City Music Hall in New York City on April 1st 2006, featuring nearly 3 hours of music - over 90 minutes of which was performed with a full orchestra. The DVD will also contain a 1 hour Documentary tracking the entire career of the band from their very beginnings at the Berklee College Of Music in 1985 all the way to the Radio City Music Hall grand finale. It also includes rare never before seen footage and interviews with current and previous members of the band. Also included on the DVD are several live Bonus Tracks from through the years taken from the Portnoy Archives. www.dreamtheater.net



Queensrÿche

Q2K

(RHINO/WMG)

Queensrÿche recorded its seventh studio album in 1999 during a time of uncertainty. Emotionally devastated by the departure of one of its founding guitarists, the Seattle-based, progressive-metal quintet was also reeling from the twin losses of its management group and record company. Despite the chaos, Queensrÿche returned stronger than ever with an album that marked a new beginning. Rhino Records revisits the band's triumph of will with the remastered and expanded version of *Q2K*. The re-released album contains remastered versions of all 11 original studio tracks and includes a pair of songs recorded during the *Q2K* sessions but never released - "Until There Was You" and "Howl." Also included are different versions of two albums tracks - the radio edit of "Breakdown" and a live version of "Sacred Ground" recorded during the *Q2K* tour. www.queensryche.com

EVENTS



Austin Summer NAMM

The music industry's annual summer convention hit Austin this past July, with

manufacturers exhibiting their goods and retailers and music fanatics lining up to see them. At night, downtown Austin came alive with a cornucopia of musical talent, courtesy of several manufacturers parties. At "Showdown At Stubbs," Tascam, Coffin Case, Subcult Clothing and Fernandes Guitars brought the Lonesome Spurs opening the night for roots rock freak Unknown Hinson who tore up the stage, followed by the Coffin Case fashion show, featuring the Coffin Girls modeling the latest in Coffin Gear.



The night wrapped up with a sublime performance by The Tennessee Three, featuring long-time members of Johnny Cash's band. Diamond Amplifiers, Guitar World and Dean Guitars also sponsored an event at the Red Eyed Fly with performances from Outworld (featuring Rusty Cooley), Salting Jobe, Aerael's Bane and Matt O'Ree. (photo by Steve Parnell).

