B.B. King shows Eugene he's still the King of the Blues



study in contrasts at a concert featuring the best and the worst of the blues — a double-bill with BB King and opening act, The Paul Delay Band. You should have been there,

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ecstasy was in command and on stage until midnight. When BB King and his orchestra finally strode on stage to a thunderous standing ovation,

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if only because of the sheer

power, drama and glistening

beauty of BB King's soulful

sound. If you went, you had to pay a high price for tickets and

then had to listen to the Delay

band for an eternity or so, but

after the intermission, blues

everyone agreed that their spellbinding music was well worth the wait.

After his band warmed up the crowd nearly to melting point, B.B. himself emerged in a column of fire and opened up with "Every Day I Have the Blues." He continued cooking with a jazzy instrumental, and then shazam, burst into a steamy siege of "I Believe to my Soul, I've got Some Outside Help I Don't Really Need."

Honestly, I threw away my pen and just shook with joy for the rest of the concert. I never thought that anyone, even B.B. himself, could surpass the dazzling genius of his 1972 recording of that song — the one with Red Callendar helping out B.B.'s incredible vocals with a hilarious and funky horn section featuring his bouncy tuba.

But Monday night, the Am-bassador of the Blues, fresh from a world-wide tour, proved me completely wrong. He created an extraordinary musical cyclone that breezed beyond the past into a fertile new soundscape of jazz-rockblues fusion.

MUS.I

The audience loved it. It was hard to keep the enthusiastic crowd off its feet and out of the aisles, whooping and calling out encouragement to the man on stage who, lord knows, doesn't need to be incited into sing the blues with feeling. He gulped Scotch whiskey, boogalooed around roaring and bellowing like an old bull walrus on the beach, then coaxed and caressed liquid amber

solos from his guitar, Lucille. He simply blue'em away. In fact, B.B. and his band blew up two of their amps in the course of the concert, with fiery riffs and solos, great ensemble playing, and amazing musical

majesty. Yet another dimension of King that the appreciative audience lapped up was his consummate skill as an actor and mime. He portrayed hurt women and bitter men - dripping with lust for revenge, drenched with sexual jealousy, damned for awakening on the wrong side of the bed.

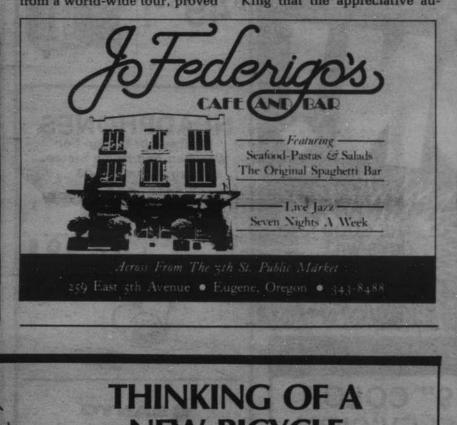
Since being born 59 years ago on a cotton plantation in Indianola, Mississippi, King has shown himself to be wide-open to all kinds of musical influences. As he says, "There's never been any type of music, including New Wave, where I don't hear something that I like and try to use in my music." His early idols included blues greats like Blind Lemon Jefferson, Lonnie Johnson, and T-Bone Walker. He was also crazy about jazz giants like Lester Young, Duke Ellington and Count Basie.

As King has said, "For us blacks, the blues is almost sacred - it's part of our culture and part of us."

The current lineup in the traveling King orchestra is very talented. Young Russell Jackson on rhythm guitar was fairly bursting with energy and mo-tion. A shy but sparkling Leon Warren got some ravishing riffs and licks in on bass and solo guitar. James Bolden was a bouncy round, blatty trumpeter with style. Eddie Synigal played a proud panther on the tenor saxophone. The solid professional polish of pianist Eugene Carrier on piano and organ, and drummer Charles Empre gave terrific excitement to the music.

From the beginning of the concert to the sizzling final encore "The Thrill Is Gone," B.B. and his band played about 20 numbers including raunchy versions of "Rock Me Baby" (with audience participation), and a delicious suspense-filled musical drama woven around the "Tombstone Blues," which featured some beautiful solo work.

I really was sorry when bedtime rolled around. As the incomparable King put it "When it all comes down, look for me and I'll still be around.'





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