MUSIC MIDTOWN 2001

We already know what sets Music Midtown apart from other big events in Atlanta. There’s the three-day lineup of live music from acts and stages of all calibers, of course. Then there are the crowds that push up against the security barricades and sometimes threaten to shake them to pieces. Don’t forget the heat, the dirt and dust, the food prices that sometimes make Marriott look like a bargain—or the beer. (It can’t officially be a festival until you have a small ocean of suds on hand, can it?)

Music Midtown 2001, held May 4 through May 6, sported all of these time-tested features and a few new goodies. One was a series of gospel- and blues-oriented shows inside the Atlanta Civic Center, with the Blind Boys of Alabama headlining on Sunday night. The Indigo Girls teamed up with Heart’s Ann Wilson, Darius Rucker of Hootie and the Blowfish, and Josh Joplin for a Saturday night acoustic show that was taped live for Turner South.

Another slightly new twist was the pot smoke that kept wafting around the site all weekend long. People could almost get high from just breathing normally; the ones that stayed more or less sober, though, found themselves confronted with quite a range of offerings to choose from.

Headlining artists on 99X stage run from lackluster to dynamite

Music Midtown on Saturday was a mixture of the many personalities that make up the Atlanta music scene. The evening sets at the Budweiser/99X stage were the Wallflowers, Train, and the Marvelous 3. While all three can be classified as alternative rock, they cover the spectrum from classic alternative (Wallflowers) to the newer morphing of alternative with more pop elements (Train).

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Train followed up with an incredible set. Stoker Patrick Monahan was the very antithesis of Dylan; he was charismatic and able to pass his enthusiasm along to the crowd. By the end of this show, they were fully into the music, singing along with whatever parts of the songs they knew. Many people were crowded-surfing, and the general mood was one of enjoyment. Industrial and Systems Engineering seniors Cornelia Herlong and Marshall Leslie commented that "Train was very cool" and even better than they had expected. The evening’s final set, by the Marvelous 3, was a perfect way to round out the night. Building on the crowd’s excitement from Train, the local boys wowed the crowd and proved themselves to be a band that is good on the radio but even better live. While the guitar of lead loulker, the superior performances of both Train and Marvelous 3 redeemed it and made those who had bought the one-day ticket feel that it was well worth the price.

Indigo Girls/Shawn Colvin/Ann Wilson/Josh Joplin/Darius Rucker<br>“Train was very cool and even better than they had expected.”

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Blues Traveler (5/4, 10:10 p.m.—Unite Georgia/Z93 Stage)

Point (Jennifer Hinkel)
Blues Traveler opened with improvisation that included a cover of “The Devil Went Down to Georgia.” After playing some of their new songs, the crowd discovered that one highlight of the performance was not onstage. Instead, they became rather amused at someone who had a festival pole fashioned with a top that was really a bong. One fellow, who clearly had a good buzz working, provided further distraction by climbing a parking lot lamppost to get a bird’s-eye view of the crowd scaled a light pole that stood nearly 80 feet high in order to catch a better view. He drew cheers from surrounding fans and a shoutout from Ray and Emily. Indigo Girls (5/6, 5:15 p.m.—Budweiser/99X Stage)

Counterpoint (Alan Back)
It’s very strange to see a huge stage, with a tower of speakers at either end, populated by only two women with acoustic guitars. Any act like this needs to have a lot of self-confidence in order not to seem completely out of place—and a dedicated fan base doesn’t hurt either. The Indigo Girls showed off their grasp of both during their Sunday afternoon set.

The show turned into a sing-along as soon as Emily Saliers and Ray Ray launched into the first bars of their opener, “Closer to Fine.” The show turned into a sing-along as soon as Emily Saliers and Ray Ray launched into the first bars of their opener, “Closer to Fine.” Audience participation was practically mandatory during the duo’s best-known songs, including “Shame on You,” “Kid Fears,” and the perennial favorite “Galaxies.”

Playing slow stuff at a festival like Music Midtown is a dicey prospect, but the crowd’s collective mind started to wander when Saliers and Ray shifted to low gear. One fellow, who clearly had a good buzz working, provided further distraction by climbing a parking lot lamppost to get a bird’s-eye view of the crowd. When the performers picked up the pace, as on the bubbly “Get Out the Map,” they easily demonstrated that they could turn heads back toward the stage whenever they wanted.

Josh Joplin Group (5/5, 2:55 p.m.—Budweiser/99X Stage)

People who were used to seeing Josh Joplin perform in some variation of his dress-shirts and glasses outfit got a surprise when he walked onstage in a jersey, shades, and bucket cap. This performance, his band’s first on the 99X main stage after several stints on the Locals Only bill, would prove unusual in other aspects as well.

Bad mixing nearly did in the five-piece lineup, the low end was cranked up enough to nearly cause an earthquake. Sincere, forlorn lyrics (“Gravity,” “Here I Am”) and sold-keyboard/guitar crunch (“Camera One,” “Undone”) had a hard time coexisting without getting into a tug-of-war. However, they began to sort themselves out after a few songs and were soon delivering the same punch as on the updated version of 1999’s Useful Music.

The death of Joey Ramone inspired Joplin to overhaul His /Phil Ochs/, his homage to the 1960s protest movement. After all, these were the guys who practically kick-started the jam scene in the late ’80s. Going on to the strains of the theme from Mission: Impossible, they jumped straight into “The Devil Went Down to Georgia.” The Kinchla brothers (Chan on guitar, Tad on bass) and harmonica man John Popper took turns standing in the violin-playing hero’s shoes and had a great fun doing so. Ben Wilson tuned the tremble register of his keyboard for every last bit of value and helped breathe new life into the band’s older material. He and drummer Brendan Hill teamed up to give the uptempo “Fe-licia” a Latin vibe and make the crowd really groove. Popper, meanwhile, took the opportunity to play more subdued, sparring harp lines instead of blowing everybody away with a barrage of notes. He did likewise on new songs such as “Back in the Day,” giving a hint of what to expect on the new album Bridge (see review, this issue). The faces may have changed, but Blues Traveler still has plenty of tricks up its collective sleeve.

If you’re on campus, join the ‘Nique!
(Student Services Building, Room 137)
If you’re off campus, read the ‘Nique!
(www.nique.net)

Gee Sea Island Singers (5/6, 2:30 p.m.—Turner South Stage)
Some acts strut and fret during their time slot at Music Midtown. Others, like the Sea Island Singers, do more with less and end up reaching a few lessons in the process. The seven-member extended family gave their audience a glimpse of how slaves lived and worked off the Atlantic coast before the Civil War. Nothing fancy here: just a line of singers with tambourines, wood blocks, and a lot of ground to cover in an hour. Frankie Sullivan Quimby acted as bandleader and teacher, weaving commentary on slave customs and culture through the songs and dances. Blues, spirituals, hymns, work songs—even the roots of R&B—grew from the plantations and took on a life of their own thanks to the Gullah language spoken on the Sea Islands. What developed on that stage was a history lesson of the sort that isn’t taught in class. (Alan Back)

By Kristi Odom / STUDENT PUBLICATIONS

Microphones and harmonicas in hand, John Popper leads Blues Traveler through a leaner, meaner set to close out the 293 stage lineup on May 4.

By Kristi Odom / STUDENT PUBLICATIONS

Photos by Rob Hill / STUDENT PUBLICATIONS

Frankie Sullivan Quimby (left) and the Sea Island Singers take the Civic Center audience back in time, showing how slaves used music in their lives.


For the uninitiated, this is known as a “sliver box.” We use it to fill leftover bits of space, and we can be quite silly while doing so. Pick up a copy of the Technique and see for yourself.