

MUSIC MIDTOWN 2001

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Read on...

...for reviews, recaps, and reflections on the three-day street party that hit Atlanta just after finals week last semester.

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.



By Mark Hill / TURNER SOUTH

The Indigo Girls take their turn in the spotlight during Saturday night's Turner South show, held in the Civic Center auditorium. Also pictured: host Kaedy Kiely from Z93 (blond, at left), Shawn Colvin, Josh Joplin, Ann Wilson.

Indigo Girls/Shawn Colvin/Ann Wilson/Josh Joplin/Darius Rucker (5/5, 8 p.m.—Turner South Stage)

With throw rugs laid down everywhere and a semicircle of chairs arranged around a large table, the stage in the Civic Center auditorium looked very much like an average coffeehouse. The only clues that something was different were the cameras hanging from overhead booms and the banks of spotlights set up across the back.

The two-hour live taping for Turner South found each of the five acts employing a different approach to dealing with the others. About the only thing they had in common was a degree of mutual respect that kept them from put-

ting their fingers into each other's songs. When one of them had the floor, everybody else sat back, shut up, and listened.

The newcomer of the bunch, Joplin fought back a case of the jitters and occasionally gave in to them, rambling during the introductions to some of his songs. However, he held his own admirably and even earned nods of approval from Colvin and the others with "I've Changed." Wilson took advantage of her time on the microphone to punch notes toward the balcony and prove that age had done little to slow her down since the heyday of Heart.

Quiet introspection and spare, open melodies were the norm when Colvin took charge and used the

Grammy-winning single "Sunny Came Home" as the centerpiece of her selections. Amy Ray and Emily Saliers switched from guitars to mandolin and banjo to provide a more intricate counterpoint, and they played their hometown-hero status for all it was worth—that is to say, quite a bit.

The night only went flat when Rucker started singing; the solo songs he trotted out were just as sappy and cloying as the Hootie hit "Let Her Cry," if not more so. Fortunately, the lulls were cut short by energetic finales from the other performers, especially the sing-along that began when the Indigo Girls launched into "Galileo" at the end of the night. Four out of five ain't bad for a show like this. (Alan Back)

Headlining artists on 99X stage run from lackluster to dynamite

By Karen Whitlatch
Campus Life Staff

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).

The performance by the Wallflowers was a rote presentation of their albums, without any personality.

Jakob Dylan seemed to be concentrating more on acting cool than pleasing the crowd. His repeated questions of "How are you, Atlanta?" fell on the deaf ears of a crowd that was more into getting drunk than hearing the music. The mass exodus for the concessions immediately following the last note of the band's last song was just further evidence that Dylan had failed to make any real connection with the

audience.

Fortunately, Train followed up with an incredible set. Singer 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 crowd-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 night'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 evening started off as lackluster, 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.

The Wallflowers got Saturday night off to a slow start, but Train and the Marvelous 3 picked up the slack.

Evan and Jaron (5/6, 2:30 p.m.—Budweiser/99X Stage)

The Evan and Jaron crowd, mostly screaming teenage girls, packed the area in front of the 99X stage. Dressed more like Beatles than pop stars, the Lowenstein brothers gave a great show, standing on the front edge of the stage and sang right into the eyes of the adolescent throng. Notably, they were the weekend's only performers who were named in *People* magazine's "50 Most Beautiful People" list.

Included were most of the songs from their latest album, including the upcoming single "From My Head to My Heart" and their best-known hit, "Crazy for This Girl." Afterward, they spent at least an hour signing autographs, where the line stretched hundreds long before the set had even begun. (Jennifer Hinkel)

Ben Harper (5/6, 3:45 p.m.—Budweiser/99X Stage)

Ben Harper was one of the most boring performers, as he sat far back on the stage and few could see him. Photographers resorted to climbing on each other's shoulders to snap pictures, although nothing very interesting happened as he just sat and played. (Jennifer Hinkel)



By Olivia Roller

With bassist Wesley Lupold, Jennifer Nettles kick-starts the 96 Rock stage on Saturday. She would later find herself swamped with autograph requests.

Jennifer Nettles Band (5/5, 1:10 p.m.—Jose Cuervo/96 Rock Stage)

You have to give Jennifer Nettles credit for being ambitious. She split from Soul Miner's Daughter two years ago to start a solo career, and she's spent that time making herself a fixture in clubs along the Atlantic seaboard. Saturday afternoon marked her Music Midtown debut, in which she handily disposed of her critics' main argument against her—that she favors melodramatics over genuine artistry.

Getting worked up is fine if you have a good reason, such as a desire to take said critics down a couple of pegs. Nettles said as much in "Listen," the opening song of her half-hour set, and consistently kept that

same energy close at hand, ready to cut it loose at any moment. She needed it, too, as she was seriously outgunned by the sound system most of the time. Even when she brought the full power of her voice to bear, she could barely make herself heard over the bottom-heavy mix.

The songs that best stood up to the festival treatment were those in which she had the most room to maneuver—the jazzy "At Stake" and the vocal/keyboard tidal wave of "Story of Your Bones." Everything else made one point abundantly clear: Nettles may have a few things to learn about working on a grand scale, but she'll become even more of a force to be reckoned with once she gets them down. (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 Z93 stage lineup on May 4.

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

Point (Jennifer Hinkel)

Blues Traveler opened with improvisation that led into 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. However, the Z93 stage was one of the most exciting ones as far as lighting and sound, and although it featured some bands with less name recognition than those on the 99X stage, it was continually crowded. In terms of crossing generations, Blues Traveler drew one of the most diverse crowds at the festival.

Counterpoint (Alan Back)

The isolated puffs of marijuana smoke that rose from the crowd on Friday night didn’t seem a bit out of place when Blues Traveler went on to close out the first day of Music

Midtown. 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 right 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 for the violin-playing hero and had great fun doing so.

Ben Wilson mined the treble 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 “Felicia” a Latin vibe and make the crowd really groove. Popper, meanwhile, took the opportunity to play more subdued, sparing 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.



Emily Saliers and Amy Ray trade their guitars for a banjo and mandolin during their Sunday-afternoon set on the 99X main stage. The hometown-girls-made-good pulled out plenty of old favorites in addition to newer songs.

Indigo Girls (5/6, 5:15 p.m.—Budweiser/99X Stage)

Point (Jennifer Hinkel)

Amy Ray and Emily Saliers, Atlanta’s own Indigo Girls, proved to be one of the weekend’s most popular acts. Although their set did not last long, they mixed well-known songs with just the right amount of new material. Their set opened with Saliers’ “Closer to Fine” and continued with classics such as “Chickenman” and one by local songwriter Gerard McHugh, “Thin Line.” They also included “Galileo” and “Virginia Woolf” in the set.

Offstage activities drew attention not only from the crowd but also the performers, as a lone fan towards the back of the teeming 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 Saliers.

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 Amy Ray launched into the first bars of their opener, “Closer to Fine.” Audience participation was practi-

Photos by Rob Hill / STUDENT PUBLICATIONS



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Georgia 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 teaching 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*)

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-shirt-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, forthright lyrics (“Gravity,” “Here I Am”) and solid 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 “Phil Ochs,” his homage to the 1960s protest



By Kristi Odom / STUDENT PUBLICATIONS

Josh Joplin goes casual for the Music Midtown crowd during his set on Saturday afternoon. The 2001 festival was his first main-stage appearance.

singer. To say that the resulting punk tribute was strange would be putting it mildly. “Fifty fans can’t be wrong, or can they?” he sang, while guitarist Deb Davis and drummer Eric Taylor slammed away behind him, and the crowd didn’t know

what to make of it. They *did* know what to do for pieces such as “I’ve Changed”—listen with their whole ears and brains. Time will tell if the band can make them do the same for every song played from a big stage. (*Alan Back*)



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.

BLAME...for this spread rests squarely on the following Student Publications people. Writers—Alan Back, Jennifer Hinkel, Karen Whitlatch. Photographers—Rob Hill, Kristi Odom. Layout—Alan Back.