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Sound Check

Ian Nathanson

Features and snapshots from the world of music — local, national and abroad.

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Linden strikes up Band



RENE JOHNSTON/TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Colin Linden plugs his latest effort, Southern Jumbo, at the Horseshoe on Saturday.

With its ragged vocal stylings, masterful guitar play and Memphis-meets-New Orleans horns, Colin Linden's just-released ninth solo effort Southern Jumbo might be construed as an homage to the Band circa early 1970s.

Then again, as the 44-year-old singer-songwriter-guitarist-producer puts it, "every time I write a song, play a lick or sing a note, it's an homage to the Band. They were always a huge influence on my work.

"Around 1987, though, I got to know some of those guys and worked with them. As my own style and confidence in writing songs began to develop, a lot of my own work became more pronounced because of working with (late bassist) Rick Danko, (singer-drummer) Levon Helm and Garth Hudson."

And while Linden's solo efforts When The Spirit Comes (1987) and South At Eight North At Nine (1992) featured collaborations with Band members, it was his co-write of Remy that scored the Band its first successful hit since the '70s. Equally satisfying was when Linden played alongside Hudson and Danko for a weekend gig in 1989, joined by former Band mate Robbie Robertson during an encore set.

Which explains that whenever Linden plays the Horseshoe, be it with supergroup Blackie and the Rodeo Kings or on his own - such as Saturday's gig to plug Southern Jumbo - the spirit of the Band tends to follow him. That has as much to do with the presence of keyboardist Richard Bell, another Band alum and former Full Tilt Boogie sideman, who's backed Linden for the past 12 years.

For a guy who, at age 11, had the pleasure of meeting blues legend Howlin' Wolf in a Toronto tavern, music is a prime

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motivator. Linden worked with T-Bone Burnett and musician and actor Chris Thomas King on the 2000 Coen brothers film *O Brother Where Art Thou?*; produces Bruce Cockburn and Colin James (the pair are back in the studio soon to follow up their successful collaboration on James' 1997 disc *National Steel*); and is a co-writer in *Blackie* along with Stephen Fearing and Tom Wilson.

What drives Linden? "There were so many years when I was in my 20s living in Toronto, wishing there was somebody who'd be interested in having me play on his or her records," Linden says. "Now when I get asked, I feel I gotta do it because such experiences may never come around again."

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