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RODEO RIDER

Colin Linden doesn't take solo trip alone

By BRENT RAYNOR

COLIN LINDEN at the Horseshoe (370 Queen West), Saturday (March 19).
\$12. 416-598-4753.

When I finally hook up with Colin Linden by phone, he's working his way through Toronto traffic, speaking a mile a minute as he tries to get dinner to his mom before it gets cold. He just got into town from his new base in Nashville, it's the middle of rush hour and -20° outside, but it would've been pointless to suggest that he could have had her meal delivered rather than going through the trouble himself.

It's this type of attitude that keeps Linden firmly grounded even when he's rubbing shoulders with the likes of T-Bone Burnett, Steve Cropper and the Coen brothers. Though he now spends most of his time stateside, Linden's remained a vital part of the T.O. music scene, playing dates with his rootsy supergroup Blackie & the Rodeo Kings, producing and showing younger artists the ropes.

"When I think of someone like Kathleen Edwards, it makes it real easy to feel that there's a sense of community here. The same things I believed in and went through 30 years ago are validated when I speak to artists like Kathleen, who is just now making her own imprint, and that makes it all worthwhile."

Ask him about Nashville and he'll offer an observation or two.

"The best thing about Nashville may be the weather, but being there has also allowed me to be a lot closer to people who are into the whole roots thing. The music scene's divided, with all the new country stuff going on, but it's amazing how many great artists and bands who totally blow me away play every night."

But he'd really rather turn the conversation to the T.O. scene.

"Even though I'm in Nashville now, I feel a deep connection to it."

This sense of community is very important to Linden, a child guitar prodigy who caught the eye of Howlin' Wolf in the 70s but by the 80s was finding it hard to get by in the face of the new wave.

"The 80s were a tough time for me. I was doing gigs at the Horseshoe and the El Mocambo, thinking things were great, but people were telling me I'd better learn to play synthesizer because nobody would be playing guitar in five years. But I'm thankful to them, because it really opened me up to things like collaborating with different artists, producing and doing session work. So really, it was a good experience. I'd much rather be part of the scene than part of the scenery."

His latest and best album, *Southern Jumbo* (True North), features some great brass courtesy of the Memphis Horns, and appearances by Lucinda Williams, Keb' Mo', Bruce Cockburn and Jane Siberry round out a stellar cast that features long-time cohorts Jim Dymond, Gary Craig and Richard Bell.

Jason Richards's review of Southern Jumbo in NOW said the album was great to play while "you get drunk on the porch with your old man or old lady," and I realize I'd had similar things to say about the last Blackie & the Rodeo Kings album. So I took Linden to task on his apparent ability to make people want to imbibe spirits whenever he picks up his six-string.

"When you think about it, all of the music that my material is rooted in was played for people who were drinking: blues, country, rock and folk. When you're drinking, you liberate your emotions, and it opens up something that is often the truest part of yourself. Whenever you make yourself vulnerable and open your heart to something, that's when the real music comes out." @

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