

Linden easin' back into spotlight

Erin Harde

Special to The Leader-Post

Thursday, February 16, 2006

COLIN LINDEN

(opening for Colin James)

Saturday

Casino Regina

- - -

If you haven't heard of Colin Linden, chances are you've heard a song he's written, own a record he's produced, or like a band he's performed with.



He has played on more than 150 albums, produced more than 30 CDs (Colin James, Bruce Cockburn, Tom Wilson) and toured with Down from the Mountain after his cover of the Skip James classic "Hard Time Killing Floor" was used in the film *O Brother Where Art Thou*.

CREDIT: Courtesy of Maple Records
Colin Linden will be at Casino Regina Saturday.

Now, as Linden promotes his latest CD, *Easin' Back to Tennessee*, while touring with Colin James, blues fans will have the chance to become better acquainted with Linden as he puts on his favourite big black hat and steps into the spotlight. Whether he's singing his own songs or backing up the headliner, Linden just loves to play.

"When I got to open the Down from the Mountain show with my band and then play as part of Down from the Mountain, for me that was hog heaven," says Linden, a Canadian export now living in Nashville.

Some of his most exciting moments in the business have been as "just one of the guys in the band."

"I've done shows with The Band in the '90s when they came back and I worked with them. Just having the emcee say 'Ladies and gentleman, The Band' and being able to walk out with them was pretty much a thrill to me," he says.

Linden, 46, has loved and played '20s-style acoustic blues since he was a kid. He counts Charlie Patton, Son House and Robert Johnson among his influences, and as an 11-year-old, he met blues legend Howlin' Wolf. So it was with great consideration and respect that he selected the songs of his heroes to play on the new album.

"First and foremost, because these songs are written by people I admire the most and love the most, I wanted to do something that brought a little bit of honour to the originals," says Linden.

"I didn't want to cheapen them or do anything to them in a haphazard way, but

I also wanted to put a little something of myself in them and make it so it wasn't just parroting the original records."

As a teenager, Linden worked tirelessly to learn every note in those songs, but was never comfortable or confident enough to record them -- until now.

On the album, he includes obscure old songs from Blind Willie McTell, Bo Carter, Sleepy John Estes, and House, among others.

Linden knows that just covering a song isn't enough to pay homage to its creator. "If you're not adding anything, even if you do your very best, it's not as good as the original," he says.

While Easin' Back to Tennessee plays like a history lesson in the blues, it also covers Linden's entire career from his oldest original song to his newest.

"Nowhere to Go" made its way onto the first Big Sugar album, but for Linden it never felt right on one of his own records.

"I have played it for the last 26 years and I play it different every single night. I tried recording it a couple times, but it didn't feel like it fit; but on this one it did," he says.

Linden wrote his newest song, "A True Friend Won't Let You Drown," the day before he recorded it. The song is about a friend of Linden's who was left with nothing after Hurricane Katrina.

Like The Band and Neil Young, Linden is a master of Americana roots, as much as any roots musician from the States. He says it's because many artists are bound by the music of their region, but as a Canadian he can include influences from all over the U.S. and merge them together for an original sound.

"Sometimes when you're from someplace else, you can almost have a more romantic vision of what that place is like; you can see something that, to local people, might be sort of normal, but to you it's cool and interesting," he says.

While Linden picks up different styles from around the U.S., one American has picked up on Linden. His side project Blackie and the Rodeo Kings has found rotation on President George W. Bush's iPod.

"This has nothing to do with how I feel about him as a president or human being, but when it happened, a lot of people asked me a lot of questions and what I told them was it's a fantastic thing for any Canadian artist to be heard by any American," Linden says with a laugh.

© The Leader-Post (Regina) 2006

CLOSE WINDOW

Copyright © 2006 CanWest Interactive, a division of [CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.](#) All rights reserved.