

Jackie Greene: All kinds of incredible

Contributed by Gary Peterson
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Jackie Greene, all of somewhere in his mid-twenties and with a recent album on which he is backed by Elvis Costello's band, did surface in Lake County way back in 2003 at one of those wonderful Library Park concerts in Lakeport.

He's, for starters, a very good reason why you should take in these concerts. They've had the (latter day and way good) Yardbirds with two living original members and the Mick Martin Blues Band, from Sacramento, among others. That band is on Dig Records' "Positively 12th & K," a Dylan tribute CD featuring Greene and one of the greatest living singers in rock 'n' roll, Sal Valentino, formerly of the Beau Brummels.

By the way, the Brummels broke up before a Lakeport concert a few years ago after Valentino and Ron Elliot had a fit of fisticuffs a la the Davies Brothers of the Kinks or the Gallagher brothers of Oasis.

Valentino, who had been opening for Greene, didn't make the Lakeport concert. He was home, just out of the hospital and, as I had been forewarned, one of the worst interviews ever. He was but I love his music so much I'd gladly bear the abuse.

So back to Greene.

In a recent issue of Rolling Stone, the usually very reliable David Fricke, wrote a "New Guitar Gods" feature listing John Mayer, Derek Trucks and John Frusciante as these newly olive crowned Olympians. A good list followed including Tom Morello, Warren Haynes, Jack White and so on.

While each of these git-picking wonders has a place on such a list I did not see Jackie Greene anywhere. And, of course, Mike Wilhelm was not listed either, not that he's new, just that he's almost consistently overlooked. I've written so much about him that some might consider me his unofficial press agent. But, hey, he's that good and I just can't stop listening to the three CDs he gave me recently.

But, again, back to Greene, the man left out of RS's "Guitar God" list. Of course, they are responsible for the pointless and disgusting excuse for something, "I'm From Rolling Stone." So that could be their excuse. But, I doubt it.

When I heard this quadruple threat for the first time in Library Park in 2003 he was already playing back to back shows at Biscuits & Blues in SF and had fronted the only unsigned band to ever receive a standing ovation at the Fillmore in the last 10 years. That ranks with Lynyrd Skynyrd getting demands for encores when they opened for the Who on a now legendary tour.

Jackie Greene is an incredible guitar player. He's an incredible songwriter. He is also an incredible harp player and I thought then and I still do the best pianist I've ever heard bar almost none.

Did I say incredible enough times?

So the only question remaining when I finally got a few minutes alone with the "Kid" – he does do "Messin' With The Kid" on his second CD (and with that same Mick Martin Blues Band whose drummer is Joe Morello's nephew, and, yes, his uncle was his teacher). So what else could I call him?

I know I wouldn't mess with him.

Quiet, softspoken, non-assuming Jacke Greene, after I saw half his show, made me feel like someone meeting Bob Dylan very early in the game.

Jackie gets compared a lot to Dylan but, after listening to his excellent Dylan covers on that Sacramento Zimmie tribute, I quickly came to the realization that Greene, like Dylan before him absorbing Woody Guthrie, was simply absorbing Dylan then moving on and being himself instead.

When you first see him, Greene looks like he wouldn't hurt a fly and he probably wouldn't. But, once you hear him, well, all the hotshot guitarists and songwriters in the universe better move over one cause Jackie Greene from El Dorado County is in the house.

I predict that, ere long, people will quote him like they have quoted Bob Dylan, marking their musical maturity by the first time they heard him.

The only question with Greene is what can't he do?

"Jackie can't clean his house," his road manager at the time, said. He looks like he can't clean his house, but all other bets are off.

Now on Verve Forecast, he had just been signed by Aerosmith's management.

How did he feel about so fast, so far; from El Dorado to standing ovations at the Fillmore?

"I don't respond to it," he said. "I just do what I do, write songs and play tunes. There's all kinds of stardom, until it fades away. Every night's special, but every night is also the same."

Who are his influences?

"Bob Dylan, Tom Waits. I like their voices and they sing their own songs. Leadbelly, Jimmy Rodgers, Hank Williams, Muddy Waters."

On guitar, it's Grant Green, the jazz guitarist. "I steal more licks from him than anyone else."

As Warren Zevon's one-time piano teacher and next door neighbor, Igor Stravinsky, once said: "Good artists borrow; great artists steal."

Impeccable taste is impeccable taste.

There's no hype with Jackie Greene. But there is the buzz. The buzz comes from other musicians, writers, his interviews, and, most of all, those guys in record stores, the kind John Cusack and Jack Black played in that movie.

"They lurk behind counters playing music they want you to hear. They stack Jackie Greene and others in the racks as if to say: "Buy this! You need this! Forget the crap you think you wanted! Jackie, and those few like him, are what you need!"

A long time ago another guitarist said something that comes to mind. He wasn't a singer so he spoke these words between blistering guitar solos I watched him play but still don't know how. One of his guitars hangs in the Hard Rock Cafe on Van Ness. He was found dead, hanging in his cell – with or without assistance.

When Roy Buchanan said: "The Messiah ... he will come again ..." Maybe, he wasn't just talking about the Big J.C.

Since I first wrote this I have been accused of overstatement. I have also seen Jackie Greene again, this time at San Francisco's Stern Grove festival, opening for Mavis Staples. And, so far, have not changed my mind one bit. Check this guy out.

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