HoustonPress

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The Moving Sidewalks at Bayou Music Center, 9/28/2013

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SEPTEMBER 30, 2013

Moving Sidewalks
Bayou Music Center
September 28, 2013

"We're actually remembering this shit," Billy F. Gibbons said after the Moving Sidewalks had played two choppy, fuzz-clouded songs Saturday night at Bayou Music Center. By all accounts, it was his pre-ZZ Top engagement's first public performance on a Houston stage since the LBJ administration, not to mention a glimpse of an alternate timeline any Bayou City music-history buff would find irresistible.

The occasion was the **Deacons of Deadwood's** 12th annual charity gala, a fundraiser thrown by the large Houston motorcycle club/nonprofit whose annual donations to Houston-area children's charities number in the six figures. According to current Deacons president Steve Lamb, the Sidewalks got involved because "some friends of the band contacted us." He went on to tell me his non-Deacon position is an assets manager for Morgan Stanley, both Jimi Hendrix's and Sharon Stone's sisters were at the gala, and that the Deacons have raised some $1.4 million for some very fortunate local kids in the club's 11-year history. Kudos.

So Saturday, many of the Deacons — recognizable by their custom white suit jackets, many sleeveless and some with patches bearing names like "Hoss" or "Coonass" or "Roadhouse" — plus their dressed-to-the-nines dates and about 800 more friends of the band, all gathered to eat (catering by Demaris), drink (top-shelf open bar), and pose on the Harley-Davidson ice sculpture near the restrooms or bid on a guitar autographed by AC/DC's Angus and Malcolm Young (minimum bid: $3,950) in the silent auction. Rocks Off definitely needs to review charity galas more often, but only if they're this bananas.

After a good, long opening set by Houston's Fab 5 that spanned '60s rock from "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" to "In-a-Gadda-Da-Vida," the Sidewalks strolled onstage about 10:50 p.m. to some Hammond B-3 swells courtesy of organist Tom Moore, who looks a little like homespun *Houston Chronicle* lifestyle columnist Leon Hale. Those licks smelled a lot like "Green Onions," if you catch my drift.

Along with drummer Dan Mitchell, Moore's draft into the U.S. armed forces is the event that sent the Sidewalks' career to the sidelines until Rock Beat Records' 2012 reissue of the band's lone album *Flash*, plus assorted singles and demos — including their, er, *reworking* of the Beatles' "I Wanna Hold Your Hand" that first got them noticed amid Houston's thriving "teen scene" — released under the simple-enough name *The Complete Collection*.

All night long Moore made a fantastic foil for Gibbons, whose master-of-ceremonies banter was dominated by the recurring line, "Are we having a good time now?" The series of "rock faces" Moore made whenever he would hit just the right chord on his B-3 seemed to answer in the affirmative, even as they upstaged the stone-faced, shades-wearing singer every time.

Some 45 years may have gone by, but the the Sidewalks' songs were written by teenage boys, and so sometimes they can be (like teenage boys) a little gawky, a little awkward, and oversaturated with hormones. Saturday, the Who-ish "Flashback," the Nightcaps' rockabilly blast "Wine, Wine, Wine" and Wilson Pickett's eternal "In the Midnight Hour" definitely were. But as men in their sixties, the Sidewalks have also earned the right to not rush a damn thing if they don't want to, life lessons they put to good use at this particular gig. If bassist Don Summers moved more than three inches from where he stood about two feet in front of Mitchell all night, I didn't notice.

Review continues on the next page.

Besides, they had the good fortune to rub shoulders with the likes of the Thirteenth Floor Elevators back in the day, and the good taste to cover "Reverberation" Saturday, one of the moments when the band's groove dug deepest. "Joe Blues," one of several elastic, luxurious numbers, demonstrated that the fundamentals of Gibbons' guitar technique have been in place since he was about 16 years old. On one level, everything he's done since then has been gravy. But at age 63, that's a thick, thick gravy, dripping with authentic Texas blues.

And here's a criticism you won't see lobbied at Bayou Music Center very often: if anything, this show could have been louder. What we heard Saturday was all coming from maybe eight to 12 Magnatone amps arrayed on either side of Mitchell's kit. It cut off almost any trace of reverb or high end, and coated every song with a viscous covering of audio grease that — particularly since the band played almost an hour and a half, saying their goodnights right around 12:20 a.m.– went down smooth indeed with the well-lubricated crowd. They even played "Wild Thing," because how could they not?

"And you thought we couldn't be corny," Gibbons quipped.

Would it be nice if the Sidewalks booked a local gig that didn't come at such a hefty price tag? Maybe. Tickets for Saturday's gala started at $225 and reached table/VIP level at $1,500-5,000, which enabled access

to the “Big Dog Lounge.” (Still, those ice sculptures…) But the gala had to have raised a king’s ransom for Child Advocates, Camp Quality USA, Devereux, the Epilepsy Foundation and the Deacons’ other worthy beneficiaries.

Meanwhile, onstage the four Sidewalks gave every impression they were having a fine old time, just the four of them whether the crowd was paying any attention or not, and that they wouldn’t mind at all doing things like this more often. We already know they’re available for private engagements.

Personal Bias: Went into this with an open mind, and left with it having pretty much been blown, more for the overall atmosphere than the Sidewalks’ actual music. Though Brother Gibbons et al. did have their moments — my pick was the glowering cover of Muddy Waters’ “Catfish Blues.”

The Crowd: Sleeveless white jackets, leather and cleavage everywhere.

Overheard In the Crowd: “Thanks for dressing up, man.”

Random Notebook Dump: Wonder how much that open bar set the Deacons back.

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This article appears in **Sep 26 – Oct 2, 2013**.

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