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Allman Brothers return with professional show

By Pat Higgins

The Allman Brothers Band returned to Lincoln's Pershing Auditorium for the first time since their legendary 1972 performance and demonstrated that their musical obituary has been written prematurely.

Sunday night's concert was not the countercultural event that their first appearance was, but it was a highly-professional, enjoyable show. Pershing was more than half full, which was a tribute to the fans as even Eric Heiden would have had a difficult time making the scene.

The Allman Brothers Band played a 14-song set, chiefly concentrating on their classics of the past mixed with a few from the new LP, *Reach for the Sky*. Their set began with "I Don't Want You No More" and "It's not my Cross to Bear," the first two cuts on their very first album, which was released in 1969. They quickly showed that the spark is still there and they are no mere exercise in nostalgia.

70s. They wrote great songs that articulated the populist realities of their working class and suburban audience much in the same manner as Bruce Springsteen or the young Bob Seger.

The Allman Brothers, while never as good of songwriters as Skynard, were the godfathers of the Southern Rock movement, most of whose members are totally indistinguishable from the other. The chief identifying characteristics were cowboy hats, beards and a penchant for mindless boogie.

Outlaws were banal

The opening act, The Outlaws, are a prime example of this form of corporate rock. Onstage they looked like a passal of hippies including (if it can be believed) a headband sported by the lead singer. The Outlaws mix wimpy Eagles harmonies with Allman-style guitar for a pleasant, if banal effect.

The songs are all extended marathons that are chiefly an excuse for endless riffing on guitar. The Outlaws played their FM hits like "There Goes Another Love Song" and "Green Grass and High Tide" and the audience ate it up.

The highlight of the Allman's set was guitarist and vocalist Dicky Betts, who played a blisteringly hot blues rock guitar that recalled glorious days of the past. Gregg Allman was rather subdued and low key, but his patented slurred whiskey vocals were quite impressive. The remaining members of the band were proficient on their instruments, but totally faceless.

Old favorites like "Whipping Post" and "One Way Out" were powerful reminders explaining the legend of the Allman Brothers Band. The only real drawback was the ever tedious drum solo which lasted an interminable length of time. "Blue Sky" one of their few AM hits ended the show with a flourish.

The Allman Brothers are totally professional nowadays putting on a competent, if perhaps mechanical, performance. Anybody listen to *Live at Fillmore East* lately?



Photo by Mitch Hrdlicka

Gregg Allman performed with the Allman Brothers Band Sunday night at Pershing Auditorium.

review

The Allman Brothers Band, in the early 1970's, had more respect and credibility in the youth culture than any other American rock band. The reasons for the Allman's success were the guitar pyrotechnics of Brother Duane and Dicky Betts and the blues influenced vocals of Gregg Allman. Duane Allman was probably second only to Jimi Hendrix as the modern guitar hero and Gregg is one of the most soulful white singers this side of Willie Nelson. Even after Duane Allman's death, the Brothers continued quite successfully.

Carter fundraisers

At Watkins Glen, N.Y., they put on a show that drew more people than Woodstock. In 1976, they were key fund raisers in making then-obscure Jimmy Carter the nominee for president, which led many to speculate that Gregg Allman would be appointed to head the Food and Drug Administration. But the band collapsed during the Bicentennial as Gregg succumbed to various demons which led him to become a nationwide laughingstock.

The Allman Brothers have returned almost in obscurity at a time when the whole Southern Rock sub-species has become outmoded and irrelevant. The best Southern band Lynard Skynard, was the most underrated band of the

Outlaws shift to rock but keep country image

By Casey McCabe

Sitting in the hotel room before their upcoming show Sunday evening, Dave Dix and Rick Cua of the Outlaws took time to relax, cheer the Atlanta Falcons on to an upset of the Philadelphia Eagles, and try to explain the current status of Southern rock.

"The term 'Southern rock' itself has become passe," said drummer Dix, a Tampa, Fla. native who now lives in Atlanta.

"It has become mainstream," adds bassist Cua. "We think of ourselves as a rock 'n' roll band from the South, as opposed to a Southern rock band."

Cua and Dix are the newest members of the Outlaws, a band which made its presence known in 1975 with a highly-successful debut album. Dix, who joined in 1977, had played with the group in its earliest stages some 10 years ago.

Cua, the most recent addition, hails from Syracuse, N.Y., a good trek north of the Mason-Dixon line. Onstage he is the well-groomed guitarist next to his somewhat shaggier counterparts Hughie Thomasson and Billy Jones.

For their Lincoln show, the Outlaws shared concert billing with the Allman Brothers, one of only seven pairings of the two groups on this tour, advertised as "a double dose of Southern rock." Both bands are accustomed to headlining, and Dix still remembers that the Outlaws' last Pershing appearance set a house record. Yet they expressed no remorse in opening for the Allman's a band which laid the groundwork for all the Southern rock bands that emerged in the 70s.

Allmans' influenced

"When we were just getting started, they (the

Allman Brothers) were the first Southern band coming out," recalls Dix. "They were very definitely an influence."

"I think the crowd's response to both bands is real good," Cua says. "I know that the first time we played with them, most of us stuck around. Just seeing them come on stage and start is kind of thrilling because they were one of the pioneer bands from the South."

The thought of receiving equal billing with the Allman Brothers wouldn't have occurred to the 1970 incarnation of the Outlaws.

"We were playing fratparties 10 years ago and they (Allmans) were making albums," says Dix. "Ten years ago we never would have thought we'd be opening for the Allmans. If someone would have told us that, we'd just say, 'Well, that's something to look forward to.'"

Now that the Outlaws have arrived, they also see the reverse happening. Cua points out that Alvin Lee, who was very popular in the Woodstock days with Ten Years After, opened for the Outlaws in a recent tour. Cua says Lee's music is as strong as ever, but says the guitarist's backslide is due mostly to just a change in the times. This is a fate the Outlaws are hoping to avoid.

"We'll have to wait and see how well the new album does before getting back into the studio," Dix says. "Our last album did not do so well. When that happens, you've got to get on the ball, get material, and get back into the studio."

Hits would help

"Looking for airplay is something that definitely is going on in our minds when we record," Cua says. "It

would really help if we had a couple of AM hits, which I think we might have on the new album (their seventh, entitled *Ghost Riders*)."

The band's studio and live personas are not mutually exclusive either.

"We love to perform, we love to play, and it helps sell records," Cua says.

Both Cua and Dix feel the band currently is going through a healthy rebirth, with new people and new material.

"We work on a group sound, but it comes from each individual," Dix says. "Everything's gone to rock; the band doesn't have the country overtones it once had."

Still catering to the overall Outlaw image, the band retains some of its Old West imagery through its name, subject matter, and album cover art. This, according to Dix, serves as a good focus for the band.

While the Outlaws don't intend to ignore the ties that link them to the Southern rock category, offstage they want to avoid the stereotypes.

Cua admits to admiring the Police, and Dix gives up after listing Steely Dan and the Doobie Brothers as current favorites, saying, "There are just a lot of really good bands out there." The notion that some fans might expect them to keep their allegiances to the South are met by doubtful smiles from Dix and Cua.

"You should hear what we play on the bus when we get done working," Cua says. "Everything from jazz to ... whatever. It's really diverse."

And Dix adds: "I suppose a lot of people expect us to get on the bus and put on a Molly Hatchet tape."