

JON SPENCER gets down — literally — during the Blues Explosion's performance Wednesday night at Sokol Hall in Omaha.

## Jon Spencer Blues Explosion delivers dynamite performance

BY JEFF RANDALL  
Music Critic

Jon Spencer is a man divided. On stage, he is a gut-wrenching personification of all that makes up the blues, punk rock and theatrics. He is cocky, he struts, and he flails across the performance space with abandon. His shouted Southern drawl often lowers into a guttural sound that shakes the floors and brings forth cheers of approval from his wildly kinetic fans.

Offstage, he is a soft-spoken man with little to say and, seemingly, all the time in the world to say it.

Spencer and his band, the Jon Spencer Blues Explosion (consisting of guitarist/vocalist Spencer, guitarist Judah Bauer and drummer Russell Simins) was in Omaha Wednesday night to play at Sokol Hall.

And whatever demon it is that possesses Spencer while on stage, it was eager to please on Wednesday night.

It was evident from the opening moments of the show, in which Spencer got the crowd roaring with his prompting introduction to "Bellbottoms," to the closing moments, in which Spencer and the Blues Explosion took the whole thing to an unbeatable climax that left the crowd sweating and visibly shaken.

Spencer had spent half the show either in the air or on his knees, using the lights of the stage and the irresistible force of rock 'n' roll to exorcise whatever demons he had within.

Before the show, Spencer gave no indications of being a man prone to possession. He stood quietly among the roadies and concert-hall staff as they pushed each peice of equipment into place, overseeing the job and occasionally lending a hand.

This is presumably the routine before every show. And the Blues Explosion have been doing this nearly every night since October, when they released "Now I Got Worry," their seventh album.

"We've been doing this for so long, but it's hard to stop," Simins said before the show. "After all the recordings and remixing and whatever, we're still a live band."

Spencer's take on the road life was

much the same.

"It's been good," he said, even though no more than five hours later, he would be on his knees testifying to a crowd full of strangers that being so far away from home was nearly killing him.

This contradiction took place during the last song of the band's first set, when the two-chord strum of "Sticky" had degenerated into a sparse guitar and drum background for Spencer's extended exorcism.

The Blues Explosion had spent nearly an hour before that in a rock-induced fury, with Simins providing rhythms that sounded as though they only could have come from a madman, Bauer playing the quiet sidekick and Spencer bringing everything together by infusing both the band and the audience with enough adrenaline to keep the show going forever.

As a live band, the Blues Explosion is one of the greatest this world has ever seen. Its individual members are seemingly joined by an unseen force that makes every second of every song into a tightly woven nugget of rock 'n' roll.

They displayed this otherworldly ability on nearly every song — starting, stopping, freestyling and starting again with master hands.

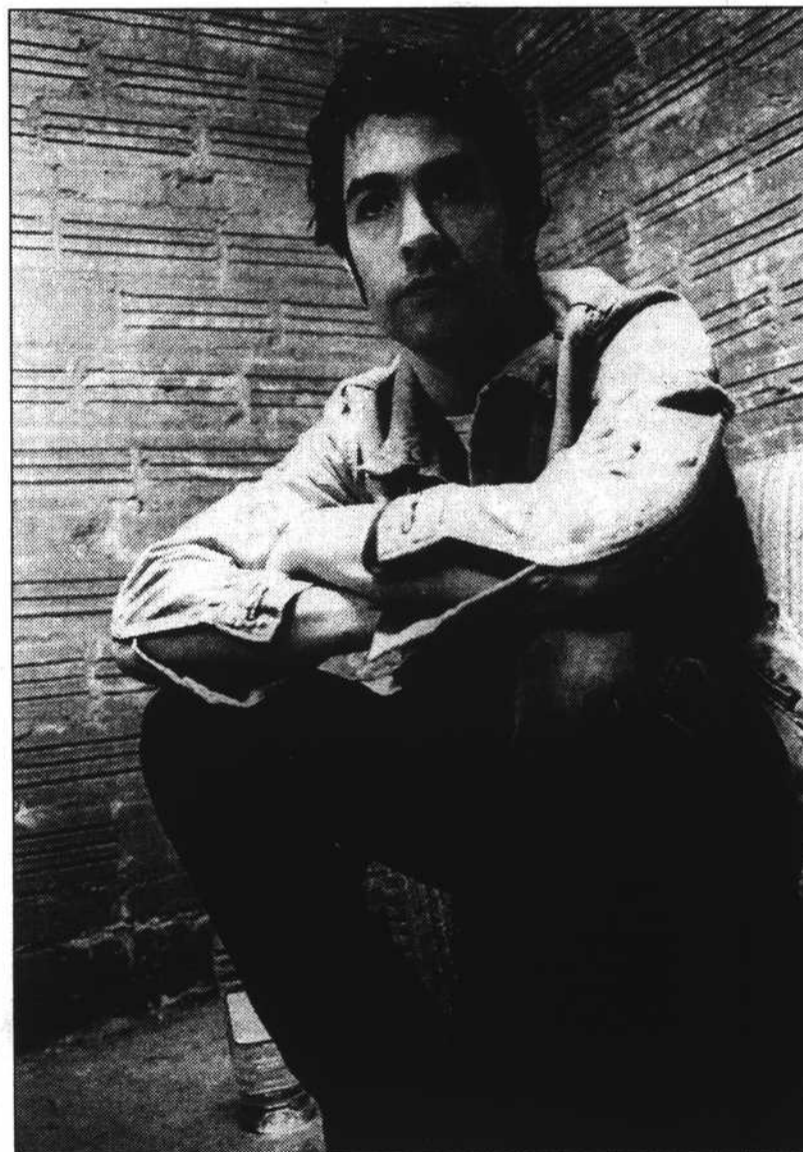
And while this ability may be the result of accumulated musical talent and practice, it is also the result of every band member's belief in live performance as the essence of a rock band.

"You see some bands that are out there, like the Prodigy, it's like they have this great persona," Simins said. "And they have all this energy and great voices and they can really play."

"But after five minutes, you just lose interest. I mean, I love their albums. They just don't know what to do when they get on the stage."

Long months and years on the road have contributed to the Blues Explosion's stage proficiency, but so have their experiences with other artists — especially Mississippi bluesman R.L. Burnside, for whom the Blues Explosion played backing band on his last two albums, "An Ass Pocket of Whiskey" and "Mr. Wizard."

Please see SPENCER on 13



SPENCER was a little less animated and a lot quieter in the dressing room before the show.

Photos by  
Lane  
Hickenbottom

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Russell  
Simins