

live blues:

The Idle Hands

Assembly Rooms, Derby 15/09/2011

Although this was not the first time The Idle Hands had landed a prestigious support, opening for Robin Trower, apparently a real hero of the band, made it extra special. Come show time, they sauntered on stage before a largely conservative audience. A few dedicated fans were at the front, the rest hugging the walls and the blissfully ignorant still in the bar. This is a familiar scene for a support act, but one that would radically change before their set was more than a couple of songs in.

Commanding centre stage as if it was his birthright, front man Phil Allen made it his personal mission to rouse the crowd and, backed by one of the tightest bands you'll see, he did just that.

Kicking off with a swaggering mood setting version of Buddy Guy's "Smell The Funk", the only cover in their set, there was an immediate sense of a rapidly changing atmosphere. By the time the band were concluding their second song "Mississippi", the bar was empty and stage front was getting pretty congested.

"Drive", from the impressive new *Ready for Business* CD, quickly followed before the band really hit their stride with the title track from their previous *All Night Sinner* album.

After four up-tempo rocking blues tracks, The Idle Hands confidently slowed the pace with "When I First Met Chicago" and "40 Nights", a double dose *tour-de-force* of some of the finest slow blues you are likely to hear this side of the headline act, bringing a fervent reaction from the now wholly converted audience.

Impressing throughout with their original songs providing a unique take on classic blues, guitarist Dave Robinson laid down some spellbinding solos whilst bassist Jamie Burns and drummer Paul Heydon underpinned the lot with a confident and intricate set of rhythms. By the time they reached set closers "Take A Closer Look" and "Weep & Moan" from the new album, the band had the entire room transfixed. British blues rock at its best. Check 'em out! - *Dave Cockett*

Toby Walker

Brook's Blues Bar, Parsons Green Social Club, London SW6 05/11/2011

There was a mounting sense of anticipation at Brook's Blues Bar on Bonfire Night. It had been well publicised that Tony Bell had taken four years to book Toby Walker; it was well worth the wait. From the moment he opened his mouth, we knew that we were in for so much more than an evening of music. Toby is a born entertainer; a true raconteur with a wicked sense of humour. He kicked off the set with a showcase of his talents manipulating his vintage National steel guitar mimicking the various components of a band in the jaunty "Swing Bean". This was followed by his rendition of Reverend Billy C Wirtz' cheeky "What I Used To Do All Night, Now Takes Me All Night To Do". For this, Toby's guitar became merely a vehicle for the delivery of a succession of one-liners well received by

the audience. Next came "I've Got To Love Somebody" followed by "Cigarette Blues", which, apart from the saucy lyrics, began to show off Toby's considerable skills. Mississippi Fred McDowell's "What's The Matter Now" had Toby wandering away from the microphone giving the audience some up close Delta blues. Then a few more lively numbers including the high energy "Ride", a ragtime version of Lead Belly's "Midnight Special" and a blistering version of "El Whipping Post" completed the first part of the evening.

The gentle and melodic "Leon's Little Girl" started the second set with well executed changes in pitch and volume, then Toby's own arrangement of 'Norwegian Wood' was unusually uninterrupted and had the audience spellbound. He quickly reverted back to his anecdotes though with "It Should've Been Me" and an epic tale of his journey through deepest Mississippi to locate the legendary Delta blues singer and guitarist Jack Owens. There was a soulful version of "Hard Time Killing Floor Blues" followed by the Robert Johnson classic "Travelling Riverside Blues" and the evening came to a glorious end with "Miss Your Daddy" and an instrumental ditty. Toby Walker is due to return to the UK next November; go and see him and relish in the delights of an accomplished musician and storyteller. You will love it! - *Heather Harrison*

Aaron Neville, Keb' Mo' Band

Barbican, London EC2 07/11/2011

Keb' Mo' appeared fronting an excellent multi-racial band consisting of Kevin So on keyboards and occasional guitar, Jeff Paris on guitar doubling mandolin, Val Johnson on bass and Les Falconer on drums. He began with visits to his 1990s albums with "Muddy Water" and "Perpetual Blues Machine" before "Government Cheese", a fine protest song from 2009's *Live and Mo'* album. Another trip back to the second Keb' Mo' album, *Just Like You*, in "More Than One Way Home" was followed by a couple from the new album, "All The Way" and "The Reflection"; appropriately Mo' played his shiny steel guitar on this one;

