

Concert Time from the Performer's Perspective:

England Discovers Little Toby Walker

By Tony Tedeschi

One of the great attractions of music festivals or a stop on a music tour, for the listener, is the anticipation that the venue will result in the discovery of an artist who will provide instant gratification followed by long-term enjoyment of that performer's particular art. However, we wondered what the experience would be like from the perspective of the performer who walks out onto a stage to face an audience in his exploration of terra incognita.

Little Toby Walker, who makes his home on Long Island in New York, is a renowned blues guitarist and singer. Winner of the prestigious Memphis International Blues Challenge Award for 2002, Walker was invited to take his show on the road earlier this year, when John Adams, a promoter in the United Kingdom, discovered him through a series of connections that began with Walker's website, <http://littletobywalker.com>

"The way they do everything over there was new to me," Walker said in an interview with naturaltraveler.com. "For example, here, artists who do not have a major record label supporting them, must do all their own logistics, promotion, road management, booking, etc. But, by the time I got to the U.K. for my tour, John Adams had done all of that work. After meeting me at the airport, he drove me to his home, where I met his family and stayed in the guest room of his house."

The hospitality extended to the way audiences treated Walker, as well. His first gig was in a catering hall, rented out by an organization that Adams heads, called the Bottleneck Blues Cub. And, clearly, they had come to listen.

"Prior to John getting me over there, no one, except a few people who had bought my CDs, had ever heard of me," Walker said. "Walking into the first gig was kind of interesting. There was some expectation because John Adams has a reputation for bringing over top artists. The audience was exactly like what I'd see in the U.S. in a concert setting, there to hear the artist, except that you could hear a pin drop and, during that first song, I'm wondering how



Toby Walker at The Filo, U.K.

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am I doing? But it was followed by thunderous applause."

Walker admitted to some nervousness because he had no idea of why the audience was reacting with such silent attention. "Are they quiet because they are being polite or are they awe-struck. And it turned out to be the latter."

After the gig, Adams told Walker, of the artists he's brought to the U.K., he'd never seen anyone capture an audience that quickly. He offered to manage Walker then and there. Adams admitted that he had originally brought Walker over there on spec, because, while he'd heard Walker's CDs, he didn't know how he'd play in front of an audience. That first night's performance validated what he'd thought about Walker.

But next came the more intimate settings of the pubs. Again, the first pub, The Filo, had been taken over by a blues crowd. Walker's poster was up on the wall. People had been expecting him, there was a sense of anticipation on the part of the audience. But, when he got up in front of the audience, same reaction: dead silence. Again, thunderous applause.

"I couldn't do anything wrong," Walker said. "It was surprising, but I started getting used to it."

John Adams had told him there were a lot of people who were really looking forward to seeing Walker perform, but nothing could have prepared him for complete silence and a respectful listening audience. Toward the end of gigs, people were clapping and singing along, which Adams said was really unusual, given that this was the U.K., where reserve is legendary.

In fact, in one club, Oranges, Walker relates that the owner had written in at the bottom of his posters, "This will be a listening concert. If anyone wants to talk, you can go buy your beer elsewhere." At one point, during the performance, the owner walked over to a small group at the bar, who were talking, and told them to shut up, in no uncertain terms, and one of those admonished was a woman who had come to cover the show for a local newspaper. She did as she was told.

Postscript to Walker's U.K. tour, along with his European management deal with John Walker, are a reprise tour next February and March and a deal to do a live recording, in a state-of-the-art studio in an old stone barn, in front of an audience who will pay to be there. This next tour will also include performances in The Netherlands and Belgium. Not surprisingly, the club owners will be paying appreciably more to book his performances.

One of the attractions of the recently completed tour, according to Walker was: "I was an anomaly, a novelty, an American blues artist come to their country."

It appears there is definitely a musical conquest in the offing. As they say in the U.K., "brilliant." [« back to top](#)

For the second time in four years,
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Award** for Internet Reporting, this time for my article entitled: "Newfoundland, Where Landscape Defines Literature." It is another in a series of journalism awards writers for the site have won over the past few years. I am particularly proud of this award because the article calls attention to the kind of innovative, in-depth coverage, by my fellow journalists, that defines

naturaltraveler.com. It also represents the level of planning and cooperation that goes into articles for the website. Beginning with the premise that many people choose a destination on the basis of a beautifully wrought piece of fiction, I found a wonderful example in Newfoundland and worked closely with Gillian Marx of Newfoundland & Labrador Media Relations, who was indispensable in setting up the interviews with the world-class authors who are quoted in the article. I feel I share this award with Gillian and her colleagues.

If you'd like to read the article, click on:
[Newfoundland, Where Landscape Defines Literature](#)

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