

A music lesson

Allmans define classic rock; Journey, Foreigner don't

By RICK MITCHELL
Houston Chronicle

This weekend's concerts at the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion in The Woodlands presented contrasting definitions of classic rock. The Allman Brothers Band, which performed Friday night with opening act Susan Tedeschi, is truly classic;

Music review

in that it represents a standard of musicianship rarely equaled in the half-century history of rock 'n' roll. Journey and Foreigner, who co-headlined Saturday night, are "classic" primarily by virtue of the fact that both bands, sold a lot of records 30 years ago and are back on the road with most of their original members in tow.

The first night was a reminder that great music never grows old; the second was basically an exercise in wishful thinking.

Of course, the latter show sold out while the former drew a half-full house. So it goes.

The Allman Brothers Band was formed in 1969 by brothers Duane and Gregg Allman. The band's sound innovatively combined blues and country roots with extended acid-rock improvisations that approached the free-form virtuosity of avant-garde jazz. The soaring seven-guitar leads of Duane Allman and Jicky Betts offered a rock equivalent to Bob Dylan and the 'Texas Playboys' twin fiddles.

The ABB pointed the way for fellow Southern rockers such as Lynyrd Skynyrd, who streamlined the blues and country inflections and ignored the jazz to appeal to mainstream hard-rockers.

Duane Allman was killed in a motorcycle accident in 1971, and bassist Berry Oakley died the same way the following year. The original group broke up in 1973, reunited in 1976, then broke up again.

But since 1989, the ABB has established under the co-leadership of Gregg Allman and Betts. *Where It All Begins*, a 1994 album of new material, has been certified gold.



Brett Cooper / Special to the Chronicle

Guitarist Dickey Betts jams with the Allman Brothers Band Friday night in The Woodlands.

The concert here was especially notable for the emergence of new guitarist Derek Trucks, the 20-year-old nephew of ABB drummer Butch Trucks. With his blond hair and ponytail, Derek Trucks both sounds and looks like the reincarnation of Duane Allman. All he needs to complete the picture is a mustache and nutcracker sideburns.

Trucks' electrifying slide guitar solos and flawless organ leads seemed to energize the whole band. Gregg Allman has appeared to sleepwalk through many previous appearances, sitting motionless behind his Hammond organ and winking briefly to his vocals.

Not this time. He demonstrated that he remains one of the most soulful white stagers to come out of the '60s blues revival on *Ain't My Cross to Bear* and accompanied himself on acoustic guitar on the bossy *Sweet Melissa*.

The original drum tandem of Trucks and Jaimee was augmented by percussionist Marc Quinones for a polyrhythmic workout on *Les Bery in A Minor*. Bassist Oteil Burbridge displayed a marvelous ability to kick down the groove while adding

counter-melodies behind the guitars.

At the end of the night, Houstonians Eric Demmer on alto sax and Mark May on guitar joined a climactic jam on Southbound that found Betts driving the band home on lead guitar like a trail boss with a lariat.

While the kaleidoscopic light show on the screens behind the stage provided an element of late '60s hippie nostalgia, the musicianship was as timeless as the blues, as fresh as any current post-punk "jam band."

If only the same could be said of Saturday's concert.

Foreigner, which played first, includes founding members Mick Jones and Lou Gramm, who has recovered from 1997 brain surgery to remove a benign tumor.

The band's set included such all-time rock anthems as *Fools Like Me the First Time*, *Cold as Ice*, *Hot Blooded*, *Dirty White Boy* and *Upend*. Featuring Gramm's powerful lead vocals and Jones' starved song-writing instincts, these songs epitomized the evolution of rock from the anything-goes '60s to the mass-market '70s.

On I Want to Know What Love Is, Foreigner's last big hit, released in 1984, Gramm was backed by a taped gospel choir. The band has a new album due next year.

If Foreigner is resting primarily on its former glory, at least it sounds like the same band. Journey, which is touring without lead singer Steve Perry, sounds more like one of those tribute bands, except that this "Tribute to Journey" band includes original members Neal Schon on guitar and Ross Valery on bass, plus long time keyboardist Jonathan Cain.

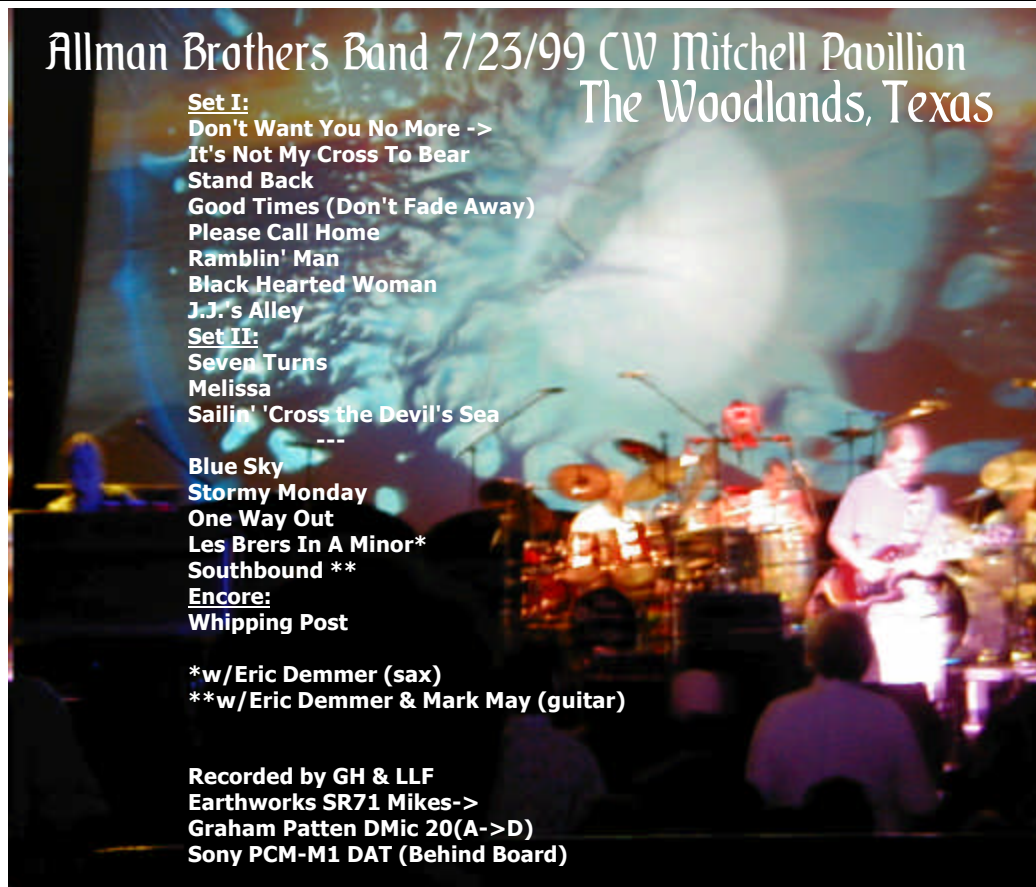
Perry, who rejoined Journey for the successful 1996 *Trial by Fire* album, is unable to tour because of health problems. He has been replaced by singer Steve Augeri, who looks and sounds enough like Perry that someone sitting high on the hill might not have noticed the difference.

Whether that's good or bad depends on one's opinion of Journey's limited and shallow hard-rock sound, which epitomized the complete corporate co-optation of mainstream rock in the early '80s. If those sick retros are coming back, Lord, please send us another Nirvana.



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Allman Brothers Band 7/23/99 CW Mitchell Pavilion, The Woodlands, Texas



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Set I:

Don't Want You No More ->
It's Not My Cross To Bear
Stand Back
Good Times (Don't Fade Away)
Please Call Home
Ramblin' Man
Black Hearted Woman
J.J.'s Alley

Set II:

Seven Turns
Melissa
Sailin' 'Cross the Devil's Sea

Blue Sky
Stormy Monday
One Way Out
Les Brers In A Minor*
Southbound **

Encore:

Whipping Post

*w/Eric Demmer (sax)

**w/Eric Demmer & Mark May (guitar)

Recorded by GH & LLF
Earthworks SR71 Mikes->
Graham Patten DMic 20(A->D)
Sony PCM-M1 DAT (Behind Board)

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