

# The thrill is(n't) gone

BY JEREMY ROTTGEN  
STAFF WRITER

It's hard to believe that B.B. King is turning 80 years old.

His birthday isn't until September 16, but the celebration has already begun, including breaking ground June 10 in B.B.'s hometown of Indianola, Miss., for a museum in his name. A duets album featuring Sting and U2 is also planned. His recent performance at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Center was a gift from B.B. to his fans in Sarasota. His latest record, released in March, is a greatest hits collection dubbed "The Ultimate Collection." It spans his career from 1951 to 2000.

It was impressive 20 years ago to see a man of his age on stage and touring constantly. His tour schedule is similar to what a young rock band's would be playing almost nightly around the world, with few breaks in between.

You can find his name in

contexts almost anywhere from restaurants to concert venues and now a museum, but his performances are something to be cherished by those who seem devoted to see him any chance they'll get.

Seeing B.B. at the Van Wezel created a very intimate atmosphere. For B.B.'s brand of blues, it was pretty close to being in a living room with him. When all nine musicians were on stage the balance of sound in the blended together for a near perfect blues experience. There really wasn't a bad seat in the house. He said he was feeling good and it was reflected in his performance.

Of course, if you wanted to catch one of the pins and needles King throws to the audience at the end of his shows, you had to be up front.

The B.B. King blues band, headed by trumpet player James "Boogaloo" Bolden, has accompanied King on stage played in more than 90 countries. The band features a four-

man horn section, a complete rhythm section with guitar, drums, bass and an organist.

They warm up the crowd before King hits the stage with high-energy jams and solos from each of the musicians, which includes horns, bass, organ and guitar.

When King finally takes the stage it is with heightened anticipation. The crowd, excited for any opportunity to catch a glimpse of the performer, even outside around his bus, has to go nuts.

Probably the most entertaining aspect of the show and the most profound characteristic of King's showmanship is how he talks and interacts with the audience. It was an example of the undivided attention that a true legend deserves. Some regard B.B.'s shows as a comedy routine, but it was all part of the mood he sets for the evening, which creates a comfortable atmosphere for everybody.

Then there is his singing



voice, probably just as significant as the sustaining voice of his beloved guitar "Lucille." His voice has probably influenced as many a pop singer in the top 40 as anybody.

B.B. told the audience he liked playing at the Van Wezel because it was "such a beautiful theater." King did not waste an opportunity to plug the diabetes testing kit that he endorses on television, which he duly noted you could use on your hind quarters if you wished.

Timeless hits of King's were performed like "Ain't That Just

## THE B.B. KING BLUES

### BAND IS:

B.B. King, Leon Warren, guitar; James Toney, keyboard; Reggie Richards, bass guitar; Stanley Abernathy, trumpet; James Bolden, aka Boogaloo, trumpet; Melvin Jackson, tenor saxophone; Walter King, baritone saxophone; and Caleb Linford Jr., drums

Like A Woman," "Nobody Loves Me But My Mother" and "The Thrill Is Gone." You know that these tunes are because of the children at the show who were just as excited as the parents.

Sarasota showed its love for B.B. and his music last week. It was easy to see and hear why B.B. likes Sarasota because so many members of the audience shouted out their admiration. B.B. responded with his own sign of admiration by placing his hands over his heart as if he were getting one big hug.