

Meet Tony Coleman

By Kurt "Swingcat" Johnson

He's THE MAN with the drums. I'm talking about Tony Coleman, internationally acclaimed drummer and band leader. He's performed in over ninety countries, spent ten years touring nonstop as B.B. King's drummer, recorded with more major R&B and blues artists than any other living drummer and has released several of his own solo CD's. He now lives in Portland, Oregon and is gigging around the area between international tours.

Just this past Fourth of July weekend, Tony performed at Portland's Waterfront Blues Festival both as a mainstage headliner and as host of the drummer's workshop. He's been endorsing major drum gear manufacturers for years, such as Pearl Drums (1978), Sabia Cymbals (1985), Remo Drumheads (1982) and Pearlmark Sticks (1982).

Coleman comes from a family with a long entertainment history. His dad was part of James Brown's touring band and, a featured DJ at the legendary Apollo Theatre and started the dance "The Mashed Potato" which James Brown turned into a number one hit.

Coleman started playing drums at an early age. He talks about how he started drumming, "I always knew I was a drummer and I'd constantly be tapping my foot and naturally progressed from there. I can always remember the melodies and tones in my head." It became second nature and with constant practice he began to play professionally.

Then fortune struck; an opportunity to jam with B.B. King presented itself which led to his becoming the permanent rhythm foundation of B.B. King's band. He tells this story, "I was in a band with Otis Clay. We were on tour with Albert King and Bobby Blue and B.B. We were the opening act. B.B. had a new hit, 'Never make your move too soon', and his band didn't play it too well. We had a jam session and the band wouldn't play without being paid, so we asked if we could use their instruments. B.B. heard us and invited us to tour with him. Later, I joined Bobby Blue Band and after that, went back with B.B. from 1990 through 1999.

While with B.B. King, Coleman observed and learned what it takes to be a great bandleader. He explains, "Basically you don't have an opinion unless asked when working with an artist. There's no crying, you give your best. A lot of musicians don't know how to be a good sideman and don't get gigs because of it. People come out for a good time and don't want to see your unhappy mess because you might be having a bad day." He mentions an important thing he learned from B.B. King directly, "I learned that you don't make excuses. You're there to engage the people and be flexible enough to adapt to changes in the program as the leader dictates. With B.B., he watches the crowd and if one person isn't getting it, he'll do something himself to help that person have a good time."

Coleman started getting the itch to create and perform his own material. He formed his own band, became a bandleader himself and has been touring internationally every since.

He describes some of the responsibilities of being a bandleader, "It's my responsibility to make sure that every musician in my band understands that I'm going to lead them and that I expect them to be as focused on the job as I am. If everyone does that then the people will appreciate the music a lot better. In order to be a good bandleader, you must first be a good follower. I expect people to follow my lead. I may change the songlist on a moments notice, I expect musicians to be flexible enough to adjust. The most important thing is my performance - not for me but for the audience. Deep down, I know I can do better. Some musicians will complain that they played bad. But if the crowd loved it then it was done right!"

He talks about his musical direction within the blues and R&B, "I think the problem with blues music is a lot of the blues musicians don't play anything different. They only play the same songs instead of being

themselves. Younger people don't necessarily relate to older music. You have to make it relevant to today's society. I'm versatile and am able to adapt and apply it to my music. I've played as a drummer for most of my life, playing with the greatest blues musicians. I got tired of that and wanted to be seen and heard like the other musicians."

He talks about his new CD, "I'm going to mix all types of music. More like the Neville Brothers mixed with James Brown and Earth, Wind and Fire." He expects the new CD to be ready by 2007.

He had this advice for aspiring beginners, "Practice until you are good enough to be able to play. Don't go out and embarrass yourself because you can't play well enough. It's just like football or basketball. You have to be good enough to play."

As an internationally acclaimed drummer and bandleader, Tony Coleman has done it all. He has a lot more new and creative ideas to bring to his fans and music lovers all over the world!

Stay tuned, keep listening and pick up a copy of his new CD when it's released!

You can see more of Tony Coleman at his websites, www.tonycolemanmusic.com
www.tonycoleman.fr



Tony Takes A Bow.jpg



Tony On Drums.jpg



Tony's Band.jpg