

★ MOVIES
★ THEATRE
★ DINING

Entertainment

★ DANCING
★ SHOWS
★ LOUNGES

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Soloist Jesse Johnson Prepares For The "Ifs" In Life

By Loretta Manago
Entertainment Editor

The idea of the rock and funk band Time splitting never really affected its lead guitarist, Jesse Johnson. According to him, he has always prepared for the likely and not so likely.

"I always try to think a step or two ahead of myself. I consider, 'What would happen if...?' and try to prepare for those ifs. During that period with the Time, I imagined what I'd do if I wasn't in the band. So I learned about the recording process, especially while working with Prince. I even cut a couple of tracks on my own for the fun of it," responded Johnson.

What Johnson was eventually preparing himself for was for something that he could call his own. "When I left the Time to pursue a solo career, it was simply because I had to do something different, something I would control. I really miss the guys sometimes and I still talk to everybody. But the most fun of all is to do your own thing," reinforced Johnson.

Those days with the Time are ones Johnson isn't soon to forget. "Life with the Time was a lot of hard work and sacrifice, but also tons of fun and everybody made tons of money," stressed Johnson.

His role with the group was not isolated to just that of a guitarist. Johnson was one of the original creative forces behind the current sound and style.

"Prince and Morris Day came to me and we basically started out with an idea of how the band was going to look and what they were going to sound like; what they were going to do on stage. Most of the attention was put on Morris as he was the lead singer, but each member of the band was able to develop his own style of dress, walk and talk."



JESSE JOHNSON

...Embarks on new career

But those days are behind Johnson now. And now the focus is on the present and the Jesse Johnson Revue. Time's loss, in the demise of the aggregation, was A&M's gain. Technically, Johnson is not signed to A&M directly, but records for the label through his JWJ Productions company, which has a deal allowing Johnson to produce other JWJ acts for the label. While he has written for others, right now Johnson's concentration is on the band and its recently debuted album, "The Jesse Johnson Revue."

"The band plays their own parts on the album, but I wrote everything and pretty much arranged the songs so that they are playing my parts." The band

includes recruited members: Mark Cardenas, keyboards; Bobby Vandell, drums; Michael Baker, guitar; Gerry Hubbard, bass; and Brad Marshall, keyboards.

"I think it'll be a fun album to dance to, but I'll let the public decide how good it is, because they're the only critics to me." A little more than a month after "The Jesse Johnson Revue" had been released, the public had already stated their opinion.

The LP was Number One with the music trade magazine, "Radio & Records." He had the top Number Five album in "Billboard Magazine." And for the final touch, his first solo album has already sold over 400,000 albums and has been critically

acclaimed in such magazines as "Rolling Stone," "The Record," "Musicians," and "Billboard."

Where Johnson is today is a stark contrast to his earlier beginnings. "It was a little heavy at times," Johnson stated of his childhood. Born in Illinois, he moved to St. Louis at age nine, to be raised by white foster parents after his father and mother split up. A good student but a loner, he remembers being teased by the other kids because of his foster parents' race. When he was 16, his father came and found him, taking him back to Rock Island, Ill. Only then did music begin to have an impact on his life.

"I got into rock 'n roll when I moved back, just because it was there. There wasn't any black radio in town and there still isn't. It's farm country and real rock 'n roll territory," recalled Johnson.

Picking up the guitar, an instrument his father used to play, Johnson's reputation was soon to spread. While playing with various funk groups like Treacherous Funk and Dealer, Johnson also remembered jamming with guitar players from UFO, AC-DC, Rush, and Molly Hatchet.

Fellow musicians and others kept telling Johnson to go to Minneapolis. After hearing so many people encouraging him towards that direction, Johnson stated: "I didn't know a soul there—I just took the money I'd saved, packed a little suitcase, grabbed my equipment and got on a bus."

That single move took Johnson to the Time and later from the formation of his own group and a hot single, "I Wanna Be Your Man."