

Big Sugar Rush

Big Sugar concert seen through the eyes of a fan

By **STEPHEN McQUAID**

It's September 23. I showed up at the Sports Center at 8:00. Met some friends I didn't know were coming, staked out front stage position.

Pluto started right at 9:00. I'd never heard them before, but they were really good. They should have been on between the Matthew Good Band and Big Sugar, but they don't have as many "hits" as the Matthew Good Band. Kelly and Gavin from Big Sugar were just to my left, watching the whole Pluto set. I think I was the only one who recognized them. They split just before Pluto stopped, around 9:35. Matthew Good Band started around 10:00, and they were pretty good. They did a non-vocal, minute and a half version of "Thunderstruck", and Matt's voice was just as you hear it on the CD.

At about 11:15, Big Sugar hit the stage. In case you don't know, Big Sugar is: Gordie Johnson (guitar), Garry Lowe (bass), Kelly Hoppe (harmonica, keyboards, melodica, saxophone), Gavin Brown (drums). I'm up front. I'm a very happy boy. Garry takes the mic and they start off with "Where I Stand" -- the first cut from their very good and most recent release, *Heated*. They then played two more from this album, "Empty head", and "I'm a Ram".

Man, Big Sugar kicks butt live.

People are shoving, trying to get ahead of us, others are body surfing, and the place goes nuts when they start "Diggin' A Hole".

I couldn't stand the guy next to me. He was trying to shove in front so much, and I think he knew the security guys, so they didn't care. I have no patience for idiots like that. I've seen brighter lights on small appliances compared to these lads. My back was still sore two days later.

Gordie stopped the show for about ten minutes or so, to let everyone calm down, to stop shovin' and body surfin', and then after that, they removed the tables and fences in the front. Have some concert courtesy, folks! Don't just stand there, but think about the people around you!

When the show started back up, they played "Dear Mr. Fantasy." I'm glad they played some of the older songs instead of just the new one and the last album, *Hemi-vision*. From there, the song order gets a bit hazy, but they played "The Scene," "Girl Watcher," "If I had My Way," "Turn the Lights On," "Better Get Used To It," "Cop a Plea," and maybe one or two I've forgotten, and they finished up with the best extended version of "Ride Like Hell" that I have ever heard. Wow.

"Man, Big Sugar kicks butt live"

For the encore they played one very good song that changed in the end. So, really, 2 songs. "Open Up Baby" that turned into "Some Kinda Wonderful". It must have lasted 13-15 minutes. It was their only cover song. They finished up at about 1:10 or 1:15.

I know a couple of people who help manage the band, and know the band, so I managed to get into the reception upstairs afterwards. I had to meet the band finally, so I did a little work on it and got it all arranged. After the show, I went upstairs for the small get-together. Me, a friend, some radio contest winners, and some staff...oh yeah, and Big Sugar! No big crowd. Just some people, pop, chips, and the guys. A little too formal, but nifty nonetheless.

I must say they are all

really cool, somewhat shy, and just really easy-going and friendly. Gordie is as cool as he'd have you believe. There's just no other way to say it. He was so laid back, quiet, and just plain "cool". Same with Garry. I got all their autographs on my new CD, and got to talk with them a bit, and shake their hands. Here's the few little questions I asked, and what they said.

Me (SM), to Gordie: I noticed something on the new CD, on "100 Cigarettes."

-Gordie leans forward, to listen closer.

There's a line in the song that goes something like..."How much longer can I watch my old TV, now that I know how white my shirts could be." And in The Rolling Stones' "Satisfaction," Mick says "...and I'm watchin' my TV, when a man comes on to tell me, how white my shirts could be..." Am I right in saying there's a connection there?

Gordie smiles as I explain that, then calmly laughs and smiles at me... "You've got good ears" He was surprised and happy I mentioned that, I guess. Man, that made me feel good. Gordie Johnson telling me that I've got good ears.

SM: "Congratulations on getting married"

GJ: "Thanks"

SM: "Just a question...did you meet Alex (his wife) before or during the video for Gone For Good?" (*wondering if her all over him started it*)

GJ: "No, I knew Alex way before we did the video."

SM: "When'll you come back to PEI? A year? More?"

GJ: "Oh, no, we'll come back soon, within the year probably."

SM: (Mentally) Wohoo!! That's nice to know.

SM: (*I drum, and have my*

high school music drumming jacket on, and Gavin notices it.) I really like your drum style and technique. It's really different for rock. There's a lot of half rolls, drags, and it's pretty complex: where'd you get your style and influences?

Gavin: It's all jazz. All I listen to is jazz. I played jazz for a long time so that's where I get it from.

Kelly laughs at Gavin saying all he listens to is Jazz, then I talk to Kelly for a second. I ask he and Gavin how they liked Pluto's set, and they say they really enjoyed it. I could tell, back when Pluto was on. They were really into it. As Gavin said, "I love Pluto."

SM, to Kelly: Do you guys have any plans for a live album?

Kelly: No...not really. It's kind of hard to do, to get the sound right, and everything.

SM: You should put out a live one. Your shows are great. All the Big Sugar fans I know are dying to know when you'll put out a live one.

Kelly: Well, actually, yeah, I think we should get around to that sometime. Our fans do really seem to enjoy the live shows.

If you don't know about Big Sugar, get in on them. I can get you started if you want -- tell you about all the different albums, e-mail list, whatever you need to know.

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