

THE BUFFALO NEWS

Entertainment

[Front Page](#) > [Entertainment](#) > [Gusto](#) > [Reviews](#)

James gang

Jony James Band blends passion, power into the blues

By SEAMUS GALLIVAN
Special to The News

10/6/2006



The Jony James Band is set to release its fifth album, "What About Tomorrow."

PREVIEW

WHO:

The Jony James Band

WHEN AND WHERE:

10 p.m. Saturday at Blues Rock Cafe, Lakeview Hotel, 13 Water St., Mayville; 7:30 p.m. Sunday and 9:30 p.m. Thursday at Tudor Lounge, 335 Franklin St.

The best blues music is not played just for kicks. It should always be entertaining, of course, but the blues was born out of the deepest desire to escape from hardship - if only mentally, and merely as a temporary salve for

survival.

It's with the weight of those heaviest of burdens that a fine line is drawn between the carbon-copy booze bands, who merely play the blues, and the artists who are able to use the blues to deliver true feeling from their soul to yours. The Jony James Band falls firmly in the latter, having long since earned the right to coin the term "Survival Blues" to describe its line of work.

Guitarist/singer-songwriter Jony James, bassist Rod Horning and drummer Kent "Boom Boom" Leech can already call themselves the hardest-working band in Buffalo, thanks to nine years of more than 225 gigs a year in town and on the road. They're set to release their fifth album, "What About Tomorrow" (Blue Wave), without any love from major labels or promoters, but with a strong will.

"When I was little, everyone always told me I had it, but I didn't know what the hell they were talking about," said the Buffalo-born James, recalling his days on Chicago's South Side as a green teen with nothing to his name but a guitar. "Sometimes I think I must've lost it, 'cause I'm broke as a joke, and if I had it, I should've gotten paid by now.

"I still don't know," he added, after a hearty laugh and a sobering pause. "All I know is, I've spent my life playin' music. I'd like to be more secure financially, but I've always played music, so I can't complain."

James hit the streets young in Chicago, inspired by B.B. King and Albert King, instructed by Eddie Taylor and Buddy Guy, and intent on playing for a living. He

followed Jimi Hendrix to London, only to arrive to the news of Hendrix's tragic death. All have informed his existential songwriting, which dances between lessons of love and life while constantly questioning the big picture.

"Jimi was a cat that talked a lot about global issues, whereas B.B. and Albert King, and Buddy Guy, they were more personal," he said. "I've always loved both [approaches]."

While James' strong songs and a combination of searing and serene solos have always stirred the soul, "What About Tomorrow" captures the trio's telepathic tempo changes and myriad moods, revealing a band equal parts muscle and finesse that transcends the blues into pure soul music.

"It's a departure - it's not straight blues by any means," James insisted. "But I'm trying to keep the blues roots. Blues is still the ultimate form of expression for the guitar - it's a language of its own, but you can't write it down."

The blues is always evident on the album, but the arrangements are more daring, due in part to their heavily experimental live shows, in which any of the three can take over at any time.

"Sometimes the groove is so heavy, you can feel it," Leech said. "You make a quick left, and everyone makes it with you. I think a lot of those parts came from those real special nights."

"You're grabbing energy out of the crowd when you stretch out, and it's hard to capture that in the studio," Horning added. "We're starting to, but we haven't totally captured it yet."

That's the magic in this band's sound - you can feel the struggle in the group's "Survival Blues," but they approach it with captivating conviction and a constant craving for adventure that allows them to grow with every show.

"We're just beginning to open doors," James said. "There are so many sounds to be found, songs to be written. I feel like we're just at the beginning." •

This material is copyrighted and is for your exclusive personal use only. Republication or other use of this material without the express written consent of The Buffalo News is prohibited. Copyright © 1999 - 2006 The Buffalo News™

