

Atlanta Band Reignites Auburn Avenue's Iconic Blues Music Legacy

Atlanta, November 17, 2016

A couple years ago, the five members of the **Atlanta Blues Society's pick for the prestigious 33rd Annual International Blues Challenge** hadn't even heard of each other. Active in their own right, the guitarist was a metro-Atlanta favorite in Blues circles, the bass player fronted several genre-spanning bands, the keyboard player performed at festivals and soloed at piano bars. The drummer played live and lent his skills to studio recordings of all genres. And the singer, a local history buff and live music superfan, was trying to see if she had the chops to get onstage.

The members of the band **Rae & The Royal Peacocks** met at a Marietta Blues jam. The singer and guitarist hit it off and under his guidance, she dove into the deep end of the Blues pool looking for the perfect sound: upbeat, juke-joint, soulful, irrepressibly danceable. The musical expedition took them from the early underground circuits of Bessie Smith in the 20s and 30s to the smoky 50s and 60s, on into the soulful, funky seventies. **And throughout the decades, Atlanta was steadily at the heart of it all – specifically a “lounge with a stage” owned by a strong woman called Mama Cunningham on Auburn Avenue: The Royal Peacock. The vibe there was pure energy: electric. Fun. Singers, horns, dancers, and emcees to get you laughing and drinking, all while decked out in your finest duds, hair coiffed and ready to be part of the scene.**

From 1949 to when it shut its doors in 1973, The Royal Peacock was the place to be – where to see legends and legends-in-the-making like **Etta James, James Brown, Little Richard, BB King, Howlin' Wolf, Muddy Waters, Big Mama Thornton, the Isley Brothers, Stevie Wonder, Percy Welch, Lavern Baker, Gladys Knight and the Pips, Nat King Cole, Miles Davis, Marvin Gaye, and even Jimmie Hendrix.** “The Apollo Theater of the South” was known to have lines of people--black and white--snaking all the way to Peachtree Street. And once you got in, the music had a force Little Richard said “regenerates the heart and makes the liver quiver, the bladder spatter and the knees freeze.”

When it was time to get a band off the ground, there was no question what the name would be. And not for nothing, its proprietress, a child of former slaves who literally ran away to join the circus before becoming the iconic, statuesque nurturer of artists and entrepreneur, was the heroine they were looking for.

“I'd read about The Royal Peacock and feel drawn to the magic Mama Cunningham had created: you got dressed up for company. You put your “Peacock” on. You got out there and tore the house down with the best musicians around. She took care of the people she worked with like family. You came for the entertainment and you stayed for the love.” – Rebekah Easley, lead singer

It worked. With a setlist that included rearranged versions of Bo Diddley, Ruth Brown and Albert King tunes, Rae & The Royal Peacocks hit the stage at the Hard Rock Café downtown Atlanta and walked away as the judging panel's win in the Band category as well as the audience's People's Choice Award. And in January, they take the show on the road as Atlanta's Band entry to the 33rd International Blues Challenge on legendary Beale Street in Memphis. Sponsored by The Blues Foundation, this competition is the nation's biggest and most respected “Battle of the Bands”.

“It was no surprise that the audience agreed with the judges. They simply dazzled us all.” – Rhetta Akamutsu, Atlanta Blues Society

“Danny Vinson, also of The Cazanovas, on guitar has long been my pick for best guitarist in the Atlanta area, and Art McNaughton on drums and Harold Pattillo on bass and Valerie Waters on keys were equally formidable, but it was their incredible vocalist, Rebekah “Rae” Easley, who sealed the win for them. What a perfect blues soul that woman projects! When she performed...it was as though she was channeling Ruth Brown right there on the stage.” Rhetta Akamutsu, Atlanta Blues Society

See upcoming shows, videos and more at www.theroyalpeacocks.com

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The Blues Foundation: <http://blues.org/>

Atlanta Blues Society: <http://atlantabluesociety.org/ibc-challenge.html>

Royal Peacock venue history/photos: <http://www.matrefineart.com/blog/2016/5/19/the-royal-peacock-atlantas-club-beautiful>

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