

Johnson to make Boston stop as part of Experience Hendrix Tour Nov. 7

New album, 'Up Close,' to be released Dec. 7

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BOSTON — In the five years since his release of the album "Bloom," guitarist Eric Johnson has certainly not rested when it comes to touring, having recently finished performing on the Acoustic Grand Masters Tour. On Tuesday, Johnson began the first leg of the 20-stop Experience Hendrix Tour, with the guitarist being among more than a dozen acts that will appear at each venue, with each performing music written and inspired by Jimi Hendrix.

Among those stops will be a Nov. 7 date at the Orpheum Theatre in Boston at 8 p.m.

Even with extensive experience doing live shows, Johnson voiced how valuable he finds being a part of this latest tour, where performers will take on Hendrix classics like "Purple Haze" and "Red House," among others.

"It's interesting, doing different stuff, playing at these performing art centers, in how you present the music, and are able to honor someone who is a great musician and songwriter in Hendrix," said Johnson during a phone interview Monday. "Even if I play just 12 to 15 minutes, to have all these people come together with their different interpretations, I find it to be a learning experience. It's a focus point that his music is so timeless, and it proliferates his legacy."

With the likes of Living Colour and Brad Whitford of Aerosmith also performing during the Experience Hendrix Tour, the guitarist and recording artist from Austin, Texas won't be stepping on stage as a lone performer during the tour.

"I'll play with Chris Layton (of Double Trouble) on drums and Scott Nelson on bass selecting a few Hendrix pieces, and that's pretty much my deal," said Johnson. "And every once in a while, I'll jam with someone else."

While having admitted recently that playing well live "doesn't come real easy to me," Johnson noted that with time, that has become less of a challenge.

"The more you play, the more you rehearse, you end up getting stronger," said Johnson. "Playing



Courtesy photo

The Orpheum Theatre, located in Boston, will be one stop on the Experience Hendrix Tour, on Nov. 7 at 8 p.m.

in front of people, you fill in the blanks, where when playing by yourself, it doesn't necessarily come together. Having more practice and flushing it out, and not worrying about the peripheral things helps as well."

The tour will make its final stop in Indianapolis on Nov. 20, a couple of weeks short of the Dec. 7 release of his latest album, "Up Close," which will feature 15 tracks, of which 14 are new Johnson compositions, to go with his version of the Electric Flag song, "Texas."

In deciding what songs to include on it, Johnson said, "I've been working on them a long time, as many fell by the way side. When I started the record, though, it was business as usual, being at the studio laboring over it."

That's nothing new for an artist who in the 32 years since completing his first solo album, "Seven Worlds," will have "Up Close" becoming just his sixth. Among those songs that "fell by the way side," before finding a new life on "Up Close," was the album's second track, "Fat Daddy."

"That one I started on years ago, but never finished," said Johnson. "When I was beginning to record (the album), it was an afterthought. As I finished (the album) off, I cut (Fat Daddy) pretty quick. I added it because I thought the pace of the album was kind of sleepy to me."

Taking a different tack from previous albums, though, Johnson found that the pace of production for "Up Close" had "changed to where I felt I didn't have to hold on so tight onto it, so I could open up to the other possibilities."

Not that the guitarist didn't start from an extensive library of song choices to begin with. Johnson started by writing 25 songs for the new album, of which 18 were then recorded, before whittling it down to a dozen, after which he chose to add a couple

more to arrive at the final number.

In talking about why certain songs failed to make the cut, Johnson said, "I think that definitely there are many reasons why something doesn't come together, either it doesn't come in at the right tempo, or the band members didn't come together, sometimes you can't find the sweet spot or there are other reasons. Many times the song simply isn't good, even though you think you can make it better."

With Johnson having earned his share of critical acclaim over the years, arriving at new material as a songwriter to keep the critics and masses content is an never-ending challenge, Johnson noted.

"I think it is being true to yourself, so to inspire yourself, as you are reinvesting your passion," said Johnson. "Then you will come upon stuff that you will approve of."

For as much recognition as Johnson may get for his talents on guitar, his latest studio album also provided an opportunity to play some piano and provide some vocals, which he handled for the songs, "Soul Surprise," "Arithmetic," "A Change Has Come to Me," and "Your Book."

"I do want to keep the guitar at the forefront, have it be powerful, but I don't want to sacrifice the delicate balance. It is a talent sometimes, to make sure the pendulum swings both ways, to go with some interesting guitar playing that doesn't sacrifice the song. On most of my records, there is some work (on piano), with it being ensemble kind of playing."

While Johnson has, over his 40-plus years as a musician — dating back to his days with the band Mariani in the late 1960s — had a strong focus on performing rock and blues tunes, "Up Close" goes beyond that in offering a variety of music styles.

"I think, really, it is for me as liberating to not stick to one style," said Johnson. "At the same time, I think that from the marketing and business end, it might be better having a real focus and be more defined. Even so, I want to keep my passion in music at an optimal level of enjoyment, while having that level of versatility."

Not only did the album provide a range of styles, Johnson noted, but the opportunity has also been there to do it live

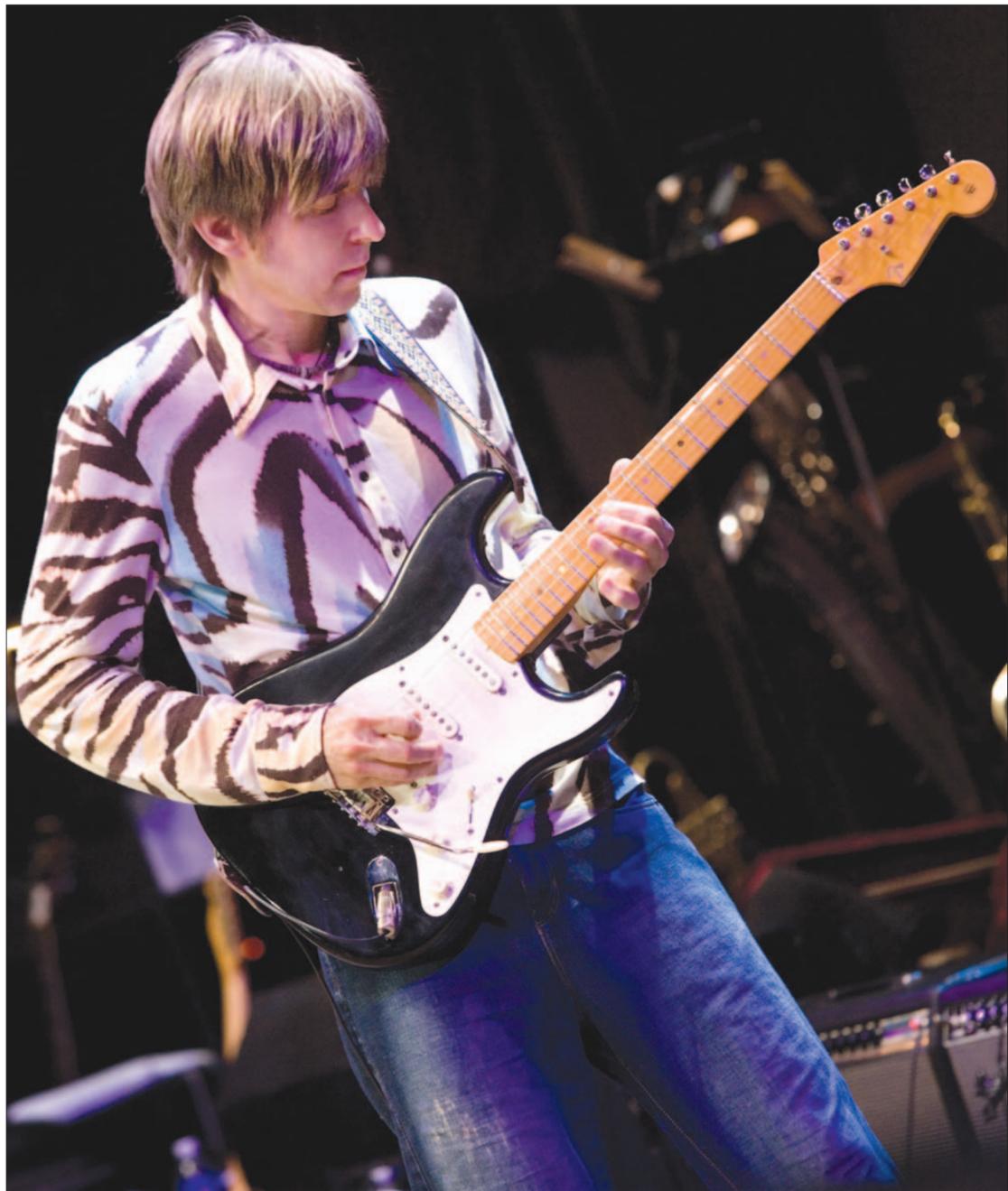


Photo courtesy of MAX CRACE

Eric Johnson plays the guitar during a performance at The Grove in Anaheim, Calif. in on May 3, 2006. Johnson will be making a stop in Boston as part of the Experience Hendrix Tour on Nov. 7, and will have his latest studio release, "Up Close," hitting store shelves on Dec. 7.

recently via the Grand Masters Tour, playing folk, classical and bluegrass music, to go with an expected full dose of blues on the Hendrix tour.

While it was cited in a recent press release about "Up Close" that the album is the "most daring" work for Johnson, while also being "at times raw" and "fervent," he said, "There are things that were recorded a little more raw than usual, and there were also some situations where it didn't have the fervent vibe, and I had other people come in and sing."

Among those to contribute on vocals on the album are Steve Miller and Johnny Lang, while Jimmie Vaughan and Sonny Landreth also contribute their talents on guitar for some tracks as well.

Where in the past, Johnson admitted to having a "high benchmark" in working to complete an album, he said the occasional situation of having others sing on "Up Close," amounted to, "What's the big deal, as I realized there's maybe another way to have that energy. It is only part of the big puzzle, and there is no reason for (not having someone else sing on) that one piece to begin freaking out."

One of the more notable things Johnson cited about "Up Close," when discussing how the album is seen as offering lyrical themes of reflection, emotional

revelations, personal growth and fulfillment, he said, "It was a process of trying to be a little bit more personal, instead of writing lyrics that are a little more third-person and bringing more to the table. The subject matter (on the album) is more self-realization, to different levels of waking up from our slumber, or at least trying to."

With "Up Close" being Johnson's eighth solo album, the artist most recognized for his Grammy-nominated platinum album, "Ah Via Musicom," released in 1990, which included the Grammy-winning song, "Cliffs of Dover," Johnson didn't seem bothered about the notion that in every venue that he performs his songs at, there is an expectation that most in the audience will not allow the night to end until the last measures of "Cliffs" echoes off the walls.

"It comes with the territory. You could have worse problems, and I don't see that as a bad thing," said Johnson. "I see it that artists also have to take a responsibility for that as well, and I have to come up with songs that catch the attention of the fans."

"Up Close" will be the second album to come out on Johnson's own label, Vortexian Music, with it being the first to where he has paired up with EMI to handle the distribution of the album. The

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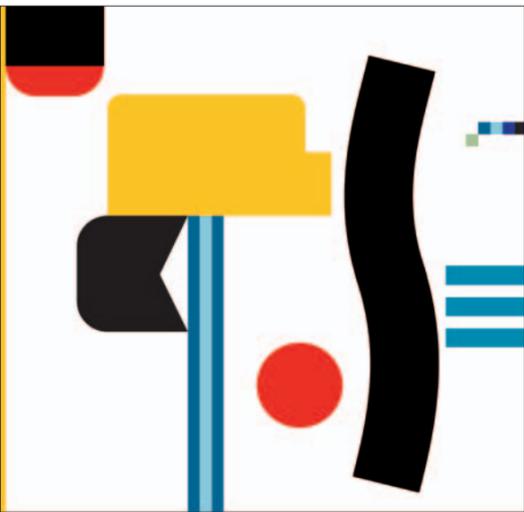
— Eric Johnson

partnership isn't altogether new, as EMI released his two best commercial successes, "Ah Via Musicom," and "Venus Isle," during the 1990s.

"This is kind of a compromise, but if you go too much to your own label, it can be kind of challenging to get out there and be known," said Johnson. "When you sign a record deal, you are kind of sacrificing yourself, so this is the best of both worlds."

For Johnson fans wanting to hear some of the latest tracks from "Up Close," live, the wait will likely have to be until the early part of 2011. With the Experience Hendrix Tour running through next month, after which Johnson will take part in an eight-stop acoustic tour through California in January, he said, "From there, I'll group up the band together and support what is coming out then."

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Courtesy illustration

The album cover for "Up Close," Eric Johnson's sixth studio album, which will be released on Dec. 7.