



Jim Beal: Get your blues back

Web Posted: 07/13/2006 12:00 AM CDT

San Antonio Express-News

It's a celebratory weekend with CD-release parties, a sort of bon voyage gathering and more.

Seth/Elana/Casbeers

Two big problems in the blues world these days are lack of imagination and new material. With too many rehashed classics and loud, over-the-top guitar slingers, fans appear to be staying away from the blues in droves.

Guitarist, singer and songwriter **Seth Walker** and his band offer a hip, soulful, swinging antidote to noisy clichés. The Austin-based North Carolina native has been doing it up right with a sound that deftly mixes New Orleans and Kansas City jump blues, T-Bone Walker-influenced Texas blues and a large dose of originality.

Two years ago, Walker took something of a detour toward Americana with the "On the Outside" CD. But he and the band are back on the blues track with the new "Seth Walker" (Pacific Blues) CD. Walker and the band, Lindsay Greene (bass), Stefano Intelisano (keyboards) and Mark Hays (drums), will celebrate its release Friday night at Casbeers and at 5 p.m. Sunday at Gruene Hall.

"Seth Walker," built on a mix of ballads and jump, features an imaginative array of songs: Walker originals, co-writes with other band members and carefully selected covers by Jimmy Reed, Tom Waits, James Hunter and Dave Bartholomew. Only the most rabid record collectors could differentiate the covers from the originals, which means that Walker and the band know well how to make their repertoire their own.

Walker, a fine guitarist who uses chops instead of volume to get his points across, and the band give the blues a much-needed dose of fresh music, hot songs and passion. And, with "2' Left to the Ceiling" (Hays/Walker), they've turned in one of the most compelling Katrina songs. If you walked away from the blues, Walker can help you stroll back.