

'INFERNO' READY TO IGNITE

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MONDAY, JANUARY 23, 2017 • SECTION BL

SOUTHSIDE HEADS NORTH



JEFF DALY/INVISION/AP
Southside Johnny performs at the Semholle Hard Rock Hotel and Casinos' Hard Rock Live! on March 7, 2013 in Hollywood, Fla.

Southside Johnny returns to North Jersey, baring soul

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Hard to believe that Southside Johnny, one of the key architects of the Jersey Shore sound, didn't always live within sight of a boardwalk. ♦ But for the record: The surf wasn't always his turf. "I've lived in a lot of places - Delaware, California, Nashville," says "Southside Johnny" Lyon, who's been living for the last 10 years in the town he grew up in, Ocean Grove. ♦ As a matter of fact, he lived for a while in Ridgewood - don't ask him precisely when. "You got me," he says. "I'm trying to think of when it was. I think it was the '80s. Early '80s, late '80s, I don't know." See **SOUTHSIDE**, Page **2BL**

MUSIC

WHAT: Southside Johnny & The Asbury Jukes, with special guest The Gary Douglas Band

WHEN: 8 p.m. Saturday

WHERE: bergenPAC, 30 N. Van Brunt St., Englewood, 201-227-1030 or bergenpac.org

HOW MUCH: \$29 to \$79

Southside

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But it does remind him of an incident—one with relevance to his career. In 1986, Southside Johnny & The Asbury Jukes released their cover version of “Walk Away Renee,” a song that’s been associated with the band ever since. And it so happened that the originator of that song, baroque-rock icon Michael Brown (he recorded it in 1966 with his band The Left Banke; it became a Billboard No. 5 hit) was living in Bergen County at the same time as Lyon. Only Brown, an Englewood Cliffs resident until his death in 2015, had a reputation as a recluse. Several years after the Jukes released their version of “Walk Away Renee,” there was a curious sequel.

“One day I’m in the kitchen making stuff, and I hear someone scrabbling at the front door,” Lyon recalls. “I get out, and a car pulls away. In the mailbox is a tape from Michael Brown of some other songs. He didn’t say ‘Hi’ or anything like that. And there was no return address. What a strange thing that was.”

In fact the songs were pretty good, Lyon remembers, though he never ended up doing them. “I would have liked to talk to him, because I really liked a lot of his songs,” Lyon says. “It’s strange. He was very reclusive.”

Lyon and the boys will be back in this area on Saturday when they’ll conjure up their portable party on the stage of Englewood’s bergenPAC (The Gary Douglas Band opens). Expect anything from signature tunes like “Talk to Me,” “I Don’t Want to Go Home” or “Having a Party” to songs from his roof-raising last album, “Soultime!” (2015). “Some of the old stuff, and then some other stuff,” he says. “I have no idea. You know me, I don’t know what I’m going to do. It just kind of happens.”

In 2017, Southside Johnny needs no more introduction than Bruce Springsteen or Jon Bon Jovi, the other two big names in the triumvirate of Jersey rockers. Though Lyon, ultimately, did not have the over-the-top success of the other two, his cult following is in some ways even more fanatical: There are people who will tell you that one “Hearts of Stone” is worth a dozen “Born to Run” or “Bad Medicine.”

And of course, Lyon came out of the same Jersey Shore stew of the late ‘60s/early ‘70s that produced Springsteen. As a matter of fact, it was in a short-lived early 1970s band with Springsteen, Dr. Zoom & The Sonic Boom (Steven Van Zandt, Garry Tallent, David Sancious and Vini Lopez were also members) that Johnny Lyon acquired the handle “Southside Johnny.”

“Everyone had to have a nickname, and somehow I ended up being ‘Southside Johnny,’ because I was playing Chicago blues, which is from the Southside of Chicago,” he says. “Gary became ‘Funky,’ because he was the funky low end. And Steven became — what was it? — ‘Miami Steve.’ And Bruce was Dr. Zoom. I think he gave himself that name. It’s the kind of thing he would do.”

His own band, Southside Johnny & The Asbury Jukes, recording since 1976, has gone through several incarnations — they’ve released something like 40 albums — but the basics have remained the same: Lyon’s powerhouse vocals and blues harp, a rockin’ rhythm section, lots of horns (typically) and lots of party-hearty attitude. In fact, it was a little impromptu party — in a supermarket, of all places — that inspired his most recent Jukes release, “Soultime!”

“It was in the liquor department of the Stop & Shop in Neptune City,” he says. “I was in there ... and ‘Superfly’ came on — Curtis Mayfield, with the great bass riff and the horns. And I saw all the people bobbing ... And I thought, ‘That’s what I’m supposed to be doing next. I’m supposed to be making music that people will hear that makes them feel good, that makes them want to move.’ That was the inspiration for that whole record.”

Not least because of the new album, the Jukes are working more than ever,



HANDOUT PHOTO

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SOUTHSIDE JOHNNY

Lyon says — which means that he’s had to put several other projects, including a “chamber” band, The Poor Pools, on the slow track. “It’s mostly the Jukes right

now,” he says. “We’ve got an enormous amount of work this year. I do want to make another album with The Poor Pools. But I’m also working on a Billie Holiday album with another band. ... There are so many things I want to do still. I went through periods where I had so much time I didn’t know what I wanted to do. Now I want to do all these things, and I don’t have time. That’s the way it usually is, I guess.”

The 11 tracks on “Soultime!” (Lyon and keyboardist Jeff Kazee share writing honors; Jack Nicholson is credited on a couple of tracks) channel the late-peri-

od soul of Curtis Mayfield, Bobby Womack and others in tunes like “Spinning,” “Ain’t Nobody’s Bizness” and the instrumental “Klank.” “That’s the kind of music I haven’t explored a lot, that kind of groove soul, so that’s what I thought we’d try,” he says. “I thought, let’s have some fun, and have something you can move to.”

A happy album, in short, for a time when we could probably all use a little cheering up. “This is the kind of music you put on when you want to feel better, when you want to forget all the problems of the world,” he says.