

# JAMMIN' WITH JR.

*by Harry Funk Washinton Obsever Rpporter*



Since he first strapped on a guitar, **Tony Janflone Jr.** probably has heard comments about following in his father's footsteps.

True, Tony Sr. has for a long time been regarded as one of the Pittsburgh area's premiere jazz guitarists. But Tony Jr. has established his own reputation as a virtuoso player in the blues-rock vein, and one heck of a showman, to boot.

His shows at at the **Blues Cafe** on Pittsburgh's South Side, where he and his band have had a Sunday residency for many years, serve as ample demonstration.

The venue has an unusual configuration: The band and its equipment are perched on a loft overlooking the bar area, not the best arrangement for audience members to see what the musicians are doing.

"That's OK. I play on top of the bar," Tony told me before the latest show.

And so he did, with a wireless microphone and guitar pickup transmitting signals up to the loft. The sound emitting from the speakers is sufficient for Tony to keep everything together without the benefit of monitors, and he pulls it off in a confident, comfortable manner.

The rather unconventional setup certainly is no hindrance to his dexterous guitar playing, which is a product of a variety of influences. He mentions Tony Sr., of course, and **George Benson**, along with a couple of other jazz legends:

"My dad's favorite two musicians were **John Coltrane** and **Wes Montgomery**," he says. "I remember walking around the house singing 'A Love Supreme,'" Coltrane's mid-'60s masterwork.

From the rock music end of the spectrum come influences from the classic players: **Hendrix, Beck, Clapton, Vaughan**, with guitarists like **Joe Satriani** and **Steve Vai** for good measure.

Matter of fact, Tony is one of the featured players on "Lords of Karma: A Tribute to Vai/Satriani," a **Versailles Records** release that also boasts such well-regarded axemen as **George Lynch, Brad Gillis, Bruce Kulick** and Jake E. Lee. Tony performs a Vai composition, "Tender Surrender," that requires a great deal of skill to execute, and he plays all the instruments except drums (handled by Rick Dickerson), to boot.

"**Guitar One** (magazine) reviewed the album and picked my cut as their favorite cut," Tony says, with the added bonus that it helped him land an endorsement deal with **Dillion Guitars**, a company based in New York.

"They're really well-made instruments, very affordable," he says. "These things hold up really well. My instrument, in a show - it takes a beating."

On Sunday's show, he ripped it up through renditions of such tunes as **Cream's** "Badge," **Robert Johnson's** "Sweet Home Chicago" (featuring a nimble bass solo from longtime collaborator George Elliot, another Washington County guy), the **Beatles'** "Eight Days a Week"

(with plenty of audience participation), the **Rolling Stones'** "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction" (lead vocal by keyboard player Richard Everett) and Tony's original "Crocodile Tears" (with drummer Jack Mrozowski in a prominent role).

(Tony's other band member is Curtis Swift, who's been blowing a mean saxophone with him for eight years.)

His band recorded a CD, "Live at the Blues Cafe," at the venue a few years ago, including a blisering version of the rock standard "Hey Joe" and Jimi's "The Wind Cries Mary." Tony says he has other projects in the works, including a Christmas album "hopefully for next Christmas," and is doing studio and production work with other artists.

He also is featured on a couple of other Versailles tribute albums: "What's Love?" (Tina Turner) and "Always" (**Bon Jovi**). On the latter, he performs "Wanted: Dead or Alive."

"That's probably my favorite Bon Jovi tune," Tony says. "That's a classic guitar lick."

Tony delivers plenty of classic licks of his own, and his shows are highly entertaining and highly recommended. Along with the regular Sunday shows, he's playing closer to his hometown in the next couple of weeks, including Nov. 23 (the day before Thanksgiving) at Jay's Sportsbar in Southpointe, and Dec. 9 at Rinky Dink's Roadhouse in Amity.

In the meantime, you can pick up Wednesday's Observer-Reporter to read my column (page B1) about efforts to have Tony's band play its stellar rendition of "The Star-Spangled Banner" at next year's Major League Baseball All-Star Game at PNC Park.

PHOTOS: Live at Blues Cafe are 1) Tony, 2) George, 3) Richard, 4) Curtis. (Sorry, it was tough shooting into that loft, so none of Jack ...)