

## MUSIC REVIEW: Blues Traveler's John Popper performs at The Cabot in Beverly

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In a similar vein to songwriting icons such as Ray Davies and John Sebastian, Blues Traveler's John Popper, known best for his distinctive lead vocals and trademark harmonica sound, played the role of solo musician-storyteller Friday night at the Cabot Performing Arts Center in Beverly.

Upon taking the stage accompanied by pianist Ben Wilson, Popper displayed his characteristic witty humor by telling the crowd they were "absolutely [expletive] awesome," a sentiment he would repeat numerous times during the show, and "if anyone wants to buy one of my books, I'll sign it for them. See, you're applauding me for selling you stuff, that's how cool you are."

The 50-year-old Popper was plugging his 2016 autobiography "Suck and Blow: And Other Stories I'm Not Supposed to Tell."

Later in the show, he mentioned that Blues Traveler were celebrating their 30th anniversary together and are due to release their 13th album in February. The group's last release, "Blow Up the Moon," hit the stores in 2015.

When someone in the crowd hollered out that the band was getting older, Popper responded, "we're not getting old, we are old."

Blues Traveler's self-titled debut came out back in 1990. Their breakthrough came in 1994 with the album "Four" and the band's fortunes ascended even more three years later with "Straight On till Morning." Both releases were platinum sellers and Blues Traveler had established themselves as one of the top rock acts in America.

Though Popper has done some solo work, Friday's show almost exclusively showcased Blues Traveler material.

“What’s nice about doing a show this way is that you get to talk a little bit about the songs you write,” he commented before delving into a version of “Look Around.”

While engaging in some good-natured, back-and-forth bantering with the audience, Popper was part stand-up comedian and appeared right at home in the intimate Cabot setting while offering several funny narratives during his 12-song set. Before performing a version of “Carolina Blues,” he suggested the song was about a time when he “got punched in the face.”

Musically, Popper’s riveting harmonica and unique vocals were as good as ever. His interludes on the harmonica received loud roars of admiration and his narrative accounts incorporated quirky subjects such as famous beer brewer Adolph Coors, J.F.K and Disney Land.

Even a brief uncomfortable moment when Popper accidentally unhooked his microphone connection during one of his harmonica solos didn’t deter in any way from the proceedings.

Wilson’s backup work on the piano added to the beauty of the tunes performed, including well-known Blues Traveler classics “Hook,” “But Anyway” and “Run-Around.” In particular, Wilson’s segue into “Run-Around” got the crowd on its feet in anticipation.

Popper also played a song from the upcoming album as well as notables “Regarding Steven,” “Sweet Pain” and “The Mountains Win Again.”

Before exiting, Popper laughingly reiterated that he would sign items - “anything, as long as it’s within legal bounds.”

He performed an encore featuring John Lennon’s “Imagine” with singer-songwriter Katrina Woolverton, who opened the show. As the song concluded, Popper tossed his collection of harmonicas to the fans.

During her performance, Woolverton expressed her reverence for the historic Cabot venue, saying “This place is so beautiful. I was told the community came together to save this place. How cool is that?”

Along with performing a few of her own pieces, including love songs “Hold Me Down” and “Better Now,” Woolverton performed Willie Nelson’s “Crazy” and honored the late Leon Russell by playing a nice rendition of Russell’s “A Song For You.”