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Review/Pop; Johnny Copeland's Blues

By PETER WATROUS

LEAD: If the Texan singer and guitarist Johnny Copeland was at all embarrassed about singing "We're going to party till the cows come home" at the Lone Star Roadhouse on Saturday night - to an audience half his age and cultures apart - he didn't show it. Mr. Copeland, who was a journeyman singer of soul, blues and rhythm and blues for much of his career until he was discovered by white audiences in the early 1980's, isn't the sort to let meditation get in the way of a frenetic, clattering performance.

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And while frenetic performances at their best can turn an audience into a single well-meaning organism, it can at times seem forced, the smile slightly askew. Mr. Copeland, though he was singing his laments well (and the fact that he could turn "I want to party" into the sound of real emotion proved it) seemed caught by his freneticism. Stalking the stage, guitar out at an angle, he gave the impression not of a predator freed, but a predator caged.

The show opened with Johnny Johnson, the great blues and boogie pianist who greatly influenced the sound and feel of many of Chuck Berry's best hits. Mr. Johnson, a burly man with workingman's hands, constructs each chorus of a blues piece as a new statement, with exclamations, asides and afterthoughts all woven into the text. He was backed by a decent band that shuffled when it was supposed to and swung when it meant to (Mr. Johnson seemed particularly happy with the 21-year-old drummer Orris (Scooter) Warner's explosions. But Mr. Johnson was forced to fight the flattened-can sound of an electric piano, which turned everything but his iron trills into mud, and demeaned his talent.