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ONE DOLLAR

## A Guitarist Pulls the Audience's Strings

By JON PARELES

There's nothing humble about Buddy Guy, who turned a history-lesson concert into performance art on Friday night, when he headlined "Legends of the Blues" at Avery Fisher Hall. The concert was a conscientious event, presented by Q104.3 (WAXQ-FM), a classic-rock radio station that rarely if ever plays unvarnished blues.

Mr. Guy took the stage after a string of bluesmen who traced the trajectory of the blues from the Mis-

### 'Legends of the Blues'

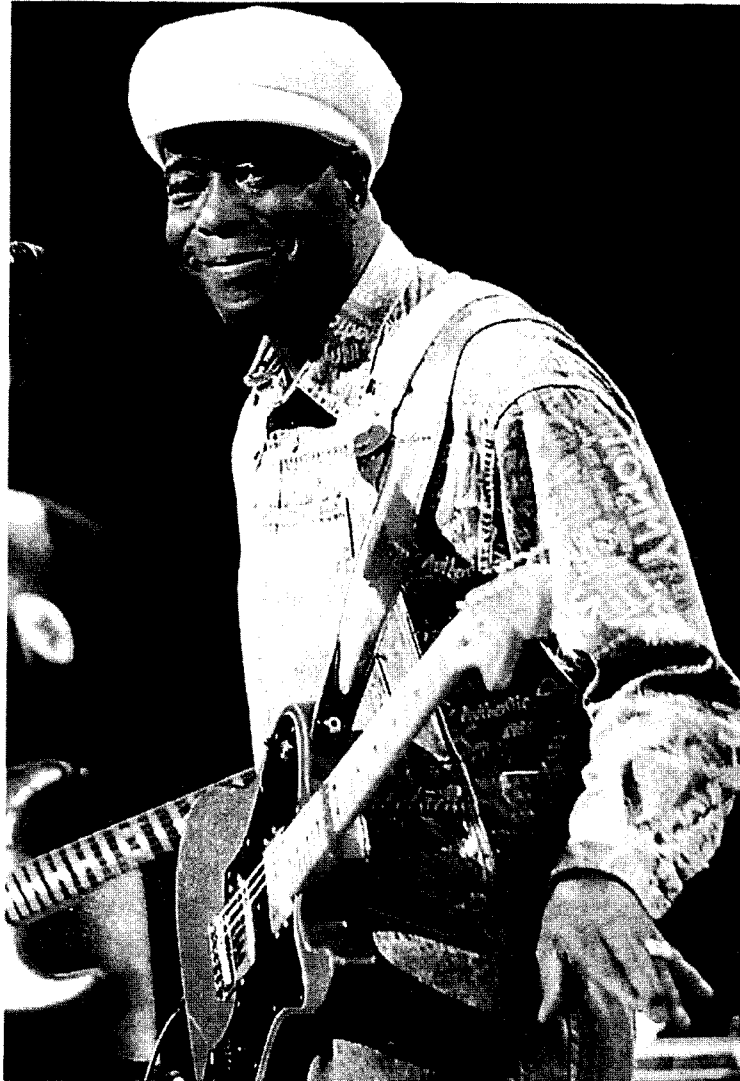
Avery Fisher Hall

issippi Delta to Chicago, including short sets by David (Honeyboy) Edwards, Robert Lockwood Jr. and groups of former members of the Howlin' Wolf Band and the Muddy Waters Band. Mr. Guy's band backed up Little Milton, who brought a touch of Memphis to the concert, before Mr. Guy strolled out, midsong, and took over.

Mr. Guy, 68, mingles anarchy, virtuosity, deep blues and hammy shtick in ways that keep all eyes on him, including those of his band, which follows through on every whim. He likes to complain about concert-hall curfews, then stretch out his songs. He likes to bring on guests — John Mayer on Friday night — and make them follow his cues. Most of all, he loves extremes: sudden drops from loud to soft, or a sweet, sustained guitar solo followed by a jolt of speed, or a high, imploring vocal cut off with a rasp.

He played much of Friday's set with his band banked down to pianissimo and his guitar nearly as quiet, as if he were squeezing each exquisitely shaped phrase through a pinhole. Every so often he would stroll to the edge of the stage to sing without the microphone, making everyone in the hall lean forward to listen. Whether he's singing with gentle menace or bending new curves into a blue note, he is a master of tension and release, and his every wayward impulse was riveting.

Mr. Guy's volatility upstaged the considered, fine-tuned blues of Little Milton, who sang long-suffering love songs punctuated by neatly turned guitar solos. Warren Haynes (of the Allman Brothers Band and Gov't Mule), sat in on slide guitar, with wailing solos that made Little Milton



Rahav Segev for The New York Times

Buddy Guy brought anarchy and virtuosity to the stage on Friday night.

### All eyes, especially the band members', trained on Buddy Guy.

sound even more fastidious.

The Muddy Waters Band was dominated by James Cotton on harmonica, bounding around the stage and turning his harmonica into a wordless moan, a horn section, a huffing kind of percussion or a train whistle. The band sounded taut and feral whether it was backing him or George (Mojo) Buford, who belted with some of Mr. Waters's gusto. Mr. Cotton, Bob Margolin on guitar and

Pinetop Perkins on piano (who, at 91, is receiving a lifetime achievement Grammy this year) shared the little riffs between vocal lines as if they were a single instrument.

For the rest of the concert, the blues sounded more like a cozy museum piece than a cry of pain or an exultant taunt. The Howlin' Wolf Band, led by Eddie Shaw and his honking tenor saxophone, was loose and sloppy, although Henry Gray on piano brought some two-fisted Louisiana style to the songs and Jody Williams on guitar added a touch of country. Mr. Edwards, 89, and Mr. Lockwood, 86, who both knew the fabled Mississippi bluesman Robert Johnson, had faded voices but spiky guitars.