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Belly Up: Jacob Johnson's Birthday Show @ Moe Joe Coffee

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Posted:

As Jacob Johnson prepares to take the stage at Moe Joe Coffee to celebrate his own 30th birthday, the rest of us should take a moment of appreciation for his grandmother, parents, and Willie Nelson as they are much of the reason the show is happening in the first place.

Like many stories of one's formative years, Johnson's musical journey began with a little help from grandma. She played in pickup bands in the 1940s, playing with the likes of the Texas Troubadour Ernest Tubb and Hank Snow when they would appear in the area. She always had a guitar around and taught Johnson his first chords when he was a kid.

When he was 12, Johnson had the good fortune to find himself at a Willie Nelson show where Nelson sprinkled in influential covers along with his own classic material. "That's where I first heard of Django Rinehardt" Johnson recalls as he speaks of the influential Gypsy jazz guitar master. The next thing he knew "I was checking out Django Rinehardt tapes from the library". Not a lot of us can claim seeing a legend like Willie or knowing who Rinehardt was at

the age of 12 but fortunately for the rest of us, this turned out to be "a very formative evening" for Johnson.

Johnson's played music through high school with various bands through high school but it was not until college before he really got to know the acoustic guitar and started writing music for himself. Eventually, music became his top priority with school becoming a distant afterthought. "I finished college in three years. I didn't graduate, but I was finished," he says with a laugh.

One would expect that since the dean of the university is Johnson's father, it would have been difficult to make such a move. In this case, though, he had the full support of his parents. "Music was going in a certain direction and I knew what that direction was. College didn't really have any direction." Fortunately his parents saw this as clearly as he did and encouraged his musical journey as much then as now.

"Music is a gift and if you have it, you have to use it," he says as he explains his dedication to his craft. It is a bit of an understatement because Johnson is as gifted a musician you will find in Upstate today.

He modestly refers to himself as "a ham that just wants to be on stage" but he is much more than that. He is an amazingly talented guitarist and songwriter which combines with a bit of a "hamish" personality making for a wildly impressive (and at times, hilarious) stage performance.

The result of it all is a sound that Johnson describes as "neo-acoustic folk/funk" which is both a surprisingly accurate description of his style and a "great way to trick people into listening" without any predisposition about what they are about to hear.

Tomorrow night he will take the stage for a birthday show which is a new sort of adventure for him. "I've never been too great with birthdays- but this seemed like a nice excuse to get the band together." Appearing as The Jacob Johnson Trio, he will be joined by John Henry ("a bad, bad dude from Atlanta") and Mark Eshenbaugh ("one of the most gifted musicians I have ever met"). The late set will see Johnson's friend and frequent song-writing partner Gray Lee jump in for a bit as well. Local vocalist and loop pedal extraordinaire, Bearby, will kick things off for the evening.

In off stage news, we are coming into the final days of Johnson's "Djake Plays Django" Kickstarter campaign.

As Rinehardt was one of his earliest influences, Johnson is teaming with childhood friend, artist and owner of Olde Soul Print Shop, Zach Landrum, for a unique album release. The project will see a limited edition vinyl record release featuring Johnson covering Rinehardt with artwork, a screenprint and posters designed by Landrum to accompany the record. Old and new fans of Jacob Johnson, Django Rinehardt, or music in general will definitely want to have a look at this.

In the meantime, clear your Friday calendar for an entertaining night of music with The Jacob Johnson Trio- and don't forget to wish him a happy birthday.

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