



## Guitars All Night In Illinois

David Tronzo played slide guitar with just about everything but the kitchen sink at the Wall to Wall Guitar Festival, which ran from Sept. 29–Oct. 2 at the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts in Urbana, Ill. His evening concert, *Masters of the Slide Guitar*, also featured Daniel Lanois on steel pedal guitar, lap steel guitarist Cindy Cashdollar and Telecaster-whiz Redd Volkaert. Tronzo altered the frequency spectrum on his guitar with a menagerie of lost objects, including an old Smokehouse Almonds can, alligator clips, corks floating within the strings and paper cups floating on the ends of chicken satay skewers rammed between the strings at the bridge.

Later on, Tronzo reunited with his partner from Spanish Fly, slide trumpeter Steven Bernstein and his Sex Mob band. Tronzo's guitar playing slithered and yipped joyously while Briggan Krauss' alto saxophone cooked at a slow burn. Tony Scherr's elastic and delirious and upright bass playing wove a tight groove with Kenny Wollensen's stealthy drums. On "Call To The Freaks," Bernstein's horn careened from searing to splattering in a series of squeaks that polished all the glass windows in the house. Vernon Reid joined the group on stage for an

unexpected, funk-ed-out rendition of "America The Beautiful."

Another highlight of the Wall to Wall evening concerts was "The Traveling Blues," which featured Taj Mahal, Rory Block and Malian kora player Mamadou Diabate. Taj Mahal performed a special concert earlier that afternoon for schoolchildren who had responded with a G-force blast of enthusiasm to his funky, bluesy rendition of the traditional song, recorded on his *Shake Sugaree* disc. His tender version of Mississippi John Hurt's "My Creole Belle," delivered with a Caribbean groove, was one song that crossed over to his play list for the grownups.

Block tore into a soulful set that included songs by Robert Johnson and Tommy Johnson and her own aching tune "Mamma's Blues." Another highlight of her set was an a cappella performance of the gospel song "Ain't No Grave Can Hold My Body Down." The sweeping range of her voice elicited a collective chill of awe from the audience.

Two other crowd-pleasing performers got together for an impromptu jam session at the Lincoln Hotel, which most concertgoers missed because of the 2:30 a.m. start time. Inspired by



the similarities between flamenco and West African music, Juan Martin and Diabate took over the hotel lobby's Victorian parlor to the delight of a few insomniacs. Their enthusiasm for playing together and the musically intimate environment made for some serious witching hour magic.

—Julia Crowe