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MUSIC

KID ROCK, NEWSTED RIDE GOV'T MULE

By ROBIN A. SCHUMAN
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"I'm gonna be the bass player in the Mule," former Metallica bassist Jason Newsted informed *Rolling Stone* in mock confidence yesterday after joining the band at New York's Beacon Theater. "Nobody else knows yet. They don't even know yet," he admitted, pointing to singer/guitarist Warren Haynes and drummer Matt Abts. "I'll tell them later."

Turns out they do know. Newsted is scheduled to play with the band for the next four nights — Ann Arbor, Michigan, on Thursday; Chicago on Friday; Minneapolis on Saturday; and Madison, Wisconsin, on Sunday. But for the event at hand, he was simply one of several high-profile guests to appear in the second half of a performance that, by intermission, had already sufficiently delivered.

With a primary lineup of part-timers Dave Schools (bass, Widespread Panic) and Danny Louis (keyboards, Allman Brothers Band) and permanent members Haynes and Abts, the familiar foursome hit many Mule staples during the hour-long first set. The band kicked off the concert with a taste of Frank Zappa's "Pygmy Twylite" into Mule's own "Blind Man in the Dark." From there, they moved expertly from one rocker to another — "Bad Little Doggie," "Lay Your Burden Down," and the full-on rhythmic assault of "Thoraxine Shuffle," which prompted Haynes to spontaneously sing, "Tell me who's on the phone." Without hesitation the audience replied in deafening unison, "Matt Abts!"

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While Haynes' guitar playing was — well, can critics in good conscience still use the word "incendiary" after *Almost Famous*? — his vocal delivery seemed less impassioned than normal. In particular, the set closer, "Soublime," which is normally an emotionally charged lyric for perhaps the most genuine and humble musician on the jam band scene, didn't seem to be coming from the heart so much as the head. With Black Crowes bassist Andy Hess sitting in for Schools and his bandmate Audley Freed on guitar, the tune punched all the right buttons musically.

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Opening with a cover of Led Zeppelin's "No Quarter," the second set seemed almost like an entirely different show. Haynes, Schools, Abts, Louis and Freed lowered the tempo and eased the stoner classic out. The intensity built as guests moved in and out of the mix. Allman Brothers Band percussionist Marc Quiñones pounded his way into the spotlight as "Mule" highlighted a brief drums/percussion solo that morphed into a mish mash of Jimi Hendrix's "Third Stone From the Sun" and the Beatles' "Norwegian Wood."

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Bassist Stefan Lessard of the Dave Matthews Band helped keep the groove deep and mellow for "Beautifully Broken," completing the exact Haynes, Abts, Louis, Lessard lineup that recorded the track on Mule's all-star effort *The Deep End Vol. 1*.

A frequent special guest, Freed returned and Newsted finally made his much-anticipated Mule debut on the Steve Marriott/Humble Pie cover "30 Days in the Hole." The biggest surprise of the night, however, came as Metallitude (as some fans have joked) found Kid Rock in front of the mike for Marshall Tucker Band's "Can't You See." "Can you feel that New York?" Rock asked. Of course they could; the crowd's singing nearly overpowered the musicians.

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Rapping lyrics from his own "Pancake Breakfast" (Get it? "Smokin' anything that I can fit in a pipe?") Rock helped hung Black Sabbath's "Sweet Leaf" before exiting the stage as the band segued into "War Pigs." Hardly new to the Mule repertoire, the tune gained weight both musically and atmospherically as Haynes, Abts and Newsted gave new meaning to the term "power trio."

"Turn On Your Love Light" — a Bobby Blue Bland song popularized by the Grateful Dead and a regular for Haynes, who plays often with Dead bassist Phil Lesh — was the single-song encore and featured pedal steel guitarist Robert Randolph, Marc Quiñones and Alvin Youngblood Hart, who was the one-man opening act earlier in the evening.

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Unless Newsted has his way, Mule will return to relative normalcy for another tour through May. This second leg begins with several appearances during the New Orleans Jazz Festival. Sporadic performances have also been announced for June and July, including the three-day Bonnaroo Music Festival in Manchester, Tennessee.

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In other Gov't Mule news, the impending ATO Records release *The Deep End Vol. 2* — which includes tracks from bass players Les Claypool, Mr.Shell Sidepocketlo and Phil Lesh, among others — is expected to hit stores some time this summer. A documentary of the making of both albums, shot by Phish bassist and filmmaker Mike Gordon, will be released on DVD in the fall.

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Gov't Mule tour dates:

Featuring Warren Haynes, Matt Abts, Danny Louis and special guests Jason Newsted, Audley Freed, and Andy Hess:

4/16 Ann Arbor, MI, Michigan Theater
4/19 Chicago, Riviera Theater
4/20 Minneapolis, State Theater
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Featuring Warren Haynes, Matt Abts, Dave Schools, and Rob Barraco:

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5/2 New Orleans, LA New Orleans Fairgrounds
5/3 New Orleans, State Palace Theater
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Featuring Warren Haynes, Matt Abts, Dave Schools, and Danny Louis (opening for The Dave Matthews Band):

5/7 Oklahoma City, OK, Bricktown Amphitheater
5/9 Albuquerque, NM, Journal Pavilion
5/10 Denver, Pepsi Arena
5/11 Las Vegas, Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino House of Blues
5/12 Phoenix, Cricket Pavilion
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