

# Local drummer saves groove for Rock Hall-of-Famers

● Gordy Knudtson stepped in without a rehearsal and got rave reviews from the legendary instrumental group.

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Time was tight.

The drummer for Booker T. & the MGs was delayed in New York City — first by flash flooding and then by airline schedules. He wasn't going to make it in time for the instrumental group's 7 p.m. show Wednesday at the Dakota Jazz Club in Minneapolis. There was no way to delay the gig an hour until the drummer arrived. This show had sold out two weeks ago — something that has never happened before at the Dakota — and a second soldout set was scheduled for 9 p.m.

So the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame group, which made its



**Gordy Knudtson**

name in the 1960s, turned to Twin Cities jazz drummer Gordy Knudtson, whose main summer job is with the Steve Miller Band. With no time for rehearsal, organ-

ist Booker T. Jones merely talked to Knudtson for a half-hour, explaining arrangements.

Well, how did it go? "It was apprehensive at first," MGs guitarist Steve Cropper said.

Jones spoke before the first song, introducing the band — and Knudtson — but also killing time hoping that regular drummer Anton Fig, who also plays on the David Letterman show, might arrive at any minute.

The MGs opened with a cover of Bob Dylan's "Gotta Serve Somebody," which seemed ironic at that moment — a song by a Minnesotan played by a band in which another Minnesotan was serving for a few songs. The band moved into one of its hits, a Hawaiian-inflected "Hang 'Em High," which didn't require anything complicated from Knudtson but afforded Cropper a

chance to get revved up on guitar.

The ensuing "Summertime" was a moody jazz instrumental that found Cropper's guitar moving from a soft passage to a soul-metal raveup. Then it was time for another hit, "Hip Hug-Hee." Jones found an organ groove, Cropper's guitar got frantic and the band began to jam. When it was over, Cropper shook Knudtson's hand.

"Green Onions" needed no introduction. Booker T. & the MGs proved once again that this is one of the greatest groove tunes of all time. Cropper's guitar runs were like blues-rock blueprints, seminal examples of the marriage of black and white musical styles in much the same way his band had been a biracial success in Memphis in an era filled with racial strife. The playful Cropper added a little Blue Brothers — yup, he and bassist Donald (Duck) Dunn were in that group — goofiness. At song's end, as thunderous applause filled the Dakota, Dunn high-fived Knudtson.

By the time the group played "Behave Yourself" (the flip side of "Green Onions") Knudtson was grooving with the MGs. During the sexy, goosebump-inducing "Time Is Tight" (com-

plete with its "Can't Turn You Loose" bass line), this all-time groove machine sounded effortlessly tight — just like a combo that had been playing together for 45 years.

Knudtson got his third high-five of the night from Dunn and another handshake from Cropper. After the encore of the island-tinged "Soul Limbo" — featuring a Knudtson solo — Jones gave the new drummer a big hug.

At gig's end, the Minnesotan was circumspect: "It was interesting. I was getting different signals from different individuals about the arrangements. It was fun to play with them. They are a piece of history."

Cropper was all smiles after the 65-minute set. "He was the best new drummer I've ever worked with," he said in the dressing room.

"He's got good chops," Jones chimed in.

"I thought his solo was incredible," Cropper said. "It was not all that flashy but incredible."

Just then, Fig walked into the dressing room and apologized — and Knudtson packed up his cymbals and memories.

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