

Friday

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Daily Tribune

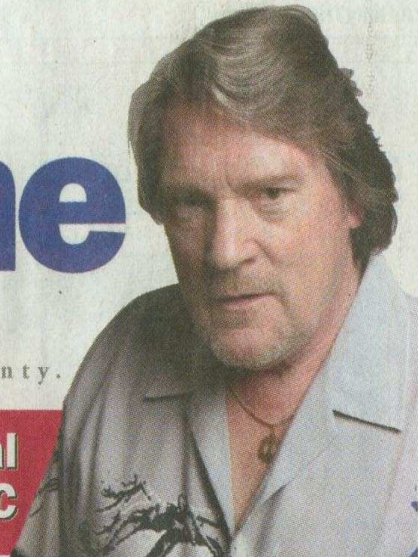
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Pistons beat Heat, sew up Central — 1B

Auger is a musical innovator — 1C



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Diversions



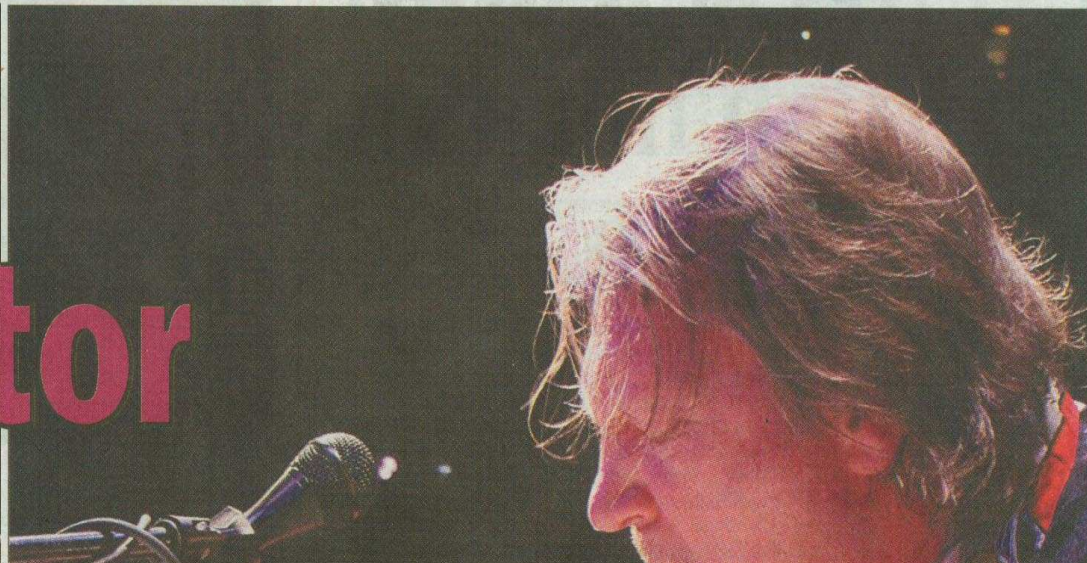
INSIDE:
Tartan Day celebrates Scottish heritage

— 2C

Sound innovator

■ Organist
Brian Auger leads

Brian Auger's



Brian Auger leads Oblivion Express in Ferndale concert.

By Bruce Edward Walker

Special to the Daily Tribune

Brian Auger's accomplishments as a musician and bandleader resulted in some of the most innovative sounds and landmark albums of the past 40 years. Auger and his musician accomplices blew the doors off popular music by bringing jazz sensibilities to rock, Motown influences to jazz, British rock sounds to Memphis soul, and much more.

Check out Auger's performance this Sunday at the Magic Bag in Ferndale for confirmation of the important role he continues to play in contemporary music.

In addition, the careers that Auger helped launch or advance are a veritable who's-who of the most impressive talent of his particular genre, a fusion of the elements of jazz, R&B and rock 'n' roll. Musicians who have worked with Auger include guitarist John McLaughlin; singers Rod Stewart, Long John Baldry, Alex Ligertwood and Julie Driscoll; and drummers Robbie McIntosh, Mickey Waller and Steve Ferrone. Along the way, Auger provided the distinctive harpsichord arpeggios that define the Yardbirds' first hit single, "For Your Love," and was the bandleader that fateful night when swinging London was introduced to then-unknown American guitarist Jimi Hendrix, who sat in with the group as such members of British rock royalty as Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, Pete Townshend, and members of the Beatles witnessed the historic event.

Auger's entry into the British pop scene came via a different path than most of his contempo-

Oblivion Express

WHAT: Concert by innovative musician and bandleader Brian Auger.

WHEN: Sunday. Doors open at 8 p.m.

WHERE: Magic Bag, 22920 Woodward Ave., Ferndale.

TICKETS: \$20.

INFORMATION: (248) 544-3030. www.themagicbag.com.

raries. Whereas many British music stars of the period used the skiffle movement and blues boom as springboards to success, Auger was a noted jazz pianist who had fronted a band featuring McLaughlin on guitar in the early 1960s. Auger's instrumental skills netted him a 1964 Melody Maker jazz poll win and supporting gigs with such American legends as Billie Holiday.

Initially, Auger was enthralled with recreating the sound of Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers, but a walk past a record emporium in 1965 changed everything. "They were playing Jimmy Smith's 'Back at the Chicken Shack,'" he said in a phone interview. Smith's funky Hammond B3 organ sound "opened up a whole new world of sound to me," Auger said. "I rushed right in and told them to wrap me a copy."

Auger purchased his own Hammond B3 shortly thereafter, and landed recording sessions such as the aforementioned Yardbirds' gig, which was Clapton's swan song with the group. "I looked around the studio and asked them where the organ was, and was told all they had available was a harpsichord. I left that session thinking a song with a harpsichord would never become a hit. I was quickly proved wrong."

The chaotic London music scene presented many opportunities for a musician who owned



Brian Auger's Oblivion Express will perform Sunday evening at the Magic Bag in Ferndale.

one of the few Hammond B3s in the country. "Long John Baldry called me and asked if I'd like to put something together. I loved his voice and we put together the Steampacket."

The Steampacket featured two other singers besides Baldry and Auger. The first was a singer with a penchant for Chicago blues and the music of Sam Cooke and an alumnus from

Baldry's previous group, the Hoochie Coochie Men. This singer was Rod Stewart.

The second was Julie Driscoll, a 17-year-old secretary in the offices of Auger's manager. A waif-

like beauty, Driscoll sounded like a cross-pollination of Grace Slick, Dusty Springfield and Bonnie Bramlett.

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AUGER: Musician experiments with different...

AUGER: Musician experiments with different sounds, configurations

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Augmented by guitarist Vic Briggs, the Steampacket immediately wowed audiences with a variety of musical styles that somehow meshed perfectly on stage. The group disbanded before a proper album could be re-

corded, but at least one stellar performance was captured on film and is now accessible on YouTube.

After the demise of the Steampacket, Auger formed the Brian Auger Trinity, which continued to mine R&B, jazz, blues and rock veins on several ground-

breaking albums of the late 1960s. The musical chemistry between Auger and Driscoll finally was realized on vinyl when they cut "This Wheel's on Fire," a Bob Dylan/Rick Danko collaboration. It became a smash psychedelic hit, distinguished by Driscoll's voice and the phasing of

Auger's keyboard. The group toured the United States and found time to appear in the Monkees' television film, "33 1/3 Revolutions Per Monkee."

After experiencing several more hits with covers of Donovan's "Season of the Witch," the Doors' "Light My Fire," and Richie Havens' "Indian Rope Man," Driscoll exited the group over management issues, and the Trinity folded shortly thereafter. Auger rebounded by forming Brian Auger's Oblivion Express, which picked up musically where the Trinity had left off by fusing jazz, funk and rock elements.

The revolving door of the Oblivion Express allowed Auger to experiment with different sounds and instrumental configurations over a series of groundbreaking albums in the 1970s that anticipated what came to be called acid jazz. In 1977, Auger was voted the number one jazz organist by Contemporary Keyboard magazine.

Auger played in former Animals lead singer Eric Burdon's touring band in the early 1990s, but eventually put together a new configuration of Oblivion Express with son Karma on drums and daughter Savannah on vocals.

At 69, Auger continues to push the boundaries of contemporary music, even though his legacy is assured across a wide spectrum from progressive to pop.

"I was at a club in L.A. a few weeks back with Keith Emerson," he said. "Although we've been friends for quite some time, he told me how much I influenced him back when he was playing in the Nice [Emerson's band before Emerson, Lake and Palmer]. I thought that was a very nice thing of him to say, when Christopher Cross came up to us to tell us that we were his two biggest influences."