

Instrumentalist praises I.U.

'Guitarophone' innovated

By D. E. BURCAL
Staff Writer

A Los Angeles musician says it's good to be back in Indiana, the home of what he believes is the "best school of music" in the Midwest.

David Luell, multi-talented instrumentalist for "L.A. Express," talked about his old alma mater, Indiana University, in an interview following a joint concert with singer Joni Mitchell at Purdue's Elliott Hall of Music.

"The Indiana University School of Music is the best, as far as I am concerned," he says. "But I didn't go there to learn how to play rock and roll, I went there to study music."

Luell attended the university during the years 1965 through 69, focusing much of his attention on classical music and jazz improvisation. "I was working on what is known as a conservatory degree," he explained. "I came here to learn about music; actually a degree wasn't in the design. My motivation was to learn in the best department I could find; and in my opinion, I.U. is it."

He adds smiling, "The band doesn't care about degrees. The only thing it is concerned with is can you, in fact, play the music."

L.A. Express musicians can, in fact, play the music, a mellow progressive jazz flavored with rock, for a unique sound experience. Dave himself has a repertoire of eight or nine instruments from saxophone to flute and percussion. His earlier training was equally stressed in the classical and jazz modes, but as time went by, the lean toward jazz became pronounced. His facility with the instruments was "picked up along the way," — except for keyboards. "I had to take keyboards at I.U.," he says. "It was a required course."

Student days dovetailed with gigs around the Bloomington area, performing with a group with the "Big Band" sound for proms, high school dances and supper clubs.

The incentive that



MUSICIAN DAVID LUELL

Staff photo by Dave Snodgrass

prompted his leaving the school 20 credits from a degree was the chance to perform with the Woody Hermann's band, where he played for eight months before setting out for a plethora of lounge and hotel acts. "In short, I did all those things musicians call "paying their dues," he said wryly.

He moved to California, where his talents came to

the fore in "The Cold Blood Band."

L.A. Express was the next step, a group whose name might classify them to the uninitiated as hard-rock oriented. Jazz lovers recognize the score as soon as the first set begins. Concertgoers reading the bill for Sunday's show might have interpreted "Joni Mitchell and the L.A. Express" as inferring

Mitchell as the headliner and the Express as the back-up group.

Actually the Express is an integral part of Joni's act.

"It's like having two jobs in one," he says. "The L.A. Express has its identity; Joni has her identity. We have separate

recording contracts and separate albums. (Their new album, "L.A. Express" on the Caribou Label will be released in February.)

"However, everybody in L.A. Express, with the exception of myself (the album was cut before his arrival) is on Joni's new album."

He has high praise for the musical expertise of his mates: John Garen, drums; Max Bennett, bass; Robin Ford, guitarist; and pianist Vic Feldman, who he terms "the Elton John of the jazz world among his peers" — and credits the band's hallmark, its sound, to some hard work by the drummer and bass man.

"If you'll pardon the expression, that's the L.A. Express Formula," he quips. "Our sound is a tenor saxophone and guitar in unison. We play the melodies together as if the guitar were a horn. It gives the band an identity, sets it apart from any other jazz band. When you hear it in stereo, you don't get the separation (of the two instruments) you hear a blend. It sounds so much like a new instrument that some of the guys have called it the "guitarophone."

"Guitarophone," he muses. "Maybe we coined a new word."

Whatever the sound is called, it has caught on in the states, enabling the group to follow through on a year-long tour. Minneapolis was the first stop; Purdue the second. From here the road winds to St. Louis, Texas, the south, the east and eventually the Orient and Europe.

And it doesn't really matter to him whether people call him a rock musician, a classicist or a jazz man.

"I think, sooner or later, all those labels will be down the drain," he says. "And there will just be music."

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