



(Above photo courtesy of Justin Hartsell.)



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Eric Gales: The Humble Blues Idol

Written by: Justin Hartsell

Roanoke, Va. — Eric Gales is a blues-rock guitarist, singer and songwriter. He finds playing music, performing shows for an audience and having people in his life that care for him inspired and helped him get through hard times in his life that have attributed to a meaningful career.

Gales and his band performed at the intimate 5 Points Music Sanctuary—a venue space that has been converted from an old church near downtown that houses shows within what used to be the church’s sanctuary.

Gales, 44, is an artist that is known for his unique guitar playing style and impressive talent.

Blues guitarist Joe Bonamassa says Gales is “one of the top—if not the top—guitar players in the world.”

Gales was on tour with his band after releasing his latest album, titled “The Bookends” in February 2019.

The album reached number one on Billboard’s Blues Albums chart.

While at 5 Points Music Sanctuary, Gales explained that his upbringing developed into a “fascination with music, emotionally ... how it makes people feel and the connection it had with me and my family.”

“My whole family is basically saturated in something that has to do with music,” said Gales.

Gales has an untraditional playing style in that he plays a right-handed guitar with his left hand.

“When I first picked up the guitar, I just picked it up that way, and that was what was comfortable,” says Gales. “By the time I got the inclination that it was ‘the wrong way,’ it was too late—I was already knee-deep in.”

Gales noted his early inspirations to be a variety of artists that included Albert King, Jerry Reed, Freddie King, B.B. King, Chet Atkins, Muddy Waters, Wes Montgomery, Eric Clapton and others.

Gales remembers “being afraid to go to sleep because I didn’t want to forget what I learned the night before.”

Gales shared that he got a record label while he was young, but after being in the business for a while, he started to turn to alcohol and drugs.

“I’m fortunate,” says Gales, “to have survived a lot of things that life has thrown me. I had kind of, you know, been wrote [sic] off for a while because I got so involved with a lot of drugs, prison and stuff like that.”

During the concert, Gales shared that his addiction almost took his life.

“There lies, I think, people who were praying for me that I didn’t know that were that kind of kept me alive—and by the grace of the big man upstairs—that have kept me standing here,” says Gales. “So obviously, I’ve got more work to do. I’m here to do it as long as I can.”

Gales shouted in excitement to the crowd that he had been three-years sober, with the crowd erupting in applause and whistling.

Gales played a song, called “Southpaw Serenade,” which sums up his life story. Lyrics include, “When I found out that I was different,” in regards to playing style and the time “I nearly took my last breath.” The song goes on with Gales singing about making it through life trials and having the self-awareness of his playing style to ask, “How the hell could I be this good?”

Eric Gales explained how his wife, LaDonna Gales—who also serves as the band manager and a percussionist on stage—was part of the reason why he is where he is today.

“She dealt with some times with me that many of the other people in the world don’t know about. It was kind of her ... to be honest with you ... tough love,” said Gales. “That’s really how you love somebody. You know, if you got to be tough on them, you got to be tough on them. Being a ‘yes’ person to somebody all the time is not good ... she is a rock that I look forward to being there.”

Gales expressed that the most rewarding part for him when playing a show is “if one person leaves with some inspiration ... you see the light turn on in their eyes ... that’s the highest form of honor.”