

# The Boston Globe

MUSIC REVIEW

## An ageless mix of jazz and blues



Boston-based singer Lee Genesis, 65, performed a mix of jazz, R&B, funk, and blues, in a set Wednesday at Johnny D's, highlighting songs from his debut album, "The Soul of Lee Genesis." (John Abbott)

By Marc Hirsh

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Lee Genesis At: Johnny D's, Wednesday (second set)

SOMERVILLE - "Praise and worship only last 15 minutes," said Lee Genesis more than an hour into his second show Wednesday night at Johnny D's. "This is like a workout." Certainly, the exertion he put into his mix of jazz, R&B, funk, and blues for two 90-minute sets would have been enough to make anybody feel a bit winded.

Anybody except, perhaps, Genesis himself. Despite his comment, there was nothing about the performance that suggested the 65-year-old found the effort the least bit taxing. Indeed, it was hard to believe at times that the man with the soulful delivery and a constant, irrepressible bounce had reached retirement age. Genesis performed with the hunger, but not the desperation, of someone at the start of his career.

The show didn't feel like a homecoming, which it was, considering Genesis was a mainstay on the local music scene in the 1970s with his band, Heat. Nor did it seem like a warm-up for an important New York showcase later this month or a celebration of his overdue debut album, "The Soul of Lee Genesis." And it was all the better for it. Instead, sidestepping most of the lost-legend worship that has accompanied Bettye LaVette and Sharon Jones, a loose Genesis simply led a crack band that pumped out one tight groove after another like the thought just occurred to him.

The songs ranged from the jazzy ballad "How Do You Say Goodbye" to the upbeat, shuffling nightclub funk of "Told You So." "In My Darkest Hour" and "A Simple Act of Faith" tilted toward overproduced '80s pop and R&B, but Genesis saved them with the soulfulness of a voice that had just a hint of grit and a dollop of butter, smooth and raspy at the same time. He emphasized the latter on a funky blues where he called out a key and a tempo and let the band figure it out. (It turned out to be "Stormy Monday," but not quite.)

He admitted afterward that the song was simply "a stretch," but if it was simply to kill time, the band did a fine job of it. Each of the musicians got at least one spotlight through the show, as did backing vocalists LaTasha S. Jordan and Stazee Burnett, who each tore up the stage during a cover of Al Green's "Love and Happiness." By then, Genesis had left the stage and sat down at a table to watch. But he still kept moving.