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Larry Carlton and Robben Ford play a masterful show

By Patrick MacDonald
Seattle Times music critic

Just a couple of plugged-in pickers trading hot and sweet licks.

Except these two stylish electric guitarists are experienced masters, full of talent, originality and variety. They inspire, challenge and play off each other, and almost every note feels perfect.

Larry Carlton and Robben Ford played the 10th and final show of a co-headlining national tour Saturday night at the Moore Theatre, and were so masterfully in sync that they soared, in tight duets, back-and-forth improvs and awe-inspiring solos. (The show was a makeup date for one postponed in August due to "bus trouble," according to Carlton.)

Backed by a tight rhythm section of Gary Novak on drums and Carlton's son Travis on bass (who was featured in an impressive solo), they played mostly instrumentals, plus a couple of vocals by Ford. Elements of jazz and rock flowed through the music, but it was anchored in the blues.

The two were a study in contrasts. Intense, long-haired Ford wore a baggy tan suit, while balding, easygoing Carlton was cool in faded jeans and unbuttoned shirt over a black T.

Carlton has been a pro since the '60s. As a studio musician, he played on thousands of recordings, by everybody from Michael Jackson to Joni Mitchell. He worked with Steely Dan and was a member of The Crusaders. He's released many solo albums, including a Japanese import, "Live In Tokyo," with Ford (a tour DVD comes out April 15).

Ford first recorded in the 1970s, and has also worked with Joni Mitchell and many other top names. His last few albums, including his latest, "Truth," have concentrated on the blues.

Carlton, who turned 60 last week, told the big Moore crowd, "After all these years, everything just falls together."

That's a good review of his performance, as he effortlessly mixed sublime slow blues with bracing, sizzling



GEORGE B. WELLS

Robben Ford sang a couple of vocals; the rest were instrumentals, with some jazz and rock, but anchored in the blues.

runs. B.B. King was honored by the instrumental duet "Indianola," and by Ford's song, "Riley B. King," from "Truth." "Lateral Climb," Ford's other vocal, from the same album, was a powerful, contemporary lament about the tough economy and the war in Iraq.

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