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## MBNA stage, Ottawa - July 6, 2007

By ANN MARIE MCQUEEN -- Sun Media

Gary U.S. Bonds clearly loved the venue.

With the Parliament Buildings visible through netting at the back of the Bluesfest MBNA stage at LeBreton Flats, swathed in the light from a warm setting sun, Bonds looked around at the gathering crowd and said, "Ah, that's the spirit."

And then, with his sturdy band the Roadhouse Rockers, he laid down an upbeat, nuts-and-bolts set that paved the way for late-starting headliner George Thorogood and the Destroyers.

The 1960s rock 'n' roll hitmaker -- whose real name is Gary Anderson and who earned his enduring nickname from the stamp a manager put on his first single, hoping radio stations would think it was a public service announcement -- knows comebacks.

He had one in the early '80s when Bruce Springsteen decided to write songs for two back-to-back albums, and again three years ago with *Back in 20*, his first album in, well, 20 years.

Last night, he brought out a few of his biggest back-in-the-day hits, like *New Orleans* and near-legendary closing tune *Quarter to Three*, which he proclaimed with a laugh as "an oldie ... more like mouldy."

There were some Springsteen-penned tunes, including *Rendezvous* and *This Little Girl is Mine*, and inspired covers, such as Otis Redding's *Dreams to Remember* and the blues classic *Fannie Mae*.

The 68-year-old rocker -- who, by the way, was so famous at one point he had several big hits and in 1963 headlined a bill in Europe that also featured *The Beatles* -- seemed in fine form.

Perhaps it's all that practice -- his group, including wife and daughter belting it out on backup, still plays about 100 gigs a year.

Over at the Rogers Stage, just as Bonds was wrapping up, the first twangs from New York native Bela Fleck's funky banjo jumped over the audience. If you like the banjo -- heck, even if you don't -- Fleck and his band of fellow virtuosos are one of those consistently amazing acts it always pays to see.

As usual, the group dropped jaws, with percussionist Ray Wooten -- aka Futureman -- playing some sort of custom-made, guitar-impersonating percussion stick dubbed a "drumator" as the rest of the uber-talented group, including Wooten's bassist brother Victor, jammed brilliantly into dusk.

Earlier, at the Barney Danson Theatre inside the Canadian War Museum, Ottawa up-and-comer Mark Wilson and the *Last Dinosaur*, his recently formed backup band, entertained a small but transfixed crowd with music that can only be described as stirring. Stay tuned. He's one to watch.



Gary U.S. Bonds rocked the MBNA stage at Bluesfest last night, warming up the crowd before George Thorogood and the Destroyers hit the stage. (Sun Media photo)