

# G. Love delivers an impressive show

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By [Philip Schwartz](#) ([Contact](#))

Gazette Reporter

TROY – The first thing said from the Revolution Hall stage Thursday night came from Chris Wood, bassist for opening act, the Wood Brothers.

“Pace yourselves,” he told a screaming crowd. “It's just getting started. Don't peak too soon.”

Indeed.

Skip ahead to midnight and headliner G. Love & Special Sauce is in the sixth song of their encore, riffing on a swirling jam and showing no signs of slowing down. In the end, this marathon of a show (sold out, by the way) turned out to be well worth the time invested. In true G. Love fashion, the frontman and his three backing players, turned in an eclectic performance that, as always, seems like a natural outpouring and not a contrived amalgam.

And on paper, admittedly, it does sound just like that; this is a Philadelphia-bred hip-hop blues band that borrows plenty from funk, soul and straight-ahead rock. Besides all that, G. Love plays well to the jam band crowd. Nonetheless, it always seems to come across as, simply, honest. And it has been since G. Love & Special Sauce first burst on the scene in 1994. So they have a track record.

## **FUN-LOVING GROOVE**

On Thursday, they opened with “Back of the Bus” off 2004's “The Hustle” album, showing that signature fun-loving Special Sauce groove, as G. Love continually bobbed his head - clearly in his element, passionate. Like a lot of G. Love's songs, this one was buoyant, while it somehow, paradoxically, carried weight.

Later in the set, he rapped to “Recipe,” which dates from 1997, while Special Sauce laid down a nuanced-but-loose funk behind him, making this band seem even harder to classify.

Later still, the highlight came when G. Love called the Wood Brothers on stage to join a jam that went spontaneously back and forth between A Tribe Called Quest's “Can I Kick It?” and Lou Reed's “Walk on the Wild Side.” The whole band was elastic, impressive. But most impressive was the interplay between Special Sauce bassist Jim Prescott and Chris Wood. Both on the upright bass, they led the band between those two seemingly incongruous songs with an uncanny ability to turn everything on a dime.

It could be argued that G. Love is treading dangerous territory here, being a white man singing black American forms. But he largely avoids the sticky issue of cultural appropriation by taking hip hop and the blues toward new territory. No, it's not completely groundbreaking. But take note his passion - clearly the audience got that on Thursday - and realize that this is no shallow calculation to merely combine forms. This is G. Love's real inner self, it seems, pouring out for us all to see. And it should be noted, too, that inner self looks like a pretty fun guy.

## **STRONG OPENER**

The Wood Brothers, meanwhile, were stellar in their one-hour opening set that stretched the boundaries of what a duo can do. With Chris Wood joined by brother Oliver on Dobro and electric guitar, the pair went from country blues to an early rock based on the Bo Diddley beat to a delightfully quirky, inventive cover of the Beatles' “Fixing a Hole.”

Their own material shined brightest, however, especially on sneak previews of a new album due out in April. Overall, this was honest, sincere roots music. And while it wasn't pure, it had integrity in spades.

Reach Gazette reporter Philip Schwartz at 395-3111 or [pschwartz@dailygazette.net](mailto:pschwartz@dailygazette.net). Visit his blog "My Fi" at [www.dailygazette.com](http://www.dailygazette.com).