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45 Years of Vienna?s Blues Dynasty Reunites

Vienna Blues Spring, 30.03.2026 [ENA]

The Mojo Blues Gala on March 29, 2026, at Theater Akzent marked a triumphant milestone for Austria's Mojo Blues Band, celebrating 45 years of relentless blues evangelism during Vienna Blues Spring. Led by guitarist-vocalist Erik Trauner, this wasn't a nostalgia trip but a fiery testament to European blues mastery, blending Chicago shuffles, New Orleans second-line grooves, and boogie-woogie swing.

This swings with the precision of a vintage Fender amp cranked to eleven. The intimate theater venue amplified every note, turning the stage into a time machine spanning five decades of riff-driven catharsis. Trauner, the band's beating heart, wielded his Gibson ES-335 like a sorcerer's wand, channeling Buddy Guy's manic vibrato through "Rosa Lee"—their 1988 chart-topping anthem that first put Austrian blues on the international map. His wiry tone cut through the rhythm section's lockstep propulsion, trading stinging single-note runs with harmonic stabs that evoked Magic Sam's West Side soul.

The band's signature call-and-response dynamic shone: Trauner's gravelly shouts answered by horn-like guitar bursts, drummer Bernhard Egger (alternating with Didi Mattersberger) snapping crisp backbeats that recalled Sam Lay's Chicago fire.

The gala's emotional peak arrived with the appearance of the outstanding Gisele Jackson, who stepped in at short notice and transformed the evening into something truly unforgettable. From her very first note, Jackson commanded the stage with a voice of remarkable depth, warmth, and expressive power. Her rich, gospel-infused timbre blended seamlessly with Trauner's guitar, creating an electrifying dialogue that felt both spontaneous and deeply rooted in blues tradition.

Her interpretation of "Wang Dang Doodle" brought the audience to its feet, combining technical brilliance with raw emotional intensity. Jackson's phrasing—at once precise and free—showed her mastery of the genre, while her dynamic range carried the performance from intimate, almost whispered passages to full-throated, roof-raising climaxes. In the slower numbers, her voice wrapped around Trauner's bends with a soulful elegance, turning each phrase into a narrative moment.

What made her performance exceptional was not only vocal power but presence: she connected effortlessly with both band and audience, elevating the entire ensemble. Her interplay with Trauner felt organic and inspired, proving her to be not just a guest, but a true blues storyteller of international caliber. This was not

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a replacement—it was a highlight that gave the gala a fresh and memorable dimension.

Special guest Jim Kahr Band added Chicago authenticity, the Burgenland-born guitarist unearthing his roots via “Back to the Roots”. Kahr’s tenure in John Lee Hooker’s Coast-to-Coast outfit lent heavyweight credibility; his thick, Albert King-style tone on “Born Under a Bad Sign” dialogued seamlessly with Trauner’s leaner attack.

Kahr’s between-song banter—equal parts Vienna wit and South Side swagger—bridged continents, his band’s percolating organ shuffles evoking the heyday of Theresa’s Lounge. Mojo’s secret weapon remains their democratic interplay: no ego solos, just collective storytelling. Harmonica wails pierced Trauner’s riffs during “Sweet Home Chicago”, bass locked with Egger’s kick on boogie stomps, keys adding Booker T.-style fills without overcrowding. Their setlist spanned hits (“Mojo Mornin’”), obscurities, and guests’ deep cuts, each transition seamless—a masterclass in blues architecture.

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