

THE AUSTIN CHRONICLE (March 23, 2003)
by Jay Trachtenberg

ALEX SKOLNICK TRIO
Elephant Room, Saturday, March 15
(SXSW showcase)

Alex Skolnick was once the fire-and-brimstone guitarist with Testament, yet here he was, neat and trim, before a packed house of jazzbos and hangbangers alike, leading a straight-up trio in Austin's premier jazz cellar. Sampling his most recent disc, *Goodbye to Romance: Standards for a New Generation*, Skolnick's six-song set demonstrated enough spit, polish, and thrash to satisfy both contingents.

Opening with the Scorpions' "No One Like You," coaxing a warm, round tone from his thick, hollow-body Jazzmaster, he followed with Kiss' "Detroit Rock City" and his fleet, linear runs, which barely hinted at the song's origins.

Drummer Mat Zebroski is the band's fulcrum, forging a liquid balance of pulsating jazz time and metal-fisted rock grooves. Following his transformative time-keeping on Ozzy Osbourne's "Goodbye to Romance," Skolnick returned with a noticeably harder tone that brought the first real thunderous response from the full house. Another Scorpions' "standard," "Still Loving You" featured a decidedly jazzy solo by upright bassist John Graham David. The trio closed with Black Sabbath's "War Pigs," the audience having chosen it over a Deep Purple tune.

Skolnick pulled out the stops, fidgeting with his gadgets and pedals, and to the howling delight of the adoring crowd, shredded the room with loud waves of feedback wrenched from his instrument. Afterward, Skolnick was gracious in thanking his fans, lauding Austin, and promising to return in the fall. Quite gracious, indeed, for a former and unapologetic metalhead.