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Photo by Calvin James Pynn. Buckethead plays a solo at Awful Arthur's Towers in Roanoke, Virginia.

## **Calvin James Pynn**

cpynn@radford.edu

The night of Thursday, September 8th, 2011, was unlike any other night Roanoke had ever experienced. While the city has welcomed live music from the likes of various country artists such as Kenny Chesney and chart topping rock bands such as 3 Doors Down, little could be done to prepare for the one-man, electric guitar ripping force known as "Buckethead." The show took place that night at Awful Arthur's Seafood Company, located at Towers Mall in Roanoke, Virginia.

For the past two decades, Buckethead, whose actual name is Brian Patrick Carroll, has created an extensive reputation as a prolific contributor to various musical projects, as well as both underground and mainstream recognition as a "guitar god." His otherworldly skills as a guitarist, as well as an overall multi-instrumentalist, have earned the artist a great deal

of attention from a wide variety of musicians. Buckethead is virtually one of the most highly respected and sought-after in-studio collaborators and live performers.

His résumé includes collaborations with Iggy Pop, Serj Tankian (from System of a Down), Les Claypool (best known for his work in Primus), the musical endeavors of actor Viggo Mortensen, and inclusion as a full-time guitarist for Guns N' Roses from 2000-2004. He has also composed and performed music for various films, including the "Mortal Kombat" series, "Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers: The Movie," and "Saw II," among others. Aside from his collaborations, Buckethead has released over 29 solo albums since 1992.

Naturally, considering his achievements, Buckethead's stop in Roanoke was an event to behold. The show was played to a full house, and was opened by female indie artist, Lynx. While carnival music was played over the PA system as intro music, hundreds of heads turned away from the stage towards the bar, where Buckethead made a rather unexpected entrance.

He took the stage completely solo, devoid of the usual bassist, drummer and rhythm guitarist that would make up the backup band. Buckethead was accompanied only by a Gibson Les Paul, drum machine, and various sound effect apparatuses, and for the next hour and a half, both chaos and virtuosity took over the Awful Arthurs stage.

While most would probably not recognize Buckethead's music, his presence is unmistakable. Standing at 6' 6" with noticeably large hands, the guitarist's appearance is as eccentric as it is theatrical. His most prominent feature is the namesake Kentucky Fried Chicken bucket he wears atop his mane of curly black hair, which refers to his fictional origin, as he was "raised by chickens," and dons the bucket to spread awareness of "the chicken holocaust in fast food restaurants around the world."

The bucket is emblazoned with the word "funeral," and an eerie white costume mask completes his overall outfit. While in character, "Buckethead" is mute, moves robotically, and expresses only through the notes played on his guitar.

As a musician, Buckethead's playing style is as offbeat as his appearance, and equally as complex. As a guitarist, his style spans various genres from progressive rock to funk, jazz, avant-garde, and heavy metal. Throughout the show, Buckethead incorporated various effects, including tremolos, the classic "wah," and others. Essentially, there were points where he made noises that one would never expect to come from a guitar. At the same time, Buckethead played soothing, ambient passages, as well as blistering leads, which solidified his reputation as a shredder.

While Buckethead is known more for his playing skill than his individual songs, he managed to deliver a set of crowd-pleasing favorites. This included songs such as the bizarre “Night of the Slunk,” the distortion heavy “Help Help Help,” and “Soothsayer,” his melodic show closer. At one point, Buckethead even played an improvised bass guitar solo, followed by a medley of themes from the “Star Wars” films, garnering an overwhelmingly positive reception from the crowd.

The theatrical stage show also included Buckethead whipping around a pair of nunchucks, robot dancing, and taking a pause at one point to walk around the stage and hand out toys to the audience from a giant sack.

It is safe to say that while Roanoke generally tends to stick to safe and familiar territory when inviting musicians to play, Buckethead’s appearance was a treat of magnificent proportions. Regarded as one of the world’s 50 fastest guitarists, and a universally known musician behind the scenes, seeing his performance in Roanoke can now be crossed off the bucket list for over 400 residents in Southwest Virginia.