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Guitarless guitarists put on airs

New documentary goes inside "Air Guitar Nation."

By Chris Lee
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IN the opening moments of the documentary film "Air Guitar Nation," a performer who calls himself Bj-m T-roque delivers a surprisingly straight-faced explanation for his virtuosity with the invisible ax. "People ask me, 'Why air guitar?' " T-roque says. "I say, 'To err is human. To *air guitar* is divine."

It's an appropriate enough tone setter for the loopy but humanistic film that opens Friday for one week at the Landmark Nuart Theater in West L.A.

Although "Nation" chronicles the U.S. Air Guitar Championships' birth in 2003 — before then, it was a strictly noncompetitive, bedroom-mirror affair — the movie's dramatic narrative coalesces around two contestants and their clash of passion, pride and imaginary six-strings. David "C-Diddy" Jung, winner of the East Coast semifinals, and his nemesis/runner-up, T-roque (birth name: Dan Crane), try to one-up each other in terms of stage presence and "airness" on a quest to capture for America the world air guitar championship title in Oulu, Finland.

"It's the last pure art form," says U.S. Air Guitar Championships co-founder Kriston Rucker, who also executive produced the film. "It's something you can't commercialize — because it's invisible."

The documentary won an audience award at the South by Southwest music festival, among other film-festival accolades. But its hard-rockin' soundtrack and the energetic machinations of several dozen wannabe Eddie Van Halens provide a better reason to see "Air Guitar Nation": Judas Priest's "You Got Another Thing Comin'," Boston's "More Than a Feeling" and Mot-rhead's "Ace of Spades" all get, um, aired out in the film.

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