



Big Boy Little Band's Bret Littlehales as interviewed by Jenny Miller

When the Big Boy Little Band, featuring Bret Littlehales aka Big Boy Little (harmonica and vocals), Matt Kelley (guitar and vocals), Robby Leebrick (drums) and Steve "Wolf" Crescenze (bass), won this year's DCBS Battle of the Bands, I caught up with Bret to talk about it. Here's what he had to say:

"I really wanted to get up and sing the blues. Going into it, I didn't think we'd win. I have a lot of respect for the bands that were in it. I thought that Andy Poxon or The Mike Lucci Band would win, but I knew that we'd do our best. I really love my band, so I knew they would come through.

"As I listened to the other three bands that preceded us, I felt like there were things that we could do that they maybe weren't doing. I thought it might help if we tapped a deeper vein of the blues, so I changed our set at the last minute to include a B.B. King song, "How Blue Can You Get." I also didn't want to change what we normally do at our gigs, like talk to the audience. I wanted to do our songs the way we always do. We usually like to play a set for an hour and a half and we only had thirty minutes that night. I felt we started connecting right from the start, though. By the time we got half way through "How Blue Can You Get," and people were on their feet and screaming, I figured we were doing okay.

A DC Native

"This has been 42 years coming for me. I started off in a blues band when I was 16 here in DC – about 1967 or 68. I played with Bobby Radcliffe. I was friends with Mark Wenner who started The Nighthawks. After college I got focused on my (photography) career, got married and had three daughters, so in the last 15 or so years I had to kind of relearn everything. I was playing acoustic harmonica in my living room. When I started to play out again I had to learn how to play amplified harmonica. The rules are different – it's different licks – it's a whole different way of thinking. There's a big difference between singing and singing on stage professionally – there's a way of breathing and phrasing. Especially with the blues – you're communicating deep feeling if you're doing it correctly.

Blues Influences

"When I was a kid, I used to listen to the African-American radios stations in DC. There was a DJ called The Nighthawk. I think his name was Bob Terry. He used to play blues every once in awhile – people like Jimmy Reed and BB King. He used to flip out when he played sets. I loved it.

"I was learning to sing to Otis Redding records at the time. My father had some old LPs of blues giants like Sonny Terry, and Lead Belly. They were great. I listened to those records and along the line I discovered Robert Johnson, who twisted my head around. I also used to go see Muddy Waters all the time.

"First I learned to play country blues guitar, then I taught myself how to play harmonica. Paul Butterfield was a huge inspiration to me. I was much better on the harmonica than the blues guitar. That's when I started listen-

ing to a lot of Sonny Boy Williamson and Little Walter. Then I heard Junior Wells on "Hoodoo Man Blues" and well, I just thought, this is really tough stuff. It was so direct and simple and they left out a whole bunch of notes because I figured they already knew them and the people who listened to it already knew the notes, so they played in this spare, beautiful way.

A Moment of Thanks

"The one thing I really want to say about winning the Battle of the Bands is that I'm really grateful to my band and to all of the musicians that I've had a chance to play with over the years. I can't stress that enough – I've been really really lucky. I've played with some great people and I've learned from every one of them."

Catch Big Boy Little at the Zoo Bar

To see how Bret has managed to incorporate all these influences into the unique sound that is the Big Boy Little, head to the Thursday night jam at the Zoo Bar. The band starts at 8:30 and at 9:30 musicians are invited up for an open blues jam. "People can come down and sign up," says Littlehales. "I'll make a band out of the people in the audience. It's never the same thing twice." They can also be heard every first Saturday. The Zoo Bar is located at 3000 Connecticut Ave., NW, Washington D.C. 20008 (directly across from Washington National Zoo's main entrance). Tel: 202-232-4225; website: www.zoobarDC.com

For the band's schedule, visit: www.myspace.com/bigboylittleband and www.wolfsmusicweekly.com..Jenny Miller

Ed. Note: Seems like every musician has a day job and Bret and Steve are no different. Well, maybe.... Take a look at some of Bret's fine photography on his website: www.littlehales.com. As for Steve – this master of carousel restoration has worked on over 450 carousel figures (many rare and unusual pieces) and his work has been featured numerous times on the covers of *Carousel News and Trader*. See examples of his work at www.carouselrestorations.com.



Help Big Boy Little Band get to the IBC

They won the right to represent the DC area at the International Blues Challenge (IBC) in Memphis, TN, now let's help get the Big Boy Little Band there. The first fundraiser is Saturday, November 7 at the College Park Blues Festival (see Page 7). Others are planned including JVs Nov. 16 and Old Bowie Town Grille, Jan. 9. There is also a send off party at Wolf's Sunday jam at the Bangkok Blues Falls Church, VA, Sunday, Jan. 17.

For information and updates, go to www.wolfsmusicweekly.com.