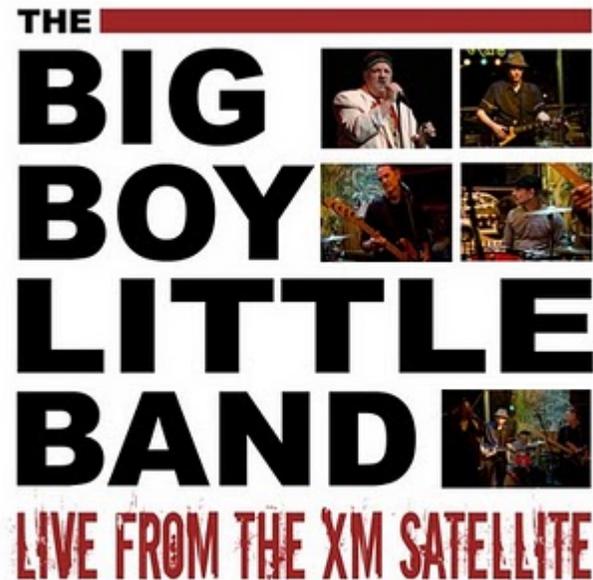


In a Blue Mood

A semi-regular collection of observations, reviews and more about blues, jazz and other matters informed by the blues tradition.

Thursday, September 23, 2010

Big Boy Little's Radio Blues



Brett Littlehales, has been part of the DC music scene for decades, but it was not until recently, as leader of the Big Boy Little Band, that as a performer he has had the spotlight shined on him as a singer and a harmonica player. I should also note he is a well respected photographer having done a superb series of portraits of DC jazz legends for Washingtonian among his credits. He has been running the Thursday night jam (and playing one weekend night a month) at the Zoo Bar for I cannot remember how many years, and has had excellent musicians playing with him for such a lengthy period. In past couple years the Big Boy Little Band has been more visible playing at other clubs in the Washington DC metropolitan area. In 2009, they won the DC Blues Society's Battle of the Bands and represented the Society at the International Blues Challenge in Memphis where they made the finals and guitarist Matt Kelley was awarded the Albert King award for best guitarist in the finals. This has translated in more gigs locally including several area festival appearances. Also, being DC based it was easy for them to visit XM-Sirius' Bill Wax and perform on Bluesville. The result is a new self-released CD by the Big Boy Little Band, "Live From the XM Satellite" (Big Train Records).

In addition to the harp and vocals of Littlehales, and Matt Kelley's guitar (and vocal on one track), the band also includes Steve 'Wolf' Crescenze on bass and Robby Leebrick on drums. The band has a distinct sound with Kelley's trebly guitar adding a menacing tone at times behind Little's world-weary street smart lyrics with the crisp rhythm. This live recording in fact is pretty representative of the band's music and 8 of the 9 selections are originals, with the Jerry Leiber and Artie Butler penned "Downhome Girl,"

that Alvin 'Shine' Robinson had recorded. Like the original "Shuck and Jive," that opens this, Littlehales vocal has a bit of cynical edge to it and Kelley takes a strong solo with a hard rhythmic focus before Big Boy sings about tossing her into the water and taking her to New Orleans and watch her dance to the Irving Bannister Band, a nice reference to the under-appreciated New Orleans guitarist who stayed with Littlehales immediately after Hurricane Katrina.

Kelley's original "Deer Rifle," has a bit more conventional feel as Kelley sings about finding a rifle next to his women's bed set with a melody akin to "Forty Four," with Littlehales harp effectively responding to the vocals. Maybe the highpoint is "The Heat and Humidity," a gritty bit of urban storytelling about a woman shooting a man (on TV she never thought the gun would ever sound so loud) as Littlehales plays some tasty harp that is based on Alan Wilson's solo (with a couple of quotes) on Canned Heat's recording "On The Road Again," while Kelley takes a tasty short break. With the spare backing from the rhythm it is a very impressive performance. "Twelve Bar Blues," is a lively celebration of the blues and a litany of various blues bars, some no longer existing such as Big John's to see Butterfield before heading to a joint on the corner of shuck and jive before heading to the Big Easy and the Maple Leaf and the Club DeLisle and John Lee Hooker with some very nice harp showing off his sweet tone. "Beg For the Money," (to get to my girlfriend's door) is a driving number with a rockabilly tinge. "Carondolet" opens with atmospheric harp with Kelley's soft single note guitar contributing to the flavor as Littlehales spins a tale centered on New Orleans and a shotgun voodoo shack and one can almost smell the incense with the smokey vocal.

The disc concludes with "The Idiot Talking, with its churning rhythm and Littlehales tale of having a bad day and talking on and on until he noticed his baby had gone. Kelley has a nifty guitar figure he employs during the vocal chorus and also takes a driving solo and the Big Boy also picks up the Mississippi saxophone for one last time here. It is a strong closing to the band's long-awaited (to its Washington DC based followers) debut album, and given how long Brett Littlehales has been playing, it is several decades overdue, but worth the wait. There are nine songs and slightly under 40 minutes of music, but no fat or gristle, just lean meat. You can check out the band's website, www.bigboylittleband.com for information on where they are playing and how to obtain this CD, either by download or physical CD.

This review is a bit of local color for me as Big Boy Little Band hails from the Washington DC area and I live in the Virginia suburbs. My review copy (for purposes of FTC regulations) was provided by Brett Littlehales. Oh at some point the cd should be available at cdbaby and downloadable at itunes.

Posted by Ron Weinstock

<http://inablue mood.blogspot.com/2010/09/big-boy-little-radio-blues.html>

Band links:

www.bigboylittleband.com

www.wolfsmusicweekly.com

www.facebook.com/bigboylittleband

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