

## THE NIAGARA RHYTHM SECTION – LIVE AT THE ANCHORAGE I.O

CD Review by D.M. Wells

This brand-new 10-song disk celebrates the 4th anniversary of the Niagara Rhythm Section's (NRS) "Saturday Night Musical Improv" at The Anchorage in Niagara-on-the-Lake. The core formation of the band is comprised of Steve Goldberger on bass and vocals, Dave Norris on drums and Penner MacKay on percussion, Steve Grisbrook on guitar and Herb Nelson on keys.

It features a variety of players who have been featured with the NRS in the weekly series over those years, some of them on repeat occasions. Although their musical friends are of both the male and female persuasion, this first compilation features just the guys. I've been assured that some female guests will be included on the second disk.

It starts off with a mellow funky groove, interpreting the Jordan/Hickman/Bartley blues classic "Early in the Morning", featuring Steve Goldberger on vocals and bass, Denis Keldie on keys, and Neil Chapman on electric blues guitar – all very tasteful.

John Mays of Fathead, who has now apparently started up his own band, takes over the vocal microphone on a rumba version of Mike Bloomfield's "Georgia Swing".

Since these performances are all live improvisations, the basic songs morph into jams that are substantial in duration, one being as long as 12 minutes, and the majority lasting around seven.

Johnny Max, ever the comedian, intros "Loozianna" Tony Joe White's "Polk Salad Annie" by stating "I'm not really drunk; I'm hammered – there's a difference. It's what I look for in a woman; I don't think it's the other way around." You have to interpret that properly to see the humour. In any case, the players and audience sound like they are having lot of fun. Johnny displays his deep, irrepressibly sexy, vocals (not unlike TJ's own pipes), with "The Stevie McGeeGees - and Dave" funk'n' up the musical proceedings.

Guitarist Steve Grisbrook does the vocals on made-for-blues Leiber/Stoller/Pomus's "Youngblood", recorded in a classic rock mode by The Coasters in 1957. The Beatles also covered it in their early live performances. Either Ed Kopala or Steve Grisbrook cleverly incorporates Deep Purple's famous "Smoke on the Water" lick into the song.

Downchild vocalist Chuck Jackson got the crowd howlin', too, on Chester Burnett's "Who's Been Talkin'", naturally accompanying nicely on harmonica, too, on this lively, mid-tempo rumba.

"Who's Been Talkin'" blends in seamlessly with Roscoe Gordon's "No More Doggin'" (with a dance contest being announced). This one's touted as an "old-time jump blues" and features

Denis Keldie on full-throated tremulous vocals similar to Chuck's and juicy keyboards and Neil Chapman on guitar.

Tony Springer prefaces a request for an "island song" by stating "I know you think I look so much like Kim Mitchell", with someone else jokingly suggesting "something by Don Ho" (e.g. "Tiny Bubbles"), but Tony thankfully decides on Bob Marley's "Stir It Up" (the 12-minute version). The band gets into the groove by providing harmony and background vocals. Tony takes the "improv" nature of the jam seriously by providing his own impromptu humorous lyrics and patois (including a Flintstones reference), which, of course, is one of his claims to fame, apart from his fabulous fretwork. Steve Goldberger gets to boost up the basswork here, as well. Bob, may he ever rest in peace, would have wholeheartedly approved, I'm sure.

The now sadly-departed Joe Ingrao, to whom the recording is devoted, sings and plays piano on a jazz-rock version of (B.B.) King/Clarke's "Why I Sing the Blues", with guitarist Eric Mahar standing in for "the king of the blues". Penner MacKay is keeping time on the drumkit and Steve Goldberger holds down the bottom end of the mix on bass. Speaking of "bottom ends", all of these male singers have vocal tones well-suited to sing the blues, and Joe was certainly no exception. If you'd never heard B.B. King's original, you could appreciate this adaptation as it stands, but I still prefer the original melancholy filled conveyance.

Another classic, "Green Onions", is performed to perfection by the Niagara Rhythm Section, with Lance Anderson majestically thrilling the listener on a Hammond B3!

Steve intros the closer, "Talk to Me", by stating, "We'll send you out on a ballad-y note". This features Cobourg's Rob Page on keyboards and Bruce Longman on guitar and vocals. It's a beautiful '50s-sounding slow-tempo rhythm and blues composed by the team of John & Seneca that was apparently written in the '60s, but I wasn't successful in tracking down the original recording of it. Not to worry – this one will send shivers up and down your spine, a la Willie Dixon's "You Send Me". You couldn't ask for a better closer to one of the most relaxing blues recordings I've heard in a while.

I encourage fans of contemporary Canadian blues players to add this to your collection!