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Backtrack Blues Band - *Make My Home In Florida*

Harpo Records

9 songs - 50 minutes plus live DVD

www.backtrackbluesband.com

The Backtrack Blues Band delivers a tasty set of Chicago-style music on *Make My Home In Florida*, which was recorded not far from their home in the Tampa Bay area. But that comes as no surprise for the legion of fans the quintet have collected across the U.S. and Canada since joining forces 38 years ago.

Harp player/vocalist Sonny Charles and rhythm guitarist Little Johnny

Walter began their musical association in the late '70s while students at the University Of North Carolina. They formed Backtrack after relocating to Tampa in 1980.

Backtrack has shared the stage with a virtual who's who of American blues talent, everyone from Koko Taylor, Gatemouth Brown and John Lee Hooker to Rod Piazza, Robert Cray and Tommy Castro.

Charles a powerful singer in the Little Walter/Paul Butterfield mold, and the band produces music that would fit comfortably and be welcome in any blues joint on the shores of Lake Michigan. The current lineup also includes Kid Royal, who handles Texas-style lead guitar and provides equally strong vocals for two cuts, as well as Joe Bencomo on drums and Stick Davis on bass, former rhythm section of the Amazing Rhythm Aces, the country-rock band best known for the tune "Third Rate Romance."

This release was recorded both as a CD and accompanying mirror-image, high-definition DVD before a live audience at the 850-seat Palladium Theater in downtown St. Petersburg. The band's performance is relaxed and greasy-smooth as their deliver a set of four Charles-penned originals and five covers – all captured without benefit of overdubs or studio editing, not that it needed it.

"Our goal was to relax and have fun playing to a sold-out room," Sonny insists. "We are all such good friends and genuinely appreciated what each guy brings to the sound, so it was easy for us to just go out there and let it roll."

The set opens with Charles' strong harp line for a traditional cover of Sonny Boy Williamson II's "Checkin' On My Baby" before Kid takes to the mike for a rock-steady cover of B.B. King's "Woke Up This Morning." A reed-bender of the first order, Sonny delivers exceptionally strong single-note runs with big, fat tone, and Royal follows suit with six-string riffs that are both sweet and subtle.

The cover tune, “Make My Home In Florida,” is up next. It’s a harp-fueled, unhurried tribute to the Sunshine State – and Tampa Bay in particular -- with Sonny at the mike and a tasty extended mid-tune guitar solo. Kid’s in command vocally for an uptempo take on Little Walter’s “Nobody But You” before Charles blows the back off it for a version of Sonny Boy’s familiar “Your Funeral And My Trial.”

The performance concludes with a three-song set of originals, all of which are constructed comfortably within the Chicago blues tradition and fit well with what’s come before.

The medium-fast shuffle “Heavy Built Woman” delivers tongue-in-cheek praise for a lady who eats all the time. One night with her and you’ll never be the same. Next up, the loping “Shoot My Rooster” vows to end his crowing both night and day, drawing derision from the singer’s neighbors, while the final cut, “Tell Your Daddy” is a stop-time plea for honesty and understanding between father and child because, no matter what you do, he truly knows all.

Available through most major online retailers, *Make My Home In Florida* doesn’t cut much new ground, but it’s a well-executed set that will please old-school blueshounds – like me!

Reviewer Marty Gunther has lived a blessed life. His first experience with live music came at the feet of the first generation of blues legends at the Newport Folk Festivals in the 1960s. A former member of the Chicago blues community, he’s a professional journalist and blues harmonica player who co-founded the Nuclebusters, one of the hardest working bands in South Florida.