

The BelAirs at the Fifty : Rockin' the Blues in the Flea Market

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Sunday, April 28th is a busy day : I gotta write a couple reviews and call Paul deLay at home for a interview over the phone, all for the Rollin' & Tumblin' magazine. But before I must check my e-mails. As soon as I am connected, the AIM window opens up. It's my buddy Philippe, Mr Zydeco himself. "Hi, how are you - Fine, thanks - Are you going to see the BelAirs this afternoon ? - (silence)"

Aaaaaaaaargh !

The BelAirs ? It's today ? Oh sh....damn ! "I call you !" . Log out. Receiver. Philippe's number. "Hello ? Yeah, fine. OK then, it's today ? At the Fifty ? What time ? OK, see you there". Brush my teeth (you never know). Shave. Shower. Hurry, time's flyin' ! Subway. Bus. Fiuu, here's the flea market, just in time. Perfect. What ? Too soon ? Of course, it's not even opened yet. OK, a little visit to the second hand CD shops. Back to the Fifty now. Ah, it's opening. Not too many people though, except for those three greasy haired guys. Two of them look pretty much alike. As if they were brothers. Of course, they're the Pruitt brothers ! It's the BelAirs ! Alright, find a place, take a chair. Ah, more people are coming in. And here come Philippe and a couple of pals. And the BelAirs are stepping on the stage. Good, because, this was starting to be a little long for an introduction to a concert review, don' you think ?

They just started playing and one thing's for sure already : t'ain't no boring band. Songs come in one after another, originals, covers, blues, rock& roll, boogie, rhythm & blues, it's very clear : this is an american music band, period. No frontier line, they'll play any style they like.

I don't know wether it's because they're so thin that they're so dynamic, or, on the contrary, if it's their energy that keeps them in that kind of shape, but our three fellows, even though clearly in their forties, deliver their repertoire like a college band who came here not for the money, but to party like hell !

David, the guitar guy, plays in the style more and more Americans seem to appreciate : an "economic" playing that reminds of Jimmie Vaughan, another greasy haired guy. Except that if the Texan puts something tortured into his playing, David's style is clear, neat, totally frank. I wouldn't say "basic" for you might think of the likes of Popa Lang or Jonny Chubby and it is totally different. On the contrary, not a single trace of the slightest piece of ego in this guitar playing, not one note unneeded, only the essential. David's strings say what must be said and that's it. In the meanwhile, his brother Dick - I hope it's short for Richard, not because of any kind of anatomic singularity he's got this nickname - plays his bass lines like a master, like a real bassist : no slapping, no tapping, only beautiful melodic lines, just what's needed, thus mastering the function of the instrument. He gives the song's pace, he's the foundation, he's the lighthouse in the storm. And he's the singer of the band. He may not be Mihgty Sam McClain nor Sugar Ray Norcia, but he's pretty good at it. Behind the two brothers, Mike Cherry, on the drums, bears his name rather well, for he's the cherry on the cake. Yes, I know, it's an easy one, but it's so true. Because the guy is good. Very good. He doesn't hammer his drumkit like he was deaf, but he's always where he should be, when he should be, as comfortable on a Louisiane second line beat as on a binary rocker - where he remains light and swinging, it is so rare that it must be mentioned - or on a

bluesy triple time as well as on R&B pieces. He's a real good one, a master. One who inspires respect.

At the end of first set, everybody's delighted, eager to see them back on stage. I barely have time to order a second round of drinks that they're back. And they start just like they started the first set : full throttle. Even the pop songs, with both brothers singing together, sound very good. These guys show such a pleasure to play that it is infectious, and nobody cares if it's blues or not, black or white, or even, at least long as the gig lasts, if Chirac or Le Pen*. There we are, having fun, life is groovy ! After another hour and an half of swinging heads and stomping tennis shoes and cowboy boots, a new pause. They deserve it. Again, they've given it all. But I must go, I got this interview. How frustrating ! But as a consolation, I left with both the band's CDs. So I invite you to read these reviews somewhere in this very issue, until the BelAirs are back in our neighborhood one of these days. In the meanwhile, you can still pay them a visit at their website www.belairs.com

*It took place during the french elections, remember?

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