



Mike Merola

Photo/Bruce Herlitschek

New York City

Big Blues & Soul in The New York City Blues World

By DAVE FIELDS

The fall has descended on the big city and soon the winter winds will chill the city streets. But that doesn't matter to New Yorkers like me, we have the blues to keep us HOT! And it seems like I keep meeting more new amazing blues talent that never ceases to blow me away.

I'm excited to introduce you readers to a great band in NYC blues scene **The City Boys All Stars** and the leader of this amazing new group **Mike Merola**. Mike has been a veteran of the NYC blues scene and his band is a prime example of "New York City" blues complete with some of the "heaviest cats" New York has to offer. In my recent interview with Mike he shared a lot with me:

Dave: Can you list the members and what they play?

Currently this is the band: Guitars: Mike Merola, Bass: Al MacDowell, Keys: Pete Levin, Drums: Nick Saya, Percussion: Danny Sadownick, Vocals: Bil Kurz, Angel Risssoff, Horace Scott, Trumpets: Tony Kadleck. We have not chosen the next regular Trumpet player to play Lew's Book -

we've been trying a few out. Sax: Blue Lou Marini, Andy Snitzer, Trombone: John Wheeler. Musicians from the past that have recorded and/or played with the band: Vocalists, Frankie Paris, Billy Troiani, Debi Cole. Sax: Fred Lipsius, Charlie Pillow, Baron Ramonde, Alex Foster, Ronnie Cuber. Trumpets: Alan "Mr Fabulous" Rubin, Lew Soloff, Trombone: Tom Bones Malone, Jimmy Pugh, Birch Johnson, Larry Farrell. Keys: Rob Clores, Peter Karoly, David Bennett Cohen,

Robbie Kondor. Bass: Keith Lambeth, Billy Troiani, Charles Palmieri.

Dave: It's so sad when the music world loses one of the greats. Tell me about your relationship with the late great Lew Soloff.

You never can replace Lew Soloff. Let's start there. Ever since I met Lou in late 1988 we were friends and our friendship went beyond music. Playing and recording with him was absolutely awesome. He was a real icon in music. As Paul Shaffer said in interviews, "Lew put the face on Jazz Rock." When with Lew I had to play my best and he often inspired me to push the limits on what I can do. In fact he made me realize there are NO Limits if I gave it all I got. There were times I was going to give up but Lou would quickly stop that kind of thinking. I met and played with many fine musicians because of Lew: Blue Lou Marini, Tom Bones Malone, Fred Lipsius, Alan Rubin, Pete Levin, Al MacDowell, Alex Foster, Jim Pugh, Ronnie Kuber. Through Jim Pugh—Tony Kadleck and Andy Snitzer. Because of Lou I'm able to have a really brilliant horn section—and all great cats to boot. Lew always thought I could pull it off—Create a fine band and besides playing, he felt I had the personality to bring it together.

Dave: What is it like to deal with all the personalities in such a big band? Three singers! LOL!

Personalities—Great Question—I'm not a "My Way or the Highway" person. Nor do I believe my ideas alone are enough. I let everyone in my band contribute ideas and concepts, all the time. Every song we play and/or record is a collaboration. Because of this we are developing our own sound, our own identity.

Everybody has been made to feel it's their band. I never wanted to be THE LEADER But that's what it is as the cats will tell you—DAMN THEM LOL. Three singers—they are very natural together—when one takes the lead, the others back up and sometimes they trade off the lead parts. They are developing their sound which in turns is part of the band's overall sound. Think—3 Dog Night

Dave: Where did you grow up and what got you into music?

Photo/Bruce Herlitschek



City Boys All Stars

I grew up in the northeast Bronx adopted at the age of 3 weeks. My mother could not have children so she and my father set out to adopt me and my two sisters.

My mother put an acoustic guitar in my hands at the age of 9 and I've never looked back. All my life I've been very lucky that so many people wanted to play music with me and I've always had good friends. I have to give a lot of credit to my parents who gave me a life to die for. Who knows what could have happened if I had not been adopted.

Dave: Tell me about your journey in the blues world? How did it start?

Blues—When everybody was listening to The Beatles I was listening to The Yardbirds and soul. Blues has always been and always will be a huge part of my sound. I will always try to make my playing my own and draw upon many things to expand my sound and make it more and more expressive.

Dave: Being that you're a guitar player, who are some of your influences?

Eric Clapton, BB King, Freddie King, Albert King, Otis Rush, Robert Johnson, Jeff Beck, Les Paul, Carlos Santana, Larry Carlton, Robben Ford, Joe Pass and Sal Salvador. I firmly believe Joe Pass is the greatest guitar player I ever heard.

Dave: How did you connect with all these amazing musicians? What gave you the idea to do an All Star band like this and how long has this band been around?

I met Lew Soloff in Late 1988 and in 1989 the project began to come together. We first recorded in late 1989-1990. I always wanted this kind of band for years. After hearing Stax label bands, BB King's bands, Blood Sweat and Tears, Chicago, Earth Wind And Fire, The Crusaders and The Maynard Ferguson Big Band I knew what I wanted! In 1990 it was a project that became a gigging band and evolved personnel-wise. It had a 3 piece horn section which then to the present went back to my concept with 3 horns. Because of Nick Saya, who has been the only drummer to record and play with the band, he introduced Danny Sadownick which gave us a whole new sound with a percussionist.

In the beginning the very first line-up was Nick Saya on drums, Charlie Palmieri on bass, David Bennett Cohen on Keys, me of course on guitars, Bill Troiani on vocals with Debi Cole back up vocals. The horn section for the 1st song recorded (City Boy Blues, written by David Bennett Cohen which is where I eventually got the name of the band) was Lew Soloff and Alan Rubin on trumpets, Fred Lipsius and Blue Lou Marini on sax and because Tom Malone was sick, Jim Pugh played Trombone. The Session was produced by Brian Drago who owned the recording studio (Broccoli Rabe Entertainment in Fairfield NJ) and that's how I met Nick Saya.

Dave: Who does the arranging for the band?

Tony Kadleck, Pete Levin, Lou Marini, Jim Pugh, Fred Lipsius, Tom Malone.

Dave: The City Boys All Stars are more than just blues. Tell me about the other influences in the band?

Frank-John Hadley a great writer from Downbeat has said I'm really a jazz rock player—certainly a lot of blues but he could see me taking the blues someplace else.

Of course when I met Lew Soloff I had to push myself hard because at the very least I wanted to play much better and at least be accepted among some of the very best players around. After Listening to Eric Clapton and Freddie,

Albert, And BB King Larry Carlton's music showed me the way I wanted to go and with a big band sound around me so I set out to try to live my dream.

Dave: How many CD's do you have and tell me about them and is there a new CD in the works?

We have 4 albums out now and a single to be released soon. We have CD's, vinyl, and digital downloads, 35 different digital sites - iTunes, Amazon, CDBaby, etc... over 40 reviews including a 4 star review for our live album from Downbeat December 2014 issue.

Dave: Any last words?

"In The End" my friendship with Lew Soloff really put the charge into my dream and THE RIDE CONTINUES. Tony in fact makes me feel like Lew is still with us. I really think the best is yet to come. Also please let me thank Great Musician Jimmy Pugh for introducing me to Tony Kadleck and Andy Snitzer and also a huge thank you to Blue Lou Marini another cat with a heart of GOLD!!!

For more info their website is www.cityboysallstars.com.

Jams!

Monday:

When you're in NYC you have to make **Big Ed Sullivan's** jam at **THE RED LION** 151 Bleecker St NY NY featuring the finest blues people in the NY area. The all star band includes: Ed Sullivan (vocals, & wicked slide guitar), Arthur Neilson (bass), Matt Mousseau (drums), VD King (guitar/vox) and David Bennett Cohen (keys). Then there's **THE HILLTOP** 50 Essex St Lodi NJ hosted by **Rich Borge** and rock n' soul master **JB Lessen**. **Johnny "Fedz" Federico & Da Bluez Boys** are at **THE BAYOU** 580 Gramatan Ave Mt Vernon NY. **THE GREAT NOTCH** US Highway 46 Little Falls NJ hosted by: **Dean SHot**. **BITTER END** 147 Bleecker St NY NY hosted by legendary sax man **Richie Cannata** starting late, after 12 midnight.

Tuesday:

THE STANHOPE HOUSE JAM 45 Main St Stanhope NJ hosted by Johnny Charles and myself.

Wednesday:

THE ROBIN'S NEST 3103 Tremley Point Rd Linden NJ hosted by Dean SHot. **ROXY & DUKES** hosted by Lenny De Piano and featuring Wayne Lyle and Jin Hart.

RANCHERO CANTINA 214 Kinderkamack Rd Emerson NJ hosted by Nikki Armstrong.

Thursday:

Roger Z holds his Thursday night jam at **VICTOR'S** 500 Commerce St Hawthorne NY.

Bob DelRosso has his jam at **GENERAL SALOON** 194 Englishtown Rd Old Bridge NJ.

Saturday:

Jonathan Kalb has an afternoon jam from 2-5pm at **The Parkside Lounge** 317 East Houston St NY NY.

Sunday:

The Bitter End All Star Jam 147 Bleecker St NY NY hosted by Mark Greenberg happens every 2nd and 4th Sunday. Al Gold holds a bi weekly jam at **HAT CITY KITCHEN** 500 Valley St Orange NJ.

In closing

The big city is gearing up for the winter, but I know that the NYC blues scene with bands like The City Boy All Stars will be keeping the city streets HOT! I hope you readers get to check them out soon!

www.davefields.com