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Music Review: Professor Louie And The Cromatix – Whispering Pines

By JOHN TAYLOR BLOGCRITICS.ORG

You could be forgiven for not knowing this band's titular frontman. "Professor Louie" is a moniker bestowed on pianist Aaron Hurwitz by none other than Rick Danko, back when the two performed as a duo. It all happened in Woodstock, during The Band's heyday, back when Big Pink was still a center of creativity.

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Trouble is, as wonderful as The Band's music was – and to be sure it still holds up remarkably well, in a time-capsule sort of way – it's music of an era now long past, when "alternative lifestyle" meant rejecting the establishment rather than a form of sexual orientation. And the music on Whispering Pines, a product, if ever there was one, of the "Woodstock mentality," sounds like it's been lifted straight from that time. Which is to say – sad to say – rather dated.

Professor Louie And The Cromatix do indeed hail from Woodstock. Members have performed with the likes of Bob Dylan and the Band. And for good or bad, they seem firmly planted in the (admittedly glorious) past. Witness the inclusion of the title song, an aching ballad from Richard Manuel and Robbie Robertson. It's given a pleasant enough reading (though it's marred by the swirling synth that's presumably meant to represent the wind blowing through said trees). And later there's a live rendition (the disc mixes live and studio cuts) of one of the Band's most

famous tunes, the immortal "The Weight." Both get faithful treatments that simply fail to add anything to iconic tunes. S'okay in a bar, perhaps, but why record 'em if you really don't have anything new to say?

Elsewhere there are tunes from the likes of Bob Dylan ("Serve Somebody," given a fine if ultimately unremarkable live reading, with vocalist Miss Marie at her smoldering finest) and Leonard Cohen ("In My Secret Life"), and a stunning rendition of the lovely and touching "Forever & Ever" (credited to Champion Jack Dupree). Hurwitz and co-writer M. Spinoza (one guesses it's Miss Marie) contribute "Between Midnight And Two," a soulful torch tune, and the funky "I Wouldn't Do It That Way," which gives Hurwitz lots of room to stretch out on the big ol' Hammond organ. They're also responsible for "Melody Of Peace," a tune featuring the Czech Radio Symphony Orchestra and Kuhn Choir – it's noble in intent, but the Professor doesn't quite have the pipes to reach the sublime heights the song strives for.

It's all quite good; instrumental performances throughout are thoroughly professional, with some genuinely excellent moments, and the band seems to be having fun throughout. And maybe that's what it comes down to. Everyone's having fun – just what one wants on an evening out – but the hunger that makes music absolutely necessary seems somehow to be missing here.

When the Band did tunes like "Whispering Pines" and "The Weight," or Dylan sang "Serve Somebody," the music had an urgency, a sense that the songs and their message genuinely mattered. Here, while it's all well done, when all is said and done it seems more like entertainment.

Good entertainment, mind, and an enjoyable enough listen. But it falls short of the greatness from whence so much of it is taken.

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