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## Music Review: Commander Cody and His Modern Day Airmen - Live from the Island

By Phillip Barnett, BLOGCRITICS.ORG  
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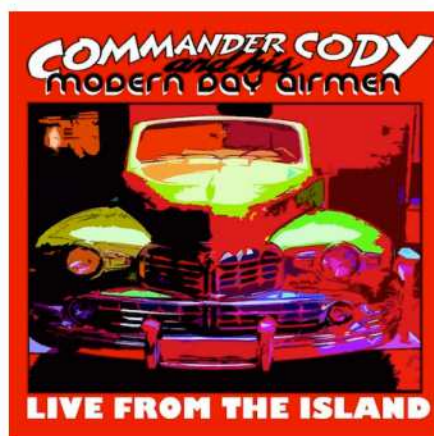
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In the early '70s,



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Commander Cody and His Lost Planet Airmen had a different style than other country-influenced groups.

Much of their material channeled Western swing (Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys) or the boogie-woogie piano of the '40s. The Airmen broke up in the mid '70s but the Commander (keyboardist George Frayne, the fast-talking vocalist in "Hot Rod Lincoln") continued playing with different bands. His current group, Commander Cody and His Modern Day Airmen, has come out with a new CD, *Live from the Island*, that reworks many of the old songs.

Followers of the Lost Planet Airmen will immediately recognize significant differences from the classic sound. The style is a lot less country and more rock and roll. Part of that is because of personnel costs. As the Commander explained to me in a phone interview, "the same budget that used to get you a truck, eight musicians, four roadies, two secretaries, a manager, and a lawyer on retainer now gets you four old geezers." As a result, he looks for a higher-volume musical style to fill up a hall. The personnel on this album includes Steve Barbuto on drums, Randy Bramwell on bass, Mark Emerick on guitar, Professor Louie (Aaron Hurwitz) on Hammond organ and accordion, and Miss Marie on background vocals.

This band has played together for a number of years, and they sound very tight. Barbuto and Bramwell lay down driving rhythm tracks. Professor Louie plays very solid organ and accordion. Emerick plays excellent lead with a style that veers between rockabilly and ZZ Top. Commander Cody, of course, has made a specialty of the hard-driving, rhythmic boogie-woogie piano style. He also handles most of the lead vocals. He's not a great singer, but the material doesn't really demand it.

Much of the CD consists of uptempo blues and boogies written by the Lost Planet Airmen in the old days, including "Too Much Fun," "Oh Momma Momma," "River City," and "Rock That Boogie." The old Leiber and Stoller standard "Riot in Cell Block #9" is included, along with

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"House of Blue Lights." "Thanx A Lot Lone Ranger," a newer Commander Cody rocker, relates a tale of sexual goings-on (and the consequences) in the Old West. "Lightnin' Bar Blues," by Hoyt Axton, tells the joys of sitting at a bar drinking Lone Star Beer. "Beat Me Daddy, Eight to the Bar" is the classic boogie-woogie song first made famous in the swing era.

Of course, the big hit for the Lost Planet Airmen was "Hot Rod Lincoln." The Commander gives it a number of vocal flourishes, opening it with the declaration "My pappy said, 'Son, you disgusting hippie. You dangerous drug fiend.'" When was the last time you heard that in a song? It brings a nostalgic tear to my eyes. Professor Louie's accordion and Barbuto's drumming style give "Lost in the Ozone", which closes the set, a bit of a zydeco feel.

I admit I miss the old sound. It helped give the old Lost Planet Airmen band a unique style. However, a band should be reviewed for what it does currently, and Commander Cody and His Modern Day Airmen plays an excellent brand of boogie/rockabilly-influenced rock and roll.

To quote the line from "Hot Rod Lincoln," "That's all there is, and there ain't no more."

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