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Paris Concert

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Paris Concert, (10/08/09)

While the Blues in North America has only ever had minimal mainstream success, Europe has not only welcomed North American performers wanting to rejuvenate careers with open arms but has maintained a thriving domestic scene. From Finland to the former Yugoslavia, Blues players and performers have been popping up all over the continent. Just how well established the Blues is becomes clear when you watch a DVD like Larry Carlton, Robben Ford, & Autour du Blues Paris Concert that's being made available by MVD Entertainment.

While guitarists **Larry Carlton** and **Robben Ford** are familiar to audiences in North America, the same can't be said for the men and one woman who accompanied them on stage that night at the New Morning Night Club in Paris. The five guitar players, two keyboardists, harmonica player, bass player and vocalist who made up **Autour Du Blues** for that night's concert were an all-star collection of players from France. While both Carlton and Ford are world renowned players and carry heavyweight reputations onto stage with them, it was soon obvious that the locals didn't look out of place on the same stage.

While **Francis Cabrel** (guitar), **Denys Lable** (guitar), **Michael Jones** (guitar), **Patrick Verbeke** (guitar), **Claude Engel** (guitar), **Slim Batteux** (keyboard), **Gerard Bikualo** (keyboard), **Claude Salmieri** (drums), **Bernard Paganotti** (bass), **Pascal Mikaelian** (harmonica), and **Beverly Jo Scott** (vocals) may never obtain the status of their famous guests, they show they're every bit as talented and passionate about the Blues as any group of players from North America. This concert was the culmination of a week's worth of festivities celebrating New Morning's twenty-fifth anniversary in 2006 and the result is a hundred-

minute-plus concert of great Blues music, being played for the sheer fun of playing.

When you get as many as seven guitar players on stage at once, it can get awfully crowded, and the chances of it turning into a pissing contest seem to be good. Yet, somehow these folk have been able to leave that sort of shit behind, and nobody tries to "outgun" anybody when they play. Of course, you hardly ever get all seven on stage at once, but there's always at least three guitars up.

While one player (I believe it was Claude Engel, but I'm not sure as it's hard to tell from the photos in the liner notes who is who) was content to handle the majority of the rhythm guitar duties for the night and occasionally playing a mean slide, everybody else soloed at least once while on stage.

My biggest complaint about so many Blues-based guitar solos is how many guys just seem to live to bend the really high notes and forget about the rest of the frets. So, I was really impressed by the fact that no matter who from among Autour du Blues' turn it was to solo, they would make use of the guitar's entire neck. They put on an absolute clinic on how to get the most out of your guitar during a solo. Instead of worrying about speed and playing more notes than the human ear can possibly hear, these guys showed how great it sounds when you linger over a note.

The two keyboard players, Gerard who played electric piano and Slim on organ, made sure that it didn't turn into just a guitar festival. Each was every bit as good as his companions. Gerard's piano playing was especially good as he ran off a couple of really nicely played solos. Slim also handled a lot of the vocal duties and showed himself to have a really good voice for the Blues. The only real disappointment of the evening was the vocalist Beverly Jo Scott who just didn't have the breath support to give her singing the strength that is required.

The stars of the evening were of course Larry Carlton and Robben Ford. While the gathering didn't really lend itself to either of them really taking off while they were playing with the full band, there is a nice added bonus to the disc of an extra cut featuring just the two of them. It's here you get to see them really shine by doing what they are both famous for. Carlton's playing shows his jazz influences with a fluidity and elegance that you don't normally associate with blues guitar. Yet, he also has enough grit that it stilled retained the earthiness needed for it to have the emotional depth that Blues has as compared to jazz playing.

Robben is a different story as he is a pure Blues guitar player. What really impressed me about him was his ability to use rhythm in his leads to give them body and way more texture than I've heard from most Blues guitarists. Like the guys in Autour Du Blues, he's another exponent of the less is more theory of leads and was able to wring some great sounds out his guitar during his solo.

I've seen a couple of other concerts recorded at the New Morning and, like those, both the camera work and the sound on this DVD are wonderful. There is great footage of each man's solos and some wonderful shots where you see the interplay between the guys on stage as they are working things out on the fly. As for the DVD itself, it says on the cover it was recorded for HD television originally, but I had no problems playing it through my DVD ROM and a non-HD monitor. With widescreen presentation and DTS and Dolby 5.1 surround sound, it can be played on any modern system and you'll get great quality audio and video.

The Paris Concert recorded at the New Morning Night Club featuring Larry Carlton, Robben Ford, and the all-star band of French Blues musicians, Autour du Blues, is a great DVD of wonderfully played music. This DVD will put to rest any doubts you might have had of the

universal nature of the Blues. The man sure was right: Everybody really does have the Blues!

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