

VERITAS VAMPIRUS

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by Mark S. Tucker

PROF. LOUIE & THE CROWMATIX – *Crowin' the Blues* (2017 / Woodstock Records)

If Prof. Louie 'n the crew say they're *Crowin' the Blues*, well then, they're crowin' the blues, y'all, but I'm here to tell you they's also stuffing their trademark raven-sharp gospel, starling folk, magpie N'awleans, and eagle-eyed soul everywhichwhere too, esp. when Miss Marie saunters into Jimmy Rogers' "That's Alright". You can't score a Crowmatix disc without getting the full boat, and *Crowin'* continues to carry the San-Fran-Americana flag into righteous battle against the satanic forces of mainstream radio (would someone please tell Madonna she can eat me...and Lady Gaga...and Shania Twain...and Abba...and...wait a minute!, is that pornographic?).

Yes, I know the Crowmatix are a New York combo, but few in America have forwarded the grand old Fillmore sound ('n 'member: Big Bill Graham exeunteo NYC to open his historic SF venue) and this ensemble readily brings to mind a whole raft of grand old sonorities, from the Dead to Lamb to Stoneground to The Sons of Champlin and beyond. In *Crowin'*, the usual suspects, the four gentz and lady, are revisiting the roots era in the same way in which our neighbors to the north, the Canadaians (Steve Dawson, Colin Linden, etc.), have been so damned successful.

The swingin' stutter-boogie of "I Finally Got You" will git them feets at the end of your legs to scootin' across the floor, and the band's re-interpretation of B.B. King's "Confessin' the Blues" (Miss Marie again!) crosses Ray Charles with Jerry Lee Lewis. Professor Louie holds the mainstay vocals in a clear bluesy Plains drawl as though *Little House on the Prairie* woke up to the mess beyond the gingham table-cloths and square dances. He also tackles keyboards and accordion along the way, his sparking piano work standing out as longshoremen Frank Campbell (bass) and Gary Burke (drums) provide a big rhythm section, Campbell fearlessly peeling off fat full sounds as Burke takes a measured hand in his travelling traps, complemented by exceptional cymbal work.

In case yer wondrin' who this "Hurwitz" cat is who's writing so many Prof. Louie selections, well, 'Aaron Hurwitz' is the good Professor himself. He acquired the moniker from Rick Danko...and who the hell's going to scamp or disclaim such an honor? I wouldn't dream of it. His partner in crime is Marie Spinosa, a.k.a 'Miss Marie', and while Hurwitz produced and engineered the affair, he and Ms. Marie co-engineered it, with Marie also providing the art direction. From such in-house controls come such distinctive sounds, though I imagine Cedric The Cat, the band mascot, will hog all the glory regardless; it's just the nature of felines.

My favorite cut is "Love is Killing Me", with its killer upbeat folky refrains and lyrics - "*This can't be happening / This can't be happening to me*" – either accidentally or non-accidentally forming the soundtrack for America under Emperor Trump, with nice slo-hand guitaristics from the stalwart John Platania. My second favorite song is "Bright Lights, Big City", and, man, I can't even tell ya what they're doing to the Reed / Ragavoy classic; it's breathing new life. My third fave track is "I'm on My Way" and...geez, I guess this CD of great cuts is like a bag of Lay's Potato Chips: I can't listen to just one!