

Blues-E-News

Y O U R P A R T N E R I N B L U E S

Meet Musician Larry "Fuzzy" Knight And The Blowin' Smoke Rhythm 'N' Blues Band

By Doug Deutsch

For nearly two decades, the Blowin' Smoke Rhythm 'N' Blues Band has been one of the most in-demand, successful groups on the Southern California live music circuit. Front and center in Blowin' Smoke is its creator, bandleader/bassist/vocalist, and longtime San Fernando Valley resident Larry "Fuzzy" Knight - whose impressive musical resume' includes a decade-plus stint as bassist for one of the great SoCal bands to emerge from the psychedelic era of the Sixties, Spirit. Knight has also recently launched a new band project, Sky King, featuring some top-name musicians, all the while keeping Blowin' Smoke going strong.

Blues E-News writer Doug Deutsch (DD) recently interviewed Larry "Fuzzy" Knight about his storied career and what musical adventures lay ahead. Here's how it went.

DD: When did you first start in the music business, and what was the first band and/or music project you were associated with?

LFK: I began playing blues guitar in St. Louis (where I was born) at the age of 15 (around 1959-1960) I was lucky enough to hear the legends (before they were legends) on KATZ, Sweet 16 (Black) Radio that would broadcast 'live' from different nightclubs at night featuring bands such as Albert King, Ike Turner and the Kings of

Rhythm, Little Milton, and Chuck Berry. I used to sneak into the clubs because I was underage and eventually started sitting in with the bands and soon I was offered a gig playing with Billy Gayles, who



had recorded a hit record with Ike Turner called, "Tore Up". We played six nights a week near downtown St. Louis. My musical background started in school where I learned to read music and I played violin (all through my entire schooled education) and eventually, viola, French horn and the upright double bass. Mom helped me purchase my first guitar, along with an electric bass from McMurray Music in St. Louis. With my schooled music education, I taught myself guitar and electric bass. All through school, I had my own bands that played at school dances, half-time at basketball games, and whatever events that would come up for kids to go to for dancing. It seems as if I have played music all through my entire life. My early bands in St. Louis were, The Galaxies, The Upsetters, and PAX.

DD: According to your bio, you were a member (bassist) of famed Southern California sixties era band, Spirit. How did that come to be?

LFK: I migrated to Los Angeles in late 1969, after being drafted and serving two years in the U.S. Army. I brought a band from St. Louis (PAX) out here that I left for the opportunity to play lead guitar with Delaney, Bonnie & Friends. Eventually that group broke up, but I used to go out to an area called Agoura when I wasn't touring and on the weekends many musicians would get together and jam on an outside stage for two days straight. Many musicians from the Topanga Canyon area would be there, some from Canned Heat, Booker T, Black Oak Arkansas, Bruce Gary (eventual drummer for The Knack) and Randy California and Ed 'Cass' Cassidy. I had the most fun playing with Randy and Ed. Every time we played together, it was like 'magic'. Our jams were like Cream and Hendrix. SPIRIT was in a state of disarray at that time and Randy had asked me if I would go out on tour with him, Cass and John Locke (keyboardist). I did and our shows were fantastic. I started recording with Randy on

his first solo album as well, "Captain Kopter and the Fabulous Twirlybirds" which became a big hit album in Europe. Before I knew it (about a year and a half later) we were on our way to Europe for an extensive tour that lasted nearly eighteen months. Not only was I a member of the band but I was offered an equal business partnership in the band along with Randy and Cass. So began my era with SPIRIT that lasted from 1969 all the way through 1981 (with time out here and there to raise my family and run a successful music company as well for seventeen years).

DD: Let's discuss your band Blowin' Smoke, who has been together and gigging regularly for an amazing seventeen years now here in Southern California. What's your secret for longevity?

LFK: The band, Blowin' Smoke Rhythm & Blues Revue featuring the Fabulous Smokettes, was created over seventeen years ago. My early experiences of going to see artists like Ray Charles, Wilson Pickett, James Brown, Ike Turner, etc. in St. Louis while I was learning my craft inspired me to no ends. They all had 'big shows'; MC's, featured horn sections, featured singers, dancing....it was an experience that I never forgot. I wanted to recreate that experience but with all of my influences thrown into the mix for our young and older audiences to enjoy. Many young music lovers never had the opportunity to see shows like the ones that I did so I am dedicated to give them great music, played by the best musicians and sung by the best vocalists on the West Coast. What distinguishes Blowin' Smoke Shows is the amazing amount of blues, R&B and rock energies that are melded together and delivered with intensity with every song performed. I guess you would have to compare me with John Mayall in regards to bringing the best talent to the band year after year. Even though the musicians and vocalists have not remained the same from day one, the level of perfection is to continually 'raise the bar' on performance, soloing, ensemble playing, vocals and audience participation! More than anything else, Blowin' Smoke Shows are fun... and that what keeps the band fresh and happening!

DD: Four members of Blowin' Smoke were used on two songs in "The Sapphires" movie. Tell us more about this?

LFK: Myself, guitarist David Raven; drummer Don

Littleton; and keyboardist John "JT" Thomas, performed two songs, "Burnt Biscuits" and "Hush" (each originally recorded by Booker T. & The MG's and Deep Purple, respectively) in the film. The four of us are the Blowin' Smoke rhythm section. This is so cool because the movie is a hit! It was just released domestically in March. It's an inspirational tale set in the late '60s about a quartet of young, talented singers from a remote Aboriginal mission, discovered and guided by a kind-hearted, soul-loving manager.

DD: You also have a new music project called Sky King. Fill us in on this?

LFK: "Sky King" is my latest music project. I was fortunate to meet a guitarist/singer/songwriter from Columbus, Ohio, now living in Los Angeles by the name of Walter Morosko, about two years ago. I was intrigued by his original songs, especially the lyrics. We started playing and working on the basic structures of the songs and I re-wrote thirteen of the originals with him. It's taken about a year or so to record all the songs and they are in the mastering stage right now. I play bass on all the tracks, sing lead and background harmonies, musically arranged the entire group of songs and produced the new CD, titled, "Morose Tales From The Left Coast." Sky King has provided another outlet for me to introduce original songs that are nothing like the Blowin' Smoke Band and to work with a smaller group of musicians. I am overseeing the cover design, which will be original artwork and the inside booklet that will feature the lyrics to all thirteen tracks. This is going to be an exciting band to see 'live' as well. There are

some really great musicians who have added their own very 'special sauce' to the recording: Jimmy "Z" (formerly with Rod Stewart, The Eurythmics, and Etta James) on tenor sax, flute, harmonica; Lee Thornberg (Bruce Springsteen, others) on trumpet and trombone; John "JT" Thomas (Bruce Hornsby Band) on all keyboards.

DD: Looking ahead, what is your five-year plan for success (for) both Blowin' Smoke and Sky King?

LFK: My five-year plan for both Sky King and Blowin' Smoke starts with myself. What I mean by that is to take care of my health. Being in good shape with a clear, sharp mind is step number one for me. The old saying, "You're not getting any younger" might apply, however, I'm still ready to rock 'n roll so I just need to live the healthy lifestyle. Once I've got that down then I can apply myself to my musical endeavors. I would like to see the talented musicians in "Sky King" put out another two to three CDs over the next five years as well as tour on a regular basis. Taking the band to Europe is a must do. I would also like to integrate the Blowin' Smoke Revue on the same shows as "Sky King" and feature both bands in concert. Blowin' Smoke would also be featured on European shows as well. Basically, it's pretty much as the Mel Brooks character said in "Blazing Saddles"work, work, work !!!!! Keeping busy, keep planning, stay dedicated and keep looking forward to new musical adventures. That's what it has always been for me and I plan to keep on, keepin' on !!!

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