



*The Orange County Blues Society Interview with Larry "Fuzzy" Knight*

*Thank you for taking time from your schedule to answer a few questions for me. The Orange County Blues Society is dedicated to making California a great home for the blues!*

*-Jeff (Papa J) Hudson*

*You first started in the music business in St. Louis in the 60's. How different is it from today's music world?*

If starting in the music business means the same as, when did I start performing as a "Professional Musician"? 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.

*How different is it from today's music world?*

The music business has changed 360 degrees since the mid 60's. Back in the 60's you could make an impact locally and through regional radio airplay a Record company AR person or executive would check you out. If they were interested, they would offer you a contract. From there, it was the Record label that did the promotion. If you were lucky enough you could do shows in much smaller venues than the bands perform at today. Radio was truly the only wide exposure. With luck your group might make the Dick Clark show and you'd be able to be seen on American Bandstand, etc..... Now today it's a whole new ballgame. A group or artist doesn't need the big record label. The entire world of music fans are accessible through the Internet media and the venues and festivals are huge. All one has to do is watch the Palladium Channel and you will see many groups, artists, bands that you might not have ever heard of playing before 25,000 -50,000 at a time , along with a roster of other bands. Bands are now in control of their own destiny, not relying on a record label to make or break them. Many great unknown bands and artists from the 60's, 70's 80's were never given the advantage of having the general public judge whether they liked them or not because a label that didn't earn good sales right from the get go would drop those bands off their roster and eventually those bands would dissolve. Also, there is much more diversity today than there ever was in the past. Any and every style of music can have a certain segment of fans that can make them successful because we have a global marketplace. However, the only downside of diversity is that there is so much musical product being released that finding the real quality music is sometimes like trying to swim through the muck and mire.

*You were once a member (bassist) of the famed Southern California band, Spirit. How did that come to be?*

I migrated to Los Angeles in late 1969, after being drafted and serving two years in the U.S. Army (fourteen months in S. Vietnam during the war). 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.).

*Let's discuss your band Blowin' Smoke, who has been together and gigging regularly for an amazing seventeen years now here in Southern California. Playing the Blues in California is hard. Besides you're love for the blues, what's been your secret for longevity?*

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!

*Now you also have a new music project called Sky King, with a new album coming out. Fill us in on this?*

"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. I estimate the release should take place around March, 2013. 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. -

*The Orange County Blues Society has found finding clubs playing the blues a challenge. Being in the business for as long as you have, what are some of the main changes you think need be done to make the blues scene better in Southern California?*

There are two very obvious changes to the Music Industry over the last ten years: #1) The introduction of the Digital Age to music recording and its easy access to every musician, singer and songwriter. No more cheesy demos or waiting for someone at some record label to 'discover' you! #2) The Internet and all that it brings with it. Downloads, easy transfers to all types of listening devices. And, opportunities to showcase your music on a myriad of sites worldwide. These new methods have not only changed the entire way the music industry works but has broken the genres down into as many styles of music as can be imagined. It's all available to anyone that wants to take the time to utilize all the new opportunities and of course, you gotta 'bring the talent' with you!

*What in your opinion do you see as some of the necessary ingredients for an independent band or solo artist to achieve success in the current music business? Or is that possible anymore?*

The necessary ingredients for the indie band or solo artist to achieve success in today's current music business aren't much different than it's ever been. Have confidence and tenacity at what you're trying to achieve. Believing in yourself and your music is paramount. Never stop learning, practicing your art and becoming better at what you are trying to achieve. Being an 'artist' is not a hobby, its hard work and dedication. Once you reach the point where you have something to show the world, everything you need is right in front of you on your computer. Exposure, exposure, exposure...and soon enough, you'll start to receive feedback. You'll be able to contemplate, adjust what you are doing to make it better and better. Sooner or later, if you have great music, you'll need to find a manager, a booking agent, a label (although you can do it independently) and (always) with a little luck, you'll be the next superstar!

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

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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