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“Fuzzy” Knight Brings Blowin’ Smoke Rhythm and Blues Band and the Fabulous Smokettes to Harvelle’s for Some Great Music

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The Smokettes and 'Fuzzy' Knight on stage.

Often times, the smaller intimate rooms bring out the best in a group. Such was the case Saturday night at Harvelle’s, once the only place west of LA’s Central Avenue where you could hear blues, soul and R&B. The Blowin’ Smoke Rhythm and Blues Band with the Fabulous Smokettes packed the place with a crowd that was there to enjoy great music played the way it should be. And in a place like Harvelle’s, dating back to 1931, where the horn section is practically on the dance floor, it is easy to see them playing the same club in the ’40s, with ‘Easy’ Rawlins coming in to enjoy the music.

Bandleader Larry “Fuzzy” Knight started in music in his hometown of St. Louis at the age of 15. His mother helped him buy his first bass, which, decades later, is still the only bass he has ever had. He learned to play and was soon working with some of the best blues and soul players in St. Louis. By the late '60s he had moved to Los Angeles where he took a musical detour, playing bass with the well-known psychedelic rock band, Spirit. In 1981 he called it quits with Spirit and went back to his first love, the blues. Seventeen years ago, he decided that he wanted a band of his own, playing the music he loved, so the Blowin’ Smoke Rhythm and Blues band featuring the Fabulous Smokettes was born and he’s never looked back.

The evening’s music started simply enough, with the Band playing a selection of songs, sung by either Fuzzy Knight or his guitarist, Dave Raven Rutchinski. Larry Knight has the kind of voice that is perfect for the blues, a little gritty but with excellent range. The band did a mixture of originals as well as tried and true tunes from old masters like Junior Parker, Z. Z. Hill and Ray Charles. Dave demonstrated his skill on a Stevie Ray Vaughan song, ‘Crossfire’, where his playing on one of one of SRV’s signature tunes demonstrated that he could wring a ton of emotion out of that guitar. C. O. D., with John ‘JT’ Thomas on organ showcased the instruments along with Fuzzy’s powerful vocals.



The crowd's excitement had built up by the end of the band's set and after a short break they came back with another powerful song. Finally, the crowd cheered as the introduction of the Smokettes began. The band began to play and with barely a pause, the ladies launched into 'RESPECT', written by Otis Redding but owned by Aretha Franklin since the first time she sang it. Dwanna Parker, also known as Madam Dee, Lyrica Garrett and La Quita Davis belted it out, getting the audience up and dancing and grooving to their excellence rendition. From that point, the packed house was clearly crazy about the band and the Smokettes. The horn section might not had much room to move, but they certainly moved the audience with their staccato notes.

On 'Don't Fight It", the Smokettes showed why some of the most famous music ever came from the voices of a trio of female R & B singers. They upped the ante on a blistering version of 'Something to Talk About' with some nice choreography, great lead vocals from Lyrica and Dave's excellent slide guitar solo. Lyrica also did a fine version of 'Voulez Vous Coucher Avec Moi Ce Soir' with Madam Dee Dee and La Quita providing some stellar backup vocals. La Quita stepped up to the plate to take the lead on 'Rescue Me', showing why that song is such a classic and the skill and control she has over her voice.



'Living Just Enough For The City' gave Lyrica another change to take the lead, giving a version of the Stevie Wonder tune that had the audience clapping along with. With an eight-piece band, the instrumentals were spot-on also. Showing 'JT's' versatility on piano, organ or synthesizer. The song also highlighted the horns, and had everyone dancing. With each song they played, the Blowin' Smoke Rhythm and Blues Band with the Fabulous Smokettes showed why so many of these songs have become classics. Further, they demonstrated the skill that years of playing can bring. Larry "Fuzzy" Knight certainly showed that, drawing everything from the sounds of a standard electric bass to the sound of an upright 'slap' bass out of his instrument. This is not music for the faint-hearted, but music that other musicians as well as a happy audience can appreciate.

The Blowin' Smoke Rhythm and Blues Band will play a return engagement at Harvelle's on October 25. Get there early, stay late and savor the band's music, along with the vocal thrills of the Fabulous Smokettes. This is music played and sung the way it was meant to be and "Fuzzy" Knight knows how to get the best out of his musicians and singers. 'Easy' Rawlins would certainly approve.



Blowin' Smoke Rhythm and Blues Band with the Fabulous Smokettes

www.blowinsmokeband.com