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Little Charlie and the Nightcats combined hard Chicago blues and swing jazz to produce their latest album 'Shadow of the Blues.'

Courtesy photo

'Shadow of the Blues' lacks originality

Little Charlie and the Nightcats offers recycled sounds and cliché vocals

By Casey Kelly
for the Emerald

On their latest CD, "Shadow of the Blues," Little Charlie and the Nightcats offer up 13 tracks of recycled guitar riffs and horribly cliché vocals that actually make the swing revival sound almost innovative.

Revolving around Little Charlie Baty's guitar stylings and Rick Estrin's ridiculous vocal delivery, The Nightcats create the type of banal blues that typically accompanies commercials for breakfast cereals and soft drinks. In short: nothing terribly original, or for that matter interesting.

Baty and Estrin began collaborating almost 25 years ago while attending college at UC Berkeley. They formed Little Charlie and the Nightcats and released their first album, "All The Way Crazy," in 1987. In the time since, they have released seven full-length al-

bums, including a greatest hits collection.

"Shadow of the Blues" begins with "Never Trust A Woman," a tongue-in-cheek tune about unfaithfulness.

Instead of trying to capture the raw emotions of the situation, it seems as if The Nightcats are just poking fun at it. Estrin's lyrics are delivered without a hint of the pain and suffering that factors heavily into the most successful blues songs. And as with all the tracks on this CD, it includes a gratuitous guitar solo that is as dull and unimpressive as it is drawn out.

Another song that employs ridiculous humor rather than real feeling is "Big and Fat." Featuring vocals that can only be described as nerve grating, it's by far the worst song of the album. Estrin

Shadow of the Blues

Little Charlie and the Nightcats

TYPE: Jazz
RATING:

★★★★★

reaches a lyrical low when he sings, "We go together like big and fat/Just like an alley and an alley cat." It's not quite clear what message such inane subject matter is supposed to convey, but in any event it seems out of place on a blues CD.

The next track is a cover of "You Don't Love Me That Way," by legendary blues harmonica player Sonny Boy Williamson. It's bad enough that The Nightcats have to ruin the blues with their own songs, but here they tarnish a tune by one of the genre's most influential artists. Integrating elements of swing and jazz, "You Don't Love Me That Way" is easily the most upbeat track of the record. But Estrin's insipid harmonica fails to live up to Williamson's genius.

Little Charlie and The Nightcats will play at the Good Times Cafe tonight and Saturday night. Both performances begin at 9 p.m. But if "Shadow of the Blues" is any indication of what their live set will be like, it would probably be a good idea to steer clear.



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