

Media Alert: Larry Carlton Review Live at the Iridium

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The Iridium - NYC - 12/4/03
By Scott H. Thompson

They came to play. The U.S. debut of Larry Carlton & The Sapphire Blues Band was spectacular. The horn section alone blew the doors off of New York City's popular jazz club, The Iridium, located at 51st & Broadway.

My brother Addison (an alto player) and I snuck in just in time as Troy at the door escorted us to a comfortable table and our lovely waitress Alisha. (There's not a bad seat in the house.) Settling in for some hot brie and bread, we had heard good things about these guys. Larry Carlton came out smiling and waving, followed one-by-one by his horn and rhythm section members. It was gonna be a big sound.

Ripping into a fast-paced swingin' blues number, the band hit the ground running. Larry Carlton is one of the premier guitar players of today. He's paid his dues, and has a resume to prove it. He is the best at what he does. Crisp, tasty, perfect picking. Larry explained that he and the boys have been busy gigging around Europe and Japan. That explains the professional tightness. The new CD "Sapphire Blue" is now available in Asia and will be released in the U.S. this January 2004 on BMG.

Smiling the whole time, Carlton introduced the Steely Dan hit he spiced up with his gutsy guitar work. He worked through the hits like a craftsman shaping art. Whether plucking harmonics on his acoustic six-string or blazing a burning blues solo on his Gibson, Larry was in fine form. ("Kid Charlemagne" from Steely Dan's release "Royal Scam" featured Carlton's guitar wizardry.)

The Sapphire Blues Band are all from Nashville, Larry from L.A. tells us. All, but the drummer, who's from Jersey. The smokin' Sapphire Blues Band is: Billy Kilson (drums), Michael Rhodes (bass), Rick Jackson (keys), Mark Douthit (sax), Doug Moffett (baritone sax), Mike Haynes (trumpet) and Barry Green (trombone). A well-practiced bunch. Nashville.

I was in heaven! I mean, what more do ya need than a bunch of kick-ass horns and a smokin' guitar man?!

"It's a joy to do this every night!" Larry smiled, as they rumbled to a

LARRY CARLTON

grinding halt on the last blues blast. Sax frontman Mark Douthit did a good job complimenting Carlton. Its nice to see a band sound happen right before your very eyes.

Then the whole gang got featured on a runaway train version of "Tenor Madness". Just great stuff. Larry says the record label told him he could do anything he wanted...and he smiled and spread his arms out to include the band and said "This is what I wanted."

Larry Carlton deserves to get what he wants. He was one of the most respected studio musicians in the business, before spreading his wings and following his own solo career.

Carlton has studio credits from the the 70's and 80's with Steely Dan, Joni Mitchell, Michael Jackson, Sammy Davis R., Herb Albert, Quincy Jones, Bobby Bland, Dolly Parton, Linda Ronstadt...get the point? Then there's the Jazz Crusaders. For a while, Carlton was recording on up to 500 albums a year.

He signed with Warner Brothers in 1978 and recorded five albums, including the Grammy-nominated "Friends." In 1986, he signed with MCA Records where he won a Grammy for Best Pop Instrumental for his rendition of Michael McDonald's "Minute By Minute". (Which he played for us on this night in New York.) His "Last Nite" '87 release won him a Grammy nomination for Best Jazz Instrumental.

While working on the next MCA album "On Solid Ground", Larry was shot in the throat by gun-wielding juveniles outside Room 335, his private studio in Burbank, California. The bullet destroyed his vocal cord and caused nerve trauma. But intensive therapy and an incredible inner strength helped Larry to come back and kick butt tonight.

He has since released a slew of top-shelf projects, mostly on GRP. I saw him a couple of years ago at the Saratoga Jazz Festival with the jazz superband "Fourplay". He was awesome then and I knew he would be off-the-hook with his own blues band tonight.

After the incredible show, which included a standing ovation and encore...not bad for a jazz dinner club in Manhattan...he humbly thanked us all for coming. He just smiled backstage and shook my hand as I thanked him for all his years of great music. A humble man. Just glad to play for you.