



CHICAGO BLUES ALL-STARS
RED, HOT & BLUE



AND SO IT BEGAN...

For years Dan Ivankovich talked about putting together the Chicago Blues All-Stars. His dream was to recruit some of Chicago's top blues talent and create a true 21st century, contemporary "All-Star" blues band. In 2009 this seed began to sprout through a series of weekly rehearsals / brainstorming / jam sessions held at a rehearsal hall on Chicago's near west side. It was then that the Chicago Blues All-Stars began to take shape. Dan's plan: put a bunch of Chicago blues veterans together with no agenda or specific outcome defined, and see what happens. The result was a sort of 'Tuesday Night Music Club' of the blues, or a Bluesday Night Music Club, if you will. Over the course of the next several months, many different songs and sounds were played. Eventually some solid material and arrangements began to emerge and take shape. The atmosphere was loose, casual, and relaxed. There was no agenda, no looming deadline, but rather a burning desire, by all, to simply make music. As players cycled through the line up, musical compatibilities were discovered and explored, alliances were forged, and most importantly, laughter and good times were always in the house. Out of this loosely controlled chaos certain patterns began to develop. Those who were serious about the venture rose to the occasion. As the weeks and months went by the formation of the core line-up was solidified and structure and organization ensued.

After almost a year of regular rehearsals, fits and starts, it became clear that this new unit was studio worthy and bound. So instead of playing for ourselves at a rehearsal space, we began meeting once a week at the north side recording studio of Dan's long time friend and owner of Rax Trax Recording, Rick Barnes. It was there that each meeting of the 'Bluesday Night Music Club' was professionally recorded. Each personnel change and new addition brought more flavor to the mix resulting in an amazingly spicy jam at every recording. As these free-wheeling, casual jams were reviewed and critiqued, things began to crystallize, ultimately providing more focus for each subsequent get-together. The Chicago Blues All-Stars already sounded like a band, but as Dan and Rick whittled down the tracks and the wheat was gradually separated from the chaff, these recordings started to sound like a CD.

This once very loose and organic development of yesterday is now what you will know as the Chicago Blues All-Stars. With a line up of Stars, there was really no need for instruction instead we were told to bring your own sound and feel to the project and let the music do the talkin'. In the end, these musicians experienced the rare luxury of working on a project without the meter ticking, and with the freedom to express themselves in a way that





wasn't dictated by anything but their own talent. In other words, this was an opportunity for everyone to make music strictly for the joy and fun of it – and I think the results speak for themselves.

- Scott Dirks

AND NOW IT IS...

Chicago's blues scene has produced more legends than any other. Although they've individually played with a veritable who's who of Windy City greats and they never miss a chance to testify about the influence of their heroes and fallen cohorts, the Chicago Blues All-Stars aren't interested in recreating the past. Instead, they're poised to escort the genre into fresh, funky, extremely danceable territory with their own high-energy attack.

Their heady moniker is no idle boast. Prior to teaming up, these All-Stars played on countless studio recordings and logged myriad miles on the road. Bringing them together under the All-Stars banner was the brainstorm of both "Killer" Ray Allison, who pounded out ferocious drum beats behind Buddy Guy & Junior Wells, Koko Taylor, James Cotton, and Chicago's revered blues king Muddy Waters before switching to guitar and stepping out front as a vocalist, and guitarist Daniel Ivankovich, who started out in Otis Rush's band at age 18 before bringing his 6'11" frame fully into the spotlight.

"What we're hoping is to try and uncover an audience that's younger, that's interested in all kinds of different music, by doing so, we can captivate them with the blues," says Dan, who also answers to the sobriquet of Chicago Slim (Rush and Magic Slim, two of his primary influences, bestowed the Slim nickname on him; he's proud enough of his Chicago roots to wear them as the other half of his stage handle). That daunting task hasn't proven too difficult for the soul-and-funk-steeped band. "Every show we play," Ray says, "the dance floor is jammed."

Classics of the genre abound on this All-Stars debut album. But these aren't covers in the standard sense. This aggregation aggressively redefines each song for the here and now, no holds barred. Take their storming rendition of Little Walter's "Everything's Gonna Be Alright." "If you're looking for the 1950s version, you ain't gonna find it," says Dan, who sings it here. "That was something that I just wanted to make a guitar workout." Ivankovich also does the vocal honors on revamps of Rufus Thomas' "Walkin' The Dog" (filtered through Luther "Guitar Junior" Johnson) and Buddy Guy's relentless "Let Me Love You Baby."









The exuberant Killer belts the strutting "Feelin' Sexy," its steamy boasts tailor-made for his boisterous stage persona. His steady-surfing rendition of "Tell Me" socks hard, spiced with harp and horns. "Ray's a bluesman, but he's definitely a soul-fixin' bluesman," says Dan.

From the very beginning, the All-Stars were sculpting their sound during weekly Tuesday evening jam sessions with engineer Rick Barnes at Rax Trax Recording. During this time they were guided by a musical philosophy not often encountered locally. "I simply said, 'I want you guys to play the way clubs will not let you play, and the way record labels will not let you play!' And they go, 'Are you kidding?'" says Dan. "There were no parameters. It was like, 'How do you guys envision blues sounding today?' There was but one rule for these jams, James Brown Rule #1: 'I don't care what you play, make it funky!'" There's no denying the Chicago Blues All-Stars accomplish that goal handily. Everything on this CD churns and burns with molten intensity, a thoroughly contemporary approach that may not please postwar purists but is sure to delight a youthful constituency weaned on remixes and beats-per-minute.

The Chicago Blues All-Stars began coming together in 2007, when Killer and Dan started brainstorming the concept (they made a still-unissued album together back in the mid-'80s, when Ray was manning the drums, before Ivankovich took an extended musical hiatus to pursue a now-thriving career as a physician). One of their first recruits was harpist Scott Dirks, a noted expert on Little Walter and other Windy City blues harp icons. He sings a pair of Junior Wells gems on this set, "Snatch It Back And Hold It" and "Hoodoo Man Blues."

"When we started, it was basically me, Dan and Scott, with a dude playing trap drums, doing that whole Rice Miller King Biscuit thing," says Ray. "Real stripped-down, real dark, real heavy Maxwell Street stuff." They soon tracked down bassist and old friend Johnny B. Gayden, whose incredibly funky bottom anchored Albert Collins' late-period glory years. Drummer Jerry "Bam Bam" Porter, once upon a time Killer Ray's replacement in Buddy Guy's band, was welcomed aboard. Powerhouse keyboardist Roosevelt Purifoy, Jr., formerly with Koko, Junior, Otis, and plenty more, came into the fold too (his signature theme "Mad Hatter Blues" climaxes this disc).

The cast continued to grow; eventually a crackling horn section expanded the membership at the weekly jams. Trombonist Johnny Cotton is their leader, his resume featuring stints with James Cotton and the Ohio Players. Saxist Garrick Patton is another mainstay. Johnny invited trumpeter Kenny Anderson to round out the recording section.





"We had a full ensemble, and we basically would just jam," says Dan.

The last part of the puzzle fell into place when Allison brought in Anji Brooks, a vivacious young vocalist who worked with his band at South Side clubs. "The whole thing was to find a fresh voice, to find someone who's a really, really good singer" says Ray. "She's not someone who's been doing this for 30 years." Anji and Killer stir it up on a playful "Wonder Why," and she breathes welcome new life into the venerable warhorses "Wang Dang Doodle" and "Rock Me Baby." "It's 'Wang Dang Doodle' via James Brown," notes Dan.

Although Ray and Dan collaborated on something in the neighborhood of 40 originals as this project progressed, it was ultimately decided that a wiser strategy for their debut album would be to present classic material dramatically reworked in their own sizzling style. "This stuff sounds good. It feels really good. If we introduce what we're doing with 13 original songs, it might confuse people. The songs sounded original, and that was the real trick," says Dan.

The Chicago Blues All-Stars are as fiery onstage as they are in the studio. "We start with a couple of instrumentals, then Dan will kick in, then I'll kick in," says Ray. "We keep elevating and elevating and elevating. We're known for the fact that we don't stop playing." Lead guitar duties are doled out democratically, Dan playing behind Ray when he's singing and vice versa. The road warriors in the touring CBAS rhythm section are a show unto themselves. Bassist C.C. Copeland engages in crowd-pleasing acrobatics as he lays down a funk-dripping bottom, while drummer Tony Dale—a Roland endorsee and former trapsman for the Chi-Lites—keeps the pulse skin-tight.

CBAS sets can run as long as three-and-a-half hours, the intensity never letting up and those almighty grooves never running dry. "I think the groove is everything," says Dan. "It was like, 'How can we have a groove that is so heavy that people are just drawn into this vortex of rhythm?' You are so sucked into the whole groove that you want to dance." And who better to share leadership duties than an ebullient former drummer now free to roam the stage, guitar in hand? "I think Ray being out front driving the beat, mentally he's a drummer, and he drives the whole experience," says Dan.

These Chicago Blues All-Stars just may represent the future of their hometown's favorite musical genre.

- Bill Dahl



CHICAGO BLUES ALL-STARS:

"Killer" Ray Allison
Daniel "Chicago Slim" Ivankovich
Scott Dirks
Roosevelt "Mad Hatter" Purifoy
Johnny B. Gayden
Jerry Porter

Guitar, Vocals
Guitar, Vocals
Harp, Vocals
Keyboard, Vocals
Bass
Drums

ALL-STAR HORNS:

Johnny Cotton
Garrick Patten
Kenny Anderson

Trombone
Saxophone
Trumpet

AND INTRODUCING...

Anji Brooks

Vocals

Produced by Chicago Blues All-Stars, Daniel Ivankovich & Rick Barnes.

Engineered by Rick Barnes at Rax Trax Recording (Chicago, IL). Additional Engineering by Malcom Giron.

Mastered by Danny Leake for Urban Guerrilla Engineers (Chicago, IL).

Album cover design by Bruce Cascia.

Special Thanks To Karla Carwile . . . Without You, The Music Couldn't Happen

Additional Thanks:

Odysseus Johnson (Azure Music Group), Dave Cowles (GHS/Rocktron), Nate Weathers, Chris Eudy And All The Staff (3rd Coast Guitar, Chicago, IL), Terry Straker, Steve Siculan (Guitar Works, Evanston, IL), Josh Olds Web Design (Jacksonville, FL), Mike Piera (Analog Man, Bethel, CT), C.C. Copeland (Chicago, IL), Tony "Bible Black" Dale (Chicago, IL), Patricia Winters (Chicago, IL)

"Killer" Ray Allison & Chicago Slim Use FoxRox Pedals, GHS Strings, Planet Waves Accessories, Rocktron Amps, Shure Microphones and TC Electronic Effects.

Dedicated To The Memory Of Morris "Magic Slim" Holt.

CHICAGO BLUES ALL-STARS

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- 01) Everything's Going To Be Alright *(Walter Jacobs, Arc Music)* 4:33
- 02) Feeling Sexy *(Phil Guy)* 4:32
- 03) Wonder Why *(Riley B King/Joe Josea, Universal Music)* 4:11
- 04) Snatch It Back And Hold It *(Junior Wells/Buddy Guy, Bluesharp Music/Mic Chau Music)* 3:41
- 05) Wang Dang Doodle *(Willie Dixon, Bug Music/Hoochie Coochie Music)* 4:55
- 06) Walking The Dog *(Rufus Thomas, Almo Music Corp)* 4:47
- 07) Why You Treat Me This Way? *(Jay Owens, Bug Music)* 4:44
- 08) Hoodoo Man Blues *(Junior Wells, Bluesharp Music)* 5:02
- 09) Rock Me Baby *(Riley B King/Joe Josea, Universal Music)* 5:21
- 10) Let Me Love You Baby *(Willie Dixon, Hoochie Coochie Music)* 4:53
- 11) Mad Hatter's Blues *(Purifoy/Ivankovich)* 7:42



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