

Charlie Musselwhite Remembers Big Walter Horton



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Bad, Bad Le Blues Life

Paul Filipowicz *Live – Chickenwire* Big Jake Records – BJ2007

Rough and tumble singer, songwriter, and guitarist Paul Filipowicz has spent most of his life chasing down the blues of Chicago's West Side icons, although he has lived mostly in other regions of the country, including Texas, Colorado, and now Wisconsin. The result of his itinerant ways is an eclectic, intense blues alchemy that's always rooted in a killer groove.

Since 1981, Filipowicz has released five studio albums. Although these have been solid efforts, the aggressive beauty of Filipowicz' music truly flourishes when he walks the tightrope, slashing away on stage before a juiced-up audience. *Live – Chickenwire* captures just that, this time on a sweltering night in barn that has been converted to a club in southern Wisconsin.

Recording *Live – Chickenwire* on the seventh day of the seventh month of the seventh year, Filipowicz even had the blues calendrical mojo on his side, and he and his band—Ray Wright on bass and Brian Howard on drums—chug effortlessly through an hour's worth of deep, original material, much of it new.

Among the album's best songs is its title track, a traditional, hypnotic boogie hammered out in dark fashion guaranteed to fill any dance floor. "Chinatown," for his 2004 disco disc of the same name, captures Filipowicz digging so deep into his West side Chicago/Magic Sam fetish that he seem to pop through to an ethereal plane inhabited these days only by the likes of Jimmy Dawkins.

Songs about food are rarely appetizing to the ear, but Filipowicz' funky, affectionate ode, "Hot Chile" is an exception. It gets toes tapping near the album's mid-point, lightening the mood after a serious kick-start to the set.

Although Filipowicz' singing is an acquired taste, he is such an endearing stage personality that these is a strange charm in his presentation of numbers like "Fire Fly" and "Guitarman," which run a bit outside his range. His vocals are excellent on many of the evening's other songs, and he is such a passionate and seasoned guitarist that any occasional vocal shortcomings are riffed away with ease.

Filipowicz' guitar style can be as clean and biting as it is brash and brutal, and throughout the album he makes the expansive transitions in his attack so natural as to be almost imperceptible.

With a shout-out to Dawkins, Filipowicz delivers a tremendous version of "Serves Me Right To Suffer," from that guitarist's first album. "Mongolian Twist," which follows on its heels, is a sinewy rocker that serves as a musical summation of Filipowicz' recent spiritual quest to the deserts of the East.

Special guest Calvin Owens, formerly of the B.B. King Orchestra, fires up his Houston Horns, who help close the album on one of Filipowicz' more captivating recent lyrical compositions, the Albert King/Fenton Robinson-inspired "10,000 Footprints."

The popularity of recent live recordings by Otis Rush, Junior Wells and Bobby Rush proves that the blues-buying public hungers for music made in the energetic atmosphere of the juke. *Live – Chickenwire* is another great night out with a hard-edged, genuine guitar master who doesn't mess around. Plain and simple, it's a powerful chronicle of a good, honest blues show—raw, spontaneous, beautiful.

— Steve Harp