

Albert Castiglia

By Lori Graboyes



Albert Castiglia's new release Big Dog is eleven songs of back to back solid blues perfection to me. I had the distinct pleasure of seeing Albert only once but much like this CD, it left a lasting impression on me. This CD shows off Albert's badassery (his word not mine LOL) Not only is he an uber talented songwriter and lyricist but he also knows how to surround himself with some of the best musicians in the industry. On Big Dog he is accompanied by Mike Zito on electric and acoustic guitars, vocal and percussion, (he also produces the CD). Scot Sutherland on bass, Rob Lee on drums, Lewis Stephens on piano, Wurlitzer and organ and finally Johnny Sansone on harp on two tracks. The CD starts out with *Let The Big Dog Eat*, a rockin' blues song with blazing guitar work by both Albert and Mike. It ends up with one of my favorite tracks, *Somehow*, a slow,

bluesy tune about homelessness, the lyrics are touching. Sandwiched in between the two are nine more gems, a little bit of something for everyone. If you're not already a fan of Albert Castiglia this CD just might make you one! This is an absolute MUST HAVE CD for all blues lovers! And if you see Albert coming anywhere near your home, treat yourself to an evening of some of the best blues music out there.

1. Has this project changed you or the way you work?

"It's changed me in a lot of ways"

It's changed me in a lot of ways. I think the experience of recording at Dockside Studio in Louisiana gave me a boost of confidence that I needed at the time. My old boss, Junior Wells, recorded three CDs at Dockside. He was my guru and

the greatest blues man I've ever known. Ruf Records sending me to Dockside 20 years after Junior's last recording there gave me a sense of affirmation that Hey! Maybe I don't suck too bad. LOL A lot of musicians go through battles with self esteem. I certainly do from time to time. Speaking of time, the timing of the re-cording couldn't have happened any better. I had just put a whole new band together and I was going through some anxiety with that. The recording session was a welcome distraction from the stress of getting the new band together. The band's great and they've taken to the new material like ducks to water. Also, Mike Zito (producer) pushed me vocally and guitar wise to places I never thought possible. I'm definitely a better musician and person since the session. The whole experience was spiritual.

2. What's your favorite axe to play?

I was a Fender guy for years since I was a kid. But these days, I use Gibson Les Pauls and Delaney Jagatas. They have tone for days!

3. Do you have a special name for the instrument you play?

I got a Les Paul Goldtop called Duane, a black Stratocaster named Missy, a cherry sunburst LP called Virginia and a wine colored LP called the Fat Bastard (Fat Bastard is the name of a cabernet wine that my wife and I used to drink.

4. How did you feel after writing the track "Somehow"?

I felt particularly good about "Somehow," which I wrote with Cyril Neville.

Cyril is New Orleans music royalty and one of the greatest voices in American music. He's also an amazing songwriter and lyricist. His lyrics are something else. When he sent me the lyrics to the song, I knew right away the kind of music needed to go with them. It's a song about the

homeless, the poor and how we as a society treat them. He painted an incredible picture with his words and I provided a frame with the music. It was one of the most enjoyable collaborations I've ever been a part of. To have been able to write a song with a musician of his magnitude was definitely one of those confidence building moments.

5. What was your most memorable gig

"My first gig with Junior Wells..."

and why?

There have been so many. My first gig with Junior Wells was a biggie. It was in Buffalo at The Calumet City Cafe, February 1997. There was the Jazz a Juan Festival in the South Of France when I was with Junior (Summer of '97). We opened for BB King that night. With my band there was the performance at the Blues Music Awards in 2009 and the Blues Cruise in October 2013. The 2014 Blues Caravan tour was a biggie. Also, the 2014 Europe tour with my band was a highlight. Ooh, Katowice, Poland with Sandra Hall in 2000. There was about 5000 people in this arena. Backing up Hubert Sumlin the night before his birthday in 2008 in Fellsmere, Florida. There will continue to be more great memories as long as I keep doing this for a living. I'll just stop with these.

6. Why do you play/sing? Artists are inspired by many things, what inspires you?

Because I can't live without it. It's a huge part of who I am. Taking music away from me is like ripping my heart out. Music saved me from a potential life of boredom and strife. Music is the biggest reason I have the great life that I have. My great friends, my wonderful wife; I would not have had them if I didn't have the music. This incredible journey that I've been on since I was eighteen would not have been possible without music. What inspires me? Life inspires me and that enables me to write. I can only write about things that happen in my life or things that I can relate to. If it's not real to me, it's going to be fake to the ears of the listener. That's just my opinion.

7. Tell us the last few shows you went to see.

I saw George Thorogood & The Destroyers for the first time. They were a hoot. Great fun! Great band! I also saw Bruce Springsteen on his River tour. He never disappoints. He and the E Street Band did 3 1/2 hours straight. On top of that, he had a cold but sounded great anyway. He was blowing snot rockets during "Rosalita". It was freaking awesome! He never sounded better. The very last show I went to was Samantha Fish at The Funky Biscuit in Boca Raton, Florida. She's terrific. She gets better every time I see her. She brought me up to jam with her that night. It was a lot of fun. I always have a great time when we're onstage together.

8. What is your songwriting process?

The process is very unpredictable for me. Sometimes the words come first, sometimes the music comes first. I might put some lyrics or music on the shelf for a while, then revisit it later and find something that works for it.

9. What artists or bands get your heart a flutterin'?

I love Samantha Fish and Mike Zito & The Wheel. Danielle Schnebelen is my favorite singer in the world. I melt when she sings. I also listen to her brother Nick Schnebelen. Eric Gales is a friggin monster! Dave Gross is an amazing musician and producer. All this bullshit about the blues being dead really frosts my ass. There are so many great blues artists, young and old, doing it and doing it well. There's a band called Jane Lee Hooker outta NYC. Man!!! A wonderful hybrid of punk rock and blues. On the country side, I love Chris Stapleton. He's country music's savior. I've been revisiting Luther "Snake Boy" Johnson these days. He was the bomb! There's so much great, real stuff out there. People just need to open their minds, dig deep and avoid radio stations that play artificial, cookie cutter, soulless shit. Look for stations that have Blues and Roots shows. There's great stuff out there. You just have to look hard for it. It's worth the search.

10. What is your "why". Why do you do what you do?

When I was a kid, I wanted to play first base for the New York Yankees. The problem was I couldn't hit the curve ball or field worth a damn. When the guitar entered my life, I felt I might become pretty good at it. It's the only thing I'm good at. On top of that, I love it. If you're good at something and it brings you joy, never let it go. I was a welfare worker right out of college. I did it for 4 1/2 years. I wasn't very good at it and I hated every minute of it. When Junior Wells took me on the road with him, I never looked back and I promised myself I would never spend my life doing something I hated. I have no intention of leaving my current profession.

11. What was your first musical experience that moved you enough to take action and become a musician as opposed to a fan?

It was the day I bought the "Hard Again" album by Muddy Waters. It was a cassette, actually. I was 16 years old. Eric Clapton, BB King and Stevie Ray Vaughan started my love for blues music but it was Muddy Waters that solidified my path as a musician. I wanted to play the blues for a living the day I heard that record. Those cats on "Hard Again" oozed badassery and I wanted to be a bad ass like them. Muddy, Johnny Winter, Bob Margolin, Willie "Big Eyes" Smith, Pinetop Perkins, Charles Calmese, James Cotton; They produced the most raw, emotionally charged stuff I had ever heard at the time. All the musicians on that record are responsible for me being a blues man, for better or worse. LOL

12. Who first told you that you were "good enough?"

Graham Drout from the Iko Iko Blues Band in Miami. He's a legend and a frequent collaborator of mine. He's one of the greatest songwriters on the planet. His encouragement meant a lot to me. He was a great mentor and his early lessons served me well when I

When the guitar entered my life, I felt I might become pretty good at it.

went out to pursue the music full time.

13. What would you be doing if you weren't playing music for a living?

I'd probably be chained to a desk in a cluttered cubicle somewhere in Miami. However, I would still be playing music at night so my life would not have been a total disaster. LOL

14. What life experiences have brought



you to write your songs?

Love, good and bad. The joys of life, the trials and tribulations of life. overcoming obstacles. Just living in a world as crazy as this brings a lot to me in terms of material.

15. What's the best and worst advice

you ever received regarding pursuing a musical career?

The best advice I ever received was by a man named Pat DeLeon. He's a great guitar player and singer out of Miami. When I was eighteen or nineteen, he told me that the most important thing a blues guitarist should have is a good vibrato, which is the

pulsating effect you create on the guitar with your fingering hand. After receiving that advice, I spent a lot of time developing it.

Junior Wells' road manager, the late Michael Blakemore, told me that my vibrato was the primary reason Junior wanted me to play in the band. Worst advice? I really can't think of any bad advice that detrimentally affected my life or career. I've made mistakes. Some of those mistakes were encouraged by other people but I made the mistakes none the less. I've learned from the bad advice and mistakes and I'm who I am because of it. It's all good. Gotta take the good with the bad.

16. If you were to write your memoir what would it be called?

Hmm... I would probably call it, "From Down In The Alley To The Promised Land"

17. Tell us something about yourself that has never been printed about you before.

My nephew was diagnosed with autism last December. I never mentioned it until now. I never brought it up before out of respect to my sister. She started sharing it publicly so I feel that I can now do the same. His name is Sean and he's a great kid. He's funny as hell and really smart, a numbers wiz. I love him to death. As far as I see it, he's just like

everybody else. It's just harder for him to communicate than other kids. There's a lot I'm still learning about autism. I suppose I'll keep learning as I go. That kid's my little homie, no matter what. My sister and brother-in-law are wonderful, loving parents and they're doing a great job raising him.

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