

# BLAKE ZIDELL & ASSOCIATES



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## Groove resurgence Greyboy Allstars more vital than ever

By Tom Huntington

Back in the mid-1990s, perhaps no other non-Vermont band was as popular in Burlington as the Greyboy Allstars. The group frequently packed 'em in like sardines for epic two-night stands at Club Toast, where its funky and infectious "West-coast boogaloo" music inspired sweat-inducing dance fests.

By 1998, however, the talented collective – fortuitously formed in 1993 on the San Diego acid-jazz scene – decided to call it quits, citing burnout from its relentless touring schedule as the determining factor.

Band members pursued other musical projects, many with considerable success: Saxophonist/flutist extraordinaire Karl Denson has remained a fairly frequent visitor to the area with his ever-popular jazz-funk solo group Tiny Universe; keyboard wizard Robert Walter has made stellar albums with his own solo groups; and topnotch guitarist Elgin Park, aka Michael Andrews, went on to become a standout movie soundtrack musician and record producer.

But the allure of the Allstars' cosmic chemistry was always there, it turns out, periodically inspiring all-too-infrequent "reunion" shows starting in 2001. In early 2006, all five original members

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(including bassist Chris Stillwell and drummer Zak Najor) decided to revisit the studio – with no preconceived songs or game plan other than spontaneity and recording it live and “in the moment” – to see if they conjure up some magic.

The result? “What Happened to Television?” released last year to widespread acclaim, is arguably the band’s best CD – which is saying something as the Allstars’ 1995 debut, “West Coast Boogaloo,” is generally regarded as a modern jazz-funk classic.

A rollicking and sunny set that is firmly rooted in old-school jazz-funk but served up fresh by seasoned musicians, “Television” – the band’s first disc in a decade – delivers proof-positive that the Allstars are more potent and vital than ever.

From the James Brown-inspired funk of opener “V Neck Sweater” to the celebratory closer of obscure funk cover “Give the Drummer Some More,” this is the perfect soundtrack for a bumpin’ house party or a day at the beach.

The album’s only other cover tune is a major highlight: “How Glad I Am,” a 1960s Nancy Wilson hit, gets a beautifully breezy treatment that soars on the honeyed harmonies of the Living Sisters, a Los Angeles group consisting of Inara George, Eleni Mandell and Becky Stark.

George – the daughter of the late Little Feat leader Lowell George and one half of the intriguing indie-pop duo Bird and the Bee (whose self-titled debut was one of my favorite CDs of 2007) – is also showcased on raw and funky “Still Waiting,” providing a sweet counterpart to Denson’s raspy vocals. (The entirely puppet-populated video for the tune is definitely worth checking out at [www.greyboyallstars.com](http://www.greyboyallstars.com).)

The Allstars show off their instrumental prowess, signature sound and seemingly innate rapport and other standout tracks such as “Deck Shoes” and “Back in the Game.” Both feature Denson’s shimmering flute work, while the latter finds Walter joining him in a musical conversation with his trademark Hammond B-3 organ style.

The album “feels so cozy and organic you never want to leave its inviting groove,” according to the Los Angeles Times, while the All Music Guide says it “makes for a heady, irresistible sound perfect for the dance floor or a top-down convertible ride on a sunny day.”

Walter recently called it “my favorite album we’ve made, and probably my favorite thing that I’ve been involved with yet.”

“Just the way it happened – it was so organic and simple,” he said in the newspaper Denver Westword. “We wrote all the tunes in the studio and recorded them right after we made them up. It was just a really pure creative process.”

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The band returns to Vermont for the first time in a decade on Sunday, April 20, when the Allstars – with new drummer Aaron Redfield in tow – settle into the Higher Ground Ballroom.

According to the band's Web site, "This will be the last tour from the band for a while as everyone focuses on their other projects." However, the Allstars "are also planning a return to the studio in the fall."

"It's just good to keep it alive," said Park recently regarding the group. "I mean, we plan on doing it, hopefully, forever."