



## FUNK SPEAKS

Harry posts on the local music scene, music in general

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Way it should be



In the beginning, rock 'n' roll was supposed to be fun. Take a listen to Bill Haley's "Rock Around the Clock," Chuck Berry's "Maybelline" or other standards of the opening salvo. They're all about partying, cruising around and trying to score with the women.

To some listeners, rock 'n' roll still is all about having a good time. And if that's your objective, the **Mambo Sons** deliver the goods with their new album, "Racket of Three" (Omnicide/Guitar Nine Records).

About these guys: They're from New York, there are three of them, and this is their third album. Actually, two of the members - guitarist Tom Guerra and bassist/lead singer "Scotty Mambo" Lawson - have been playing together since the early '80s. Their longtime collaboration has paid off in a collection of well-written, well-arranged and well-executed tunes.

The opener, "Play Some Rock & Roll (She's Coming Over)" sets the tone - although, as Tom points out in the liner notes, it may be a source of confusion, as the band's previous album is called "Play Some Rock & Roll." Whatever the case, that's exactly what they do here, in a song highly reminiscent of the upbeat style of NRBQ. (If you don't know those guys, check 'em out.) Guest Matt Zeiner's piano playing lends to the festive atmosphere, and Scott puts some oomph into his singing without sounding the least bit overblown.

Influences of half a century of rock 'n' roll abound throughout, although let it be said that the **Mambo Sons** (who take their name from a T. Rex tune) put their own stamp on everything, creating a distinctive style and voice courtesy of Tom, Scott and drummer Joe "The Cat" Lemieux.

A highlight is "Be On Time," which sounds as if it would be right at home on a '60s garage-rock compilation (one that gathers the better tune of the genre, of course). Between the Leslie-speaker effect on Tom's guitar, the layered harmony vocals and the occasional minor chord in a strategic spot, the song sounds very Beatlesque, with a hint of The Move - you might know that band as the precursor to Electric Light Orchestra - if the bass were a bit heavier.

The Beatles also seem to be an influence on "Delta Slide," which shows Tom to be very proficient on the bottleneck. The arrangement and instrumentation have a Harrison leaning, which shouldn't be surprising, considering the **Mambo Sons** do a song called "Our Time Is Getting Closer (for George Harrison)" on "Play Some Rock & Roll."

Another song on the earlier album is "Rockaway (for Koss)," as in Paul Kossoff, the late guitarist for Free, most recognizable as Paul Rodgers' pre-Bad Co. band. On "Racket of Three," the Free influence rears its head on "Sidewinder Walk," with fat guitar chords producing a heavier sound than much of the rest of the album. Tom wraps up his well-crafted solo with some really neat phase shifting, again hearkening back to previous decades.

Speaking of which, his guitar playing on "Mr. Rebound" sounds a lot like the twangy low notes made popular back in the '50s by Duane Eddy. This features some lyrics that neatly summarize the plight of many guys who try to figure out what's going through a lady's mind: "Am I Mr. Rebound, I know I ain't no catch/We like each other, but we're not a perfect match."

If this album is about having fun, "Rummy Hop" really captures the spirit, with a modified reggae beat that comes as no surprise given the opening words: "Way down in Jamaica ..." This song appears to have studio-added audience sounds, which are appropriate: This sounds like a real crowd-pleaser when played live.

Throughout the album, Tom flashes his chops in a variety of styles without overwhelming the proceedings, but guitar enthusiasts might be waiting for him to really open up as they make their way through the dozen tracks. He answers the call on "Been Out of Touch," playing a blistering solo over a Bo Diddley beat (speaking of an early rocker who's usually a good time).

If you're throwing a bash, or within range of the CD player at someone else's, you'd do well to cue up "Racket of Three." A party's supposed to be fun, after all.

*posted by Harry Funk @ 4:57 PM 0 comments*