

The Mighty Mike Schermer Band

Next Set

Fine Dog FD 61036

By Lee Hildebrand, *Living Blues* May/June 2005

As if to establish his blues credentials—for those who might not already be aware of them—Santa Cruz singer-guitarist Mike Schermer closes his second solo CD with a self-penned slow blues titled *Setting Sun*. The groove is laid-back, gently driven by Steve Ehrmann's bass and June Core's brushes, and Schermer answers his smoky vocals with guitar obligatos that draw heavily on the T-Bone Walker's rhythmic and harmonic language. Pianist Austin DeLone takes the first solo chorus, followed by Schermer, whose 12 bars show how thoroughly he has internalized the Walker vocabulary, which he uses as a jumping off point for his own highly personal improvisations. Schermer stands shoulder to shoulder with Roy Gaines and Duke Robillard as a leading contemporary exponent of the Walker style.

Setting Sun is the only 12-bar blues among the dozen tracks on *Next Set*. With the exception of *Rain Down Tears*, a Rudy Toombs-Henry Glover composition previously recorded by Hank Ballard, and a scorching treatment of Earl King's *It All Went Down the Drain*, all are Schermer originals that showcase his mastery of pop song craftsmanship. Schermer's voice — a thin tenor that brings to mind those of singer-songwriters Jim Croce and Michael Franks — doesn't have what one would normally consider a blues tone, though he handles *Setting Sun* well. His voice does, however, suit his catchy light-rock compositions quite nicely. Especially compelling are *My Big Sister's Radio*, a shuffling Sam Cooke-flavored ode to old school soul, and a bluesy ballad titled *Real Fine Love*. It may not be blues per se, but Schermer never strays far from his blues roots during consistently inventive guitar solos.

Schermer has a mighty fine band. Besides DeLone, who doubles on piano and B-3 organ, it includes bassist Ehrmann and alternating drummers Core and Paul Revelli. The quartet is augmented on some tunes by fat-toned tenor saxophonist Terry Hanck and an impressive cast of guest vocalists. Angela Strehli and Maria Muldaur trade lines and harmonize with the leader on *Rain Down Tears*, and Shana Morrison (Van's daughter) duets with him on *Big Fine Girl*. Sista Monica Parker and Tammi Brown add backgrounds to other selections.