

EYE ON THE INDEPENDENTS

THE MIGHTY MIKE SCHERMER BAND

◆ NEXT SET. The Mighty Mike Schermer Band. Fine Dog Records.

Until I heard Mike Schermer as part of the *Shana Morrison Band*, I was personally down on the guitar sound of this new generation. Even though much of what you hear is technically brilliant, it ends up drowning in stale pools of itself - wholly uninspired, typically boring. Consequently, I felt myself going back to acoustic music and that folk sound of yester-year. Less complicated times. Less artificial means. Less artifice. Less bullshit.

But as I said, that was until I heard Mike Schermer playing opposite Chris Collins (*founding member of the band Wake*) as they backed Shana Morrison at a gig in San Francisco in late 2003. Anybody who doubts that the "youth movement" of the new millennium has something to say needs to catch this group, because they can play it all: raunchy blues, slow ballads inflected with gentle Celtic nuance, steamy sensual rockers and techno-pop with the pure under-taste of funk. A sound commanded by Morrison's masterful ownership of the stage (her lusty vocal, flanked by the simple rhythms of dual guitars, bass and drums, is something beautiful to behold).

This is no frills music drenched in the history of the American road. It's punchy Hooker blues filtered through the eyes of old-time rock-n-roll -- spontaneous & cold-brewed off-the cuff, feeding on the high holy energy of the audience. Which is exactly the same effect Schermer creates with **Next Set**, his follow-up album to his very fine debut, **First Set**.

Next Set will be stereotyped by many as a *blues record* - -which won't do it justice at all, because it's much more than that. Instead, this CD is a great amalgamation of rock and murky soul strains sifted through the neck of Schermer's guitar - a unique interpretation of that tried and true R&B sound. But in the end, what's best about the album is it's freshness-- existing in the newness of the moment, uncontrived, conjuring images of the studio circa 1960. This record brings us back to an era when guys just walked into the hall, plugged in, sat down, and played.

Next Set is steeped in high water marks: "Mama Say" is smoky and sexy as it lopes along, a song born in some midnight candle-lit club, just a few pairs of eyes in the audience, just the singer on stage singing to no one in the night. "Big Fine Girl" (with a playful guest vocal by Shana Morrison) displays the subtle tapestry of Schermer's guitar

style -- lilting true melodic, framing the lyrics in this invisible light of dawn. "Rediscovered" is one of the centerpieces of the record -- a choice riff built around Austin Delone's piano groove; it just cooks and burns. "Rain Down Tears" (a natural for the FM playlist), features layered guest vocals by Maria Muldaur and Angela Strehli - coarse and biting, a dark deep growling rendition of a classic. Earl King's "It All Went Down The Drain" benefits from the Roy Head treatment Schermer gives it here -- the way the melody comes to echo Head's 1965 hit "Treat Her Right" is both subtle and pristine, displaying the full range of Mighty-Mike's original style. Finally, there's "One Good Reason": another smoky-anti-standard blues number, very subtle, very understated, this cut bathed in shadow and shade would have been right at home on Dylan's "Time Out Of Mind" record that took the 1990s by storm.

When all is said and done, and the next chapter of "*The Great American Guitar Players*" is written, Mike Schermer should be there - front and center. And **Next Set** proves why. Until he passes your way with the *Shana Morrison Band* or with the *Maria Muldaur tour*, you'd be well-served to pick up this CD. Curious music fans will want to give this record a serious listen -- so rich and vital, so pure and unrelenting. ~**John Aiello** *The Electric Review* 3/05