

Albert Castiglia - Big Dog (2016)

Written by bluesever

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1 *Let The Big Dog Eat* 2 *Don't Let Them Fool You* 3 *Get Your Ass In The Van* 4 *Drowning At The Bottom* 5 *Let's Make Love In The Morning* 6 *What I Like About Miami* 7 *Easy Distance* 8 *Where Did I Go Wrong* 9 *Where The Devil Makes His Deals* 10 *What The Hell Was I Thinking* 11 *Somehow* Albert Castiglia - Guitar (Acoustic), Guitar (Electric), Vocals Jumpin' Johnny Sansone – Harmonica Lewis Stephens - Organ, Piano, Wurlitzer Scott Sutherland - Guitar (Bass) Mike Zito - Guitar (Acoustic), Guitar (Electric), Percussion, Vocals

Albert Castiglia's *Big Dog* is an album with BIG sound! It is exactly what a contemporary blues album should be. It is a nod to the past and a masterful, modern sound that delivers a new dish to the blue's buffet. The album was produced by Mike Zito, who also contributes guitar, vocals and percussion. The combination of Zito and Castiglia both in production and musical collaboration is nothing short of spectacular. Scot Sutherland on bass, Rob Lee on drums, Lewis Stephens on keyboards and Johnny Samson on harmonica are the excellent backing musicians on this recording. The album has a live feel without a garage band vibe. Nor is it too polished that it dulls the rough edges that give it life. Due to excellent production and the tightness of the backing musicians, it walks a perfect line between these two extremes. The tracks are made more powerful by Thomas Ruf, who, as Executive Producer wanted Castiglia to make a "raw, rocking blues record". Castiglia's natural raw style along with Mike Zito's flare for a powerful performance was a winning combination. The album was recorded at Dockside, a Studio in Maurice, LA, where Junior Wells recorded his last studio album, *Come On In This House*. Castiglia has mentioned in various interviews how much this connection meant to him and added to the "mojo" of the recording. He toured with Wells in the 90's as part of Well's band and credits Wells with "... opening the door for him" to "be a Chicago bluesman". Engineering, mixing and mastering was done by David Farrell who has engineered Zito in the past. Castiglia credits the production team with "helping him nail" "a record that best represented who I am, as a musician, singer, guitarist and live artist". Indeed *Big Dog* succeeds in making Castiglia's sixth album a superb example of his musical talents.

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There are eleven tracks of blazing guitar, excellent musicianship, expressive vocals and great song writing. Six songs on the album were written/co-written by Castiglia. It is an album that brings the blues very much alive in a big way. It reaches back to Castiglia's early influences such as Junior Wells, Chicago blues and even further back to the early blues with lyrical references to the infamous crossroads ("Get Your Ass in the Van") and the bluesman's devil ("Where the Devil Makes his Deals"). Musically, he makes use of call and response, particularly in "Don't Let them Fool Ya" and slow, smooth blues in "Where Did I Go Wrong" featuring Johnny Sansone on harmonica and also some boogie-woogie in "What the Hell was I Thinking" featuring Lewis Stephens on keyboards.

The album opens with a searing guitar solo in "Let the Big Dog Eat". The solo grabs you before Castiglia's rough, raspy, raw vocals kick in. The song ends with a few barks from Castiglia. This sets the tone for the rest of the album which covers quite a bit of territory. Big Dog has everything from raucous guitar jams with Zito in "Don't Let Them Fool Ya", which was written by Zito about cheating women to a slower, bluesier story of an alcoholic wife in "Drowning at the Bottom" written by Luther Allison and James Solberg where Castiglia lets his guitar cry the blues for the pain in this song. In "Get Your Ass in the Van", written by Castiglia, humor is added as he sings about those musicians wanting instant fame. One line in particular, "this ain't no American Idol", pretty much sums up the sarcastic humor of the song along with the message he wants to get across about paying your dues in the music business. His slide guitar in this song sets a great example for those quick fame seekers. "Let's Make Love in the Morning", written by Castiglia and Joel Zoss, is a smooth blues ballad with just a touch of country rock. "What I Like About Miami", written by Charlie Pickett et. al., is a funky blues song with a great hook. Castiglia gets down, dirty and swampy in "Where the Devil Makes his Deals" about a bluesman making deals with the devil. The song is blue's perfection with Sansone on harmonica and a prominent heavy bass and drum line. As in the other songs on this album, the guitar work of Castiglia and Zito with their blazing solos and complimenting style pushes the music to a level few can achieve. Big Dog concludes with "What the Hell was I Thinking", a fast paced boogie-woogie about "making promises I just can't keep". This is another song with great hooks, vocals and lively piano by Lewis Stephens. The last song on Big Dog, "Somehow", is a slow, emotional blues ballad co-written with Cyril Neville about the social wrongs in our society. It is a song with a message that is difficult to ignore – or forget. "Take a look around, tell me what you see, take a look in the mirror are you brave, are you free"? The song sites several tragic examples of people living around us who's lives are touched by poverty, lost hope and other very real social ills.

This is one of the best albums I have listened to this year. The music is excellent, it brings life to older blues traditions and musical forms with contemporary, energetic musical artistry. The songs are all well written and Castiglia brings everything he's got to each one, with Zito and the other musicians fully supporting him. The guitar work, energy and intuitive interplay between Castiglia and Zito is really amazing. Castiglia stated that he could "feel the mojo in the recording studio". It comes through the album too. The album has been charting in the top ten

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most of the summer. It is that good. Big Dog is a big deal. ---Kim Derr,
bluesblastmagazine.com

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