

Rod Piazza - Harpburn (1986)

Written by bluesever

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A1 Little Bitty Pretty One/Rockin' Robin 2:27 A2 Bad Bad Boy 3:42 A3 California Boogie 3:17 A4 The Upsetter 3:41 A5 Tribute To George Smith 7:45 B1 Harpburn 3:41 B2 Feeling Good 3:30 B3 Honey Bee (Buzz) 4:45 B4 Cold Chill 3:01 B5 I'm Dangerous 4:15 Personnel: Rod Piazza - Composer, Harp, Mixing, Producer, Vocals Rick Holmstrom - Guitar Miss Honey - Piano Richard Innes - Drums Mike "Hollywood Fats" Mann - Guitar Bill Stuve - Bass Larry Taylor - Bass Junior Watson - Guitar

Rod Piazza, considered one of the preeminent harmonica players around, has become a commanding presence at the forefront of today's blues scene. Billboard has also called him "a star contemporary blues songwriter, as well as the star musician verging on a broader breakthrough." Though he isn't quite comfortable with the term "virtuoso," his skills certainly merit placing him in that company. Piazza's harmonica technique borders on astonishing - a delicate combination of power and grace that maintains the fattest of tones while alternately evoking classic Chicago styles, interpreting R&B horn lines, or playing his own signature licks.

Although it's true that, as the New York Times said, "Rod Piazza has perfected the rough drive and edgy tone that characterized the classic Chicago blues sound of Little Walter, Sonny Boy Williamson and others in the 50's," he's also a master of West Coast jump blues, incorporating elements of Los Angeles' postwar jazz, swing, and R&B combos.

His band for the last quarter century, Rod Piazza and the Mighty Flyers, has won the prestigious "Blues Band Of The Year" W.C. Handy Award three times, regarded as the equivalent of the Grammy in the blues field. Piazza has also won the Handy Award for "Blues Instrumentalist-Harmonica," and the band's ability to keep the blues vibrant, fresh and alive has led to countless accolades, awards and nominations over the years. California native Piazza began his musical career in Los Angeles in 1965, when he formed the Dirty Blues Band at the

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age of 18. They released their first record in 1967, which was quickly followed up by a second album in 1968 on ABC/Bluesway Records. At the same time, he was cutting his musical teeth on local club dates with blues pioneers such as Big Mama Thorton, Big Joe Turner, and T-Bone Walker.

Rod then joined his long-time mentor, George "Harmonica" Smith, Muddy Waters' former harmonica player, to form the double harmonica outfit called Bacon Fat. It was through George that Rod learned the power of a dynamic stage performance and developed his prodigious harmonica talents. "He taught me to always have a plan, to always know what you were going to play before you hit the stage," says Piazza of his mentor. "He would listen closely to whatever you played, then he'd say, if you're not going to say anything different, you shouldn't be up here. He didn't want me trying to mimic him, or anyone else. Be yourself, he'd always say."

Rod released two Bacon Fat albums in 1969 and 1970. In 1973 Rod hired a talented young piano player and Otis Spann disciple named Honey Alexander, who was later to become his wife. In 1976 Rod and Honey began to perform regularly together as the Rod Piazza Blues Band and the Chicago Flying Saucer Band.

In the 1980's, Rod assumed the role of producer, often using the Mighty Flyers as the backing band, for a number of LPs for the local Murray Brothers label. These recordings of important but somewhat overlooked blues artists such as Jimmy Rogers, Johnny Dyer, Pee Wee Crayton, Smokey Wilson, and George "Harmonica" Smith have been reissued in recent years by Blind Pig.

In 1980 Rod and Honey formed Rod Piazza and the Mighty Flyers with long-time bassist Bill Stuve. The group has earned a reputation as one of the hardest working bands who consistently push the boundaries of the blues while still staying vital and true to the spirit and soul of the music. As Blues Revue put it, "Rod and Honey front one of the most popular blues bands in the world. Whether they play at an intimate club, a packed rock room or a huge festival, the Mighty Flyers share with the audience their passionate love of the blues in every show.'

For well over two decades, Rod Piazza and the Mighty Flyers have solidified their position in the top ranks of blues acts by maintaining a busy touring schedule, playing to every manner of club, concert hall, and festival. They've also been prolific recording artists, releasing nearly a dozen albums. They mix earthy originals, rousing jump tunes, earnest boogie and slow blues ballads,

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even an occasional animated instrumental, and remain among the most consistently appealing, enjoyable contemporary units. ---amazon.com

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