

Grandfathers Blues Band
After Dark Club, Exarchia
January 31, 2009
Perri Pagonis
perripagonis@yahoo.com

Grandfathers Blues Band: Nothing but Respect

Cover bands are, and always have been, one of the more quixotic animals in the rock and blues musical cultures. They play other peoples' material from memory for love of the music, personal glory, or very little money. They usually begin as kids, playing in high school bands to impress the girls and get invited to the "in" parties. In the rock genre especially, this is where most peoples' musical careers begin and end. During the college years and shortly after, societal pressure for career advancement and family responsibility pushes the dreams of global pop stardom out the door and out of the game forever. Percentage-wise, there are always a few hangers-on who continue in part-time bands because their interest in the music was truly genuine and their pathos maintained itself past the normal shelf-life of their previous bandmates. However, sometimes, and it is indeed a rare phenomenon, you get some real marathon-men. These are the guys who simply, for lack of a better term, can't stop. They are the ones who should have been the real music stars, as their dedication and efforts have honestly stood the test of time. The Athens-based, Grandfathers Blues Band, is such an example of lifelong dedication to an artform. If guys like Keith Richards and Eric Burdon hadn't hit the big-time as kids, they would currently be playing in the UK version of Grandfathers Blues Band.

Their near sold-out show at After Dark club on January 31 was like spending time with old friends who play music in their basement after having a good meal at home. The attending crowd partied and bopped along with the band with real feeling and good cheer. The patrons were also a bit seasoned in the age department. There were no kids anywhere in the club. Not one.

Their live material does have good range, as they play blues-based, classic FM pop nuggets that span from Janis Joplin's "Piece of my Heart," to a straight blues-rock version of Screamin' Jay Hawkins' standard, "I put a Spell on you." The three-guitar line-up have a very good sense of dynamics, and all players know when to fade-out, fade-in and control volume overdose. The senior guitarist, Nikos Sias, and vocalist, Evelina Miaoli, are the front-line of the band's stage presence. Sias, a medical doctor and surgeon during the daytime, plays BB King-esque soulful leads and never wastes a note of his solos on ego-gratification. Miaoli is a dead-ringer, both in appearance and vocal style, to Dale Krantz, formerly of the southern rock Rossington-Collins band. Her delivery is clean and self-confident, without a brainwave of pretention or egoism.

In the Japanese film of the mid-1990s, *Shall We Dance*, a few senior Japanese businessmen escape the pressure-cooker atmosphere of their office by taking ballroom dancing lessons at a private studio. As their lessons progress and they develop genuine feeling for the artform, they begin to prepare for an amateur dance competition. One businessman begins to dress flamboyantly, and wear flowing wigs like his idol, Johnny Williams. Although he is at first cajoled by his colleagues for his image shift, he is still respected by them. In a confessional moment he states, "when I wear the clothes and hair of Johnny Williams... I am Johnny Williams." He is a desiring subject who, at last, broke the constraints of society and became the

desired object of his dreams. How many of us can actually say we've become the thing we really wanted to be in life, even for one minute? Wouldn't you give almost anything to become the person you always dreamed of becoming, but, because of any number of reasons, had to compromise those dreams?

In the late 20th century, during the golden age of blues-based arena rock and televised guitar heroes, who didn't want to be Jimi Hendrix, David Gilmour, Pete Townshend, Ritchie Blackmore or Jimmy Page? Every kid in the world wanted to be a guitar player and experience the creative freedom, psycho-sexual power, economic success and world-wide attention of these chosen people. I respect the hell of of the Grandfathers Blues Band because they didn't compromise completely to wage slavery and single-minded wealth accumulation in our culture. When these guys play their guitars on stage they become, at least for a minute anyway, Buddy Guy, Roy Buchanan, Albert Collins and BB King. They have, effectively, given a great percentage of their lives for the opportunity to have a few moments of transcendence and identity exchange with the heroes of their youth. I'm glad we have them in our city because, like it or not, they indirectly represent the hope for all of us to become the things we really want to be in this life.