

BLAKE ZIDELL & ASSOCIATES



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the HUM

Funky As Ever

The Greyboy Allstars, together again, Citta di Vitti's jazzy soundtracks



The Greyboy Allstars first came together 15 years ago at the Green Circle Bar in San Diego, a club that's now gone like a cool breeze. A DJ who calls himself Greyboy spun funk, soul and boogaloo jazz records there. A scene developed and there was a call for live music. With the help of saxophonist Karl Denson, who'd played with Lenny Kravitz, Greyboy assembled an all-star combo drawing players from various area bands, among

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them guitarist Mike Andrews aka Elgin Park, bassist Chris Stillwell, drummer Zak Najor, and organist Robert Walter.

"The Green Circle was cool," recalled Walter when I caught up with him via cell at his relatively new home in New Orleans. "It was in a sort of crappy part of town, off the beaten path with no other clubs around. It was kind of a hipster bar where people dressed up. They had a few touring acts. Greyboy was the DJ, he played every weekend and also on Wednesdays. Wednesday was our night; he'd play before us and after, and we'd play two big sets."

Greyboy wasn't really in the band but served a role that Walter described as "spiritual advisor" and a "taste thermometer."

"He helped us avoid any tackiness in the style. He was all about a certain era of records, which was basically soul-funk and jazz records from, like, 1967-1972. That was the golden age that influenced us. So we got turned onto all this music, and from there we insinuated our own personalities into it and it became something else. But that's how it started, as a tribute to Prestige and Blue Note funky jazz records."

In 1995 the band released an album called West Coast Boogaloo with Fred Wesley from James Brown's band producing. The Greyboy Allstars took off, although when they hit the road, Greyboy typically stayed at home. Over time the various players spun off on what they deemed "sidecar projects." Elgin put a rock band together under his nom de plume. Walter formed a combo he called Robert Walter's 20th Congress, then there was Karl Denson's Tiny Universe. The Greyboy association ultimately fell by the wayside, as the various players became stars in the then-nascent jamband scene. Walter and Denson in particular became national stars in that scene.

Then a couple of years ago the Allstars decided to reassemble for a tour, then for an album, What Happened to Television? with Greyboy at the helm. It was a natural thing to do, and almost inevitable. Says Walter, "For me personally — and I don't know if Karl feels the same, but I have a feeling he does — doing those other things is great because I get to play more of my own music and push my aesthetic and all that, but as far as a band, I've always been trying to chase this sound, trying to have a band that sounds as good as this one. You know, there's something about the interaction of players and the democratic nature of the group that makes it easier and better sounding than other things. You might have some idea you can't pursue because we still go for a narrow aesthetic, but when you get in a room and start playing a groove, it just — it just sounds great."

It's true. The music sounds great, as funky as ever, kinda jammy and very cool. The Greyboy Allstars are now preparing for a spring tour (it's spring as of 5:58 p.m. Thursday), reassembling once more to hit the road with almost all of the original line-up (Najor has been replaced by drummer Aaron Redfield). A West Coast jaunt brings the boys to Eureka on Monday, March 24, for a show at Red Fox Tavern with an added bonus: Underground hip hop artist Busdriver opens.