

Apicella Channeling the Past

IN MANY WAYS, GUITARIST CHARLIE Apicella has devoted himself to a kind of historical reenactment. On all of his previous albums, which have included tributes to Jack McDuff and B.B. King, Apicella faithfully has sought to channel an era of American music when hard-bop and r&b reigned and existed as a sort of *lingua franca*.

His latest album, *Groove Machine* (O.A.2), is no exception. There are a number of instances when Apicella nods to the past as he dutifully covers funky, down-home tracks like Lou Donaldson's "Hot Dog" and Willis Jackson's "Brother Elijah." But the guitarist still manages to keep things fresh. The album, his sixth as a leader, is made up primarily of his own compositions, including the cool, swinging "Three Sided" and "Along The Southern Coast"—with a soulful cameo from violinist Amy Bateman.

"They all sound like something you would have heard in 1954," Apicella recently said over the phone from his New York apartment.

The record showcases Apicella's Iron City band, which includes drummer Alan Korzin, tenor saxophonist Gene Ghee, trumpeter Freddie Hendrix, conguero Mayra Casales and organist Radam Schwartz, who contributed one composition, "Calypso Blue." "All the music grooves,"

Apicella said. "There are no intros to the tunes that are washy—we get right to the point, just like Jack McDuff."

If Apicella seems like a throwback, it's because he is. He is in his mid-30s, but doesn't listen to much contemporary jazz, most of which bores him—there is, he said, "an obnoxious level of improvisational hysterics."

Instead, he prefers to take inspiration from earlier jazz guitarists like Herb Ellis, Wes Montgomery and Kenny Burrell. And on his records, he tries to align himself with musicians who have performed with mid-century titans of jazz. Schwartz, for instance, played with Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis and David "Fathead" Newman.

"He doesn't have super-duper chops, but he plays tastefully, and you can tell that he's studied the tradition of the guitar," said Hendrix, who's frequently collaborated with Apicella and further describes him as a deeply melodic guitarist along the lines of Grant Green.

Apicella picked up the guitar relatively late, buying his first instrument during his senior year of high school. He studied jazz on the side while a student at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where he set up shop as his teacher. And since coming to New York, Apicella has



Guitarist Charlie Apicella says his band gets "right to the point, just like Jack McDuff" on *Groove Machine*.

done his best to seek out elders, even though, as he puts it, "The way that guys used to learn isn't really around anymore." Still, he's managed to study under guitarists Pat Martino and Dave Stryker, who produced two of Apicella's records.

According to Hendrix, Apicella has "really come into his own within these past few years." The guitarist also has established himself as an educator with his TrueFire video lessons and as an instructor at the New York Jazz Workshop.

But Apicella still seems to view himself primarily as a student of the past. Regarding future albums, he said that he's like to record a tribute to Jimi Hendrix, as well as another paean to B.B. King—this time with a vocalist.

—Matthew Kassel

