



Asleep At The Wheel "**Served Live**" Acadia/Evangeline Records

Circa the early eighties, at the foot of the front cover photograph on my vinyl copy of this 1979 recording, Danny Levin, the Asleep fiddle/piano player, wrote – "Boulder, Colorado." The liner states clearly that the ten tracks were cut at The Austin Orpy House, Austin, Texas on January 19th and 20th that year. What's more, as "Choo Choo Ch'Boogie" the opening cut begins, the compere clearly announces that it's "*Live from Austin, Texas on a Saturday night.*" I guess Capitol, who originally released this disc, figured it was a neat band photo, although only four members are present including Chris O'Connell and Ray Benson [#]. On the rear of my "**Served Live**" vinyl liner, Levin then inscribed "Danny Levin = Daniel J. Menudo." That being the case, of the *nine person Asleep line-up* listed, the remainder were *original members* Ray Benson [guitar, vocals], Lucky Oceans [pedal steel] and Chris O'Connell [guitar, vocals], plus John Nicholas [guitar, piano, vocals], Pat "Raco" Ryan [sax, clarinet], Spencer Starnes [bass] and Fran Christina [drums]. On this Acadia/Evangeline release, the front of the CD booklet features a *close-up* of one of the Asleep tour bus wheel arches, a fuller photograph of which originally adorned the rear of the original vinyl release liner.

Six years prior to "**Served Live**," fiddle players Johnny Gimble and Andy Stein [who doubles on sax, in Commander Cody's Lost Planet Airmen] were guest players on the band's debut "**Comin' Right At Ya**," and they were onstage for this concert, along with Asleep alumni Link Davis Jr. [sax], plus Jimmie Vaughan [guitar] and Chris York [drums]. Concurrently, Vaughan was a member of the Fabulous Thunderbirds, and Christina joined that band within the year. Vaughan is, of course, the older brother of blues guitar wonder, the late Stevie Ray Vaughan.

This configuration of Asleep featured three lead vocalists – Benson, O'Connell and Nicholas – and offered almost endless possibilities in terms of solos, duets etc. Nicholas had recently replaced original band vocalist, Leroy Preston, in the process injecting a blues edge into band's obvious country/western swing leanings. On "Am I High ?," a double entendre filled reference to *d-r-u-g-s*, vocalist Benson [who co-penned the number with O'Connell] employs every device known to entertainers to whip the audience into a screaming frenzy. The band even detours, for a few seconds at a time, into the melodies of some well-known standards. Later, Nicholas *tiptoes* through the same *subjective territory* with his own *vision*, "Too Many Bad Habits."

I mentioned earlier that "Choo Choo Ch'Boogie" [*] opens this disc, and it was the first song that Asleep took into the Country Singles chart in 1974. This set also includes high-octane versions of the instrumental "Jumpin' At The Woodside" and Bobby Troup's *highway anthem* "[Get Your Kicks] Route 66," while Nicholas delivers the energetically bluesy tale of the *fantastic final requests* of a man on death row "The Last Meal." There's a late night, smoky jazzy club feel to "God Bless The Child," co-penned by Billie Holiday back in the 1940's, a song covered to great effect by Blood Sweat And Tears. On "**Served Live**," Ms. O'Connell gives the song a truly sensual reading.

Referring to those aforementioned vocal permutations, O'Connell and Nicholas share the lead on "Baby, You've Got What It Takes." The penultimate cut finds the Austin audience in full voice on "Miles And Miles Of Texas," and the collection closes with "Will The Circle Be Unbroken," a *little* traditional number that the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band had resurrected a few years earlier.

Acadia, a subsidiary of Evangeline Records have also released *2 for 1* CD packages by Asleep At The Wheel of their early career recordings **“Collision Course”/“The Wheel”** and **“Texas Gold”/“Wheelin’ & Dealin’**.” They’re available from the same outlets as **“Served Live.”**

Note.

[#] – The original vinyl liner is reproduced on the rear of the CD liner booklet.

[*] – The song was a # 1 R&B hit for Louis Jordan in 1946.

Folkwax Rating 6 out of 10

Arthur Wood

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