



RON LEVY'S Wild Kingdom
ORGANIC B-3 GROOVES



introduction

In an ambitious career spanning as far back as 1966, **Ron Levy** has played Hammond organ with many of the greatest names in blues, jazz and rhythm & blues today. Amongst those in the know, **Levy** is considered to be the ultimate blues and jazz keyboard player, but most just consider him an icon of the Hammond B-3 organ. **Albert King** saw enough in a very young **Ron Levy** to become his legal guardian back in 1968. He then took **Ron** out on the road for some much appreciated schoolin' until another "King" took notice. **BB King** hired **Ron** to tour and record with him for the next **7 years**, releasing such classics as *Live at Cook County Jail*, and *Lucille Talks Back*. Whether as an organist, pianist, writer, arranger, record label founder, nine time Grammy nominee or producer of over 250 recording projects, **Ron Levy** has been a creative force in American music and the best has yet to come.

Ron Levy's touring band, **The Wild Kingdom**, introduces the vintage sounds of a B-3 organ trio with the twist of a new soulfunk vibe that is proving to be irresistible. Everyone from college students to traditional blues and jazz fans are testifying to the raw power of a **Levy** induced Wild Kingdom jam session. A band that is capable of "blend[ing] jazz, blues, hip-hop and even gospel music in ways that blow apart the stylistic boxes imposed upon music in America today" Ken Franckling (United Press Int'l). Their seminal grooves can be heard at any of their 200+ tour dates a year all across the country and have been captured on three highly acclaimed CDs, including *Zim Zam Zoom* (**** Downbeat), *B-3 Blues and Grooves* (****1/2 All Music Guide and *GreaZe is What's Good* (**** Jazziz).

Over the last 6 years, **Ron Levy** has recorded, inspired and collaborated with the likes of **Karl Denson's Tiny Universe**, **Willie Mitchell**, **Charles Earland & Lonnie Smith**, **Pucho and His Latin Soul Brothers**, **Idris Muhammad & Joe Lovano**, **Reuben Wilson**, **Freddie Hubbard**, **The Memphis Horns**, **Melvin Sparks**, **Carlos Washington**, **Bonnie Raitt & Charles Brown**, **The Rebirth Brass Band**, **Earl King**, **The Wild Magnolias**, **Dr. John**, **Art Neville & George Porter of the Meters** and the list continues to grow. Ron is the best kept secret in contemporary music today and he consistently floors audiences ready to groove, shake, bump and grind. Come check out why.

other highlights

Nine Grammy Nominations: With Charles Brown [3], Earl King [2], Lowell Fulson [1], Roomful of Blues [2], The Persuasions [1]

Producer of the Year 1994: Living Blues Magazine

NAAIRD 1st Place: Larry Davis, Otis Clay [2], Anne Peebles

W.C. Handy [Winners]: Album of the Year, Lowell Fulson, Charles Brown, Champion Jack Dupree, Larry Davis

W.C. Handy [Nominated]: James Harman, Smokey Wilson, Johnny Bassett and 33 others

150+ Songs recorded and published with Levtron Music, BMI included in movies and television: "Copland," "ABC World News Tonight," "ABC Wild World of Sports," "60 Minutes," "NBA on NBC," "ABC Christmas Special," "Big Easy" series on USA, "NFL on Fox," "CBS NFL Report," "Sex in the City" and others.

Bluesman Levy Reclaims

By DANIEL GEWERTZ

Blues keyboard ace Ron Levy has come back home to the stage.

After a decade of record producing and label administration, the esteemed organ and piano veteran is hitting the boards and feeling rejuvenated. "I'm 18 years old again in terms of enthusiasm," Levy said last

week from his Newburyport office.

MUSIC

All through the '90s, while Levy produced records, first for Rounder/Bullseye Blues, and then for Cannonball, his band Wild Kingdom was a revolving batch of top studio musicians, cutting discs and disbanding. But now Levy's Kingdom has been reborn as a live outfit.

"I never got to play my Wild Kingdom songs live before, because they were too complicated for a pickup band to jam on. But now, finally, I have a real band, and they're pulling them all off. After all these years of writing ... actually playing my songs in front of people! I'm digging it big time," said Levy, whose Wild Kingdom roves into Johnny D's on Saturday.

In the early and mid-'90s, Levy helped create Rounder's Bullseye Blues label, and served as its house producer and talent scout. He brought in such greats as the late Charles Brown and Lowell Fulson, and produced CDs by Roomful of Blues, his former band. His years at Rounder coincided with the duration of his marriage to the label's co-owner, Marian Leighton.

Two years ago, Levy dove further into front-office duties. Moving to Minnesota, he became co-owner of a new blues label, Cannonball. He produced 20 albums in as many months, including work by Charles Earland and Otis Rush. He also recorded "Greaze Is What's Good," a Wild Kingdom CD. "Unfortunately, the distribution was like the Loch Ness monster: there were rumors, but no one could prove it was really there," joked Levy. (The disc is available from his Web site www.levtron.com.)



RON LEVY: Blues keyboardist returns to the stage.

tron.com.)

This business disappointment paved the way for Levy's return to his boyhood love: playing the blues live. Born in Cambridge in 1951, Levy lived in Brookline in the '60s. In 1964, he saw his first concert, Ray Charles, and began playing piano the next day.

By '65 he was hanging out at Louie's Lounge, the Club 47 and Sunday matinees at Paul's Mall, fascinated by legends such as Muddy Waters, Otis Spann and Howlin' Wolf. By the age of 15 he began backing up Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, Big Mama Thornton and John Lee Hooker when they came to town, often accompanied by fellow teens Peter Malick on guitar and Willie Alexander on drums.

Then, at age 18, Levy joined B.B. King's band for seven years, playing more than 300 gigs a year. "We had pride as a unit," he said. "We could kick anybody's butt, and we'd better, or we'd catch hell from B.B. That band caused lots of divorces. It was like military service, and we were always off at war."

Nowadays, Wild Kingdom is up to 10 gigs a month, playing its sophisticated yet groove-crazy brand of modern blues, jazz, r & b, gospel and Latin "all glued together."

Doing the thing is still Levy's Hammond organ, which weighs 385 pounds.

"Other keyboards are toys to me," said Levy. "With (a Hammond) B3 organ, you're driving a Cadillac. Everything else is a Geo."

Wild Kingdom plays Johnny D's in Somerville on Saturday. Tickets are \$7. Call (617) 776-2004.

Wild Kingdom

"High energy, genuine performance that's a true jewel in today's world of pop culture..."



RON LEVY'S WILD KINGDOM GREAZE IS WHAT'S GOOD

Cannonball

Ron Levy is the ultimate blues keyboard player. A former member of Roomful of Blues and a veteran of six years with B.B. King, Levy has lent his swirling B-3 organ playing and studio know-how to albums by Champion Jack Dupree, Ronnie Earl, Lowell Fulson, and Jimmy McCracklin. On the first album since his departure from Cambridge-based Rounder Records, Levy showcases the many sides of his musical persona. While the blues continue to reside at the core of his arrangements, Levy successfully incorporates elements of funk, hip-hop, Miles Davis-like jazz, reggae, acid jazz, and pop. Levy's skills as an accompanist are given a challenging workout by an all-star aggregate of musicians, including jazz trumpeter Freddie Hubbard, blues guitarist Preston Shannon, and vocalists Michelle Wilson and Ray Greene. Hip-hop style rapping, by Rob Raw and Caesar, provides a modern flavor to "Gangsta's To Blame" and "Mr. Mr. Blasta From The Past'da," while the syncopated rhythms of jazz drummer Idriss Muhammed anchor a soulful rendition of Marvin Gaye's "What's Goin' On."

"The Wild Kingdom's tight collaboration of Coltrane-esque jams, percussion and delectable guitar riffs are classic B-3 organ soul."

Levy is the
mate blues
ard player..."

ALL THROUGH his career, from his teenage years with Albert and B.B. King to his tenure with Roomful Of Blues and his current gig as a house producer and sessionman for Bullseye Blues, Ron Levy has been a big fan of the Hammond B-3 organ. Naturally, he is pleased to see that the hulking instrument is making a strong comeback with the emergence of the acid-jazz scene.

"I think jazz just got into this thing for a while where it was heady and experimental and everybody just tried to show off their virtuosity...chops for the sake of chops," says Levy. "I think it alienated people for a while. And I'm glad to see that jazz is becoming more popular through this jazz-with-a-beat kind of thing."

Levy's own contribution to the genre is *Zoo Zoo Zoo* (Bullseye), a collection of funky B-3 grooves in the company of guitarist Melvin Sparks, bassist Stanley Burks, percussionist Ralph Dorsay, horn players Ray Greene and Gordon Beadle and quintessential funky drummer Idris Muhammad. Recorded at Rudy Van Gelder's studio and produced by longtime B-3 enthusiast Bob Porter, it moves from charred shuffles like "C.C. Rider" to undulating grooves like "U Rockin' Me" and the funky title track, from a swinging rendition of Doc Pomus' "Lonely Avenue" to the Latin-flavored "Silver Cannonball," Levy's tribute to two towering influences, Horace Silver and Cannonball Adderley.

"I think the songwriting on this one is a little jazzier than what most people know me for," he says. "I joke when I say I'm probably one of the only people in the world who has done blues for commercial reasons, because I've just always worked in that blues vein. But myself, I've always loved jazz and R&B more."

Levy is quick to point out that his infectious brand of instrumental 'acid blues' is catching on in the clubs. "We've been able to hold the audience without vocals. People been dancing to it, groovin' to it. What more can you ask for?" — *Alf Mikowski*



Ron Levy

Jazz Times -September 1996

"The Wild Kingdom rips up preconceptions and leads listeners
down new musical paths..."

LEVY.

The Master of the B-3 Fleashes Out His Resumé

by Karl Bremer

I pulled all the records with Ron Levy's name on them out of my collection, there'd be a sizable gap on the wall. This cat's name is everywhere: producer, session player, bandleader, songwriter, label-owner.

Here's a guy who started playing with B.B. King at the age of 18. He's got a musical rap sheet seven pages long, featuring work with everyone from Bo Diddley and Champion Jack Dupree to Lowell Fulson and Smokin' Joe Kubek. Through his own co-founded Cannonball Records label and others, he's launched — or relaunched — the careers of a whole gang of blues and jazz artists, young and old. And he fronts his own band on his weapon of choice, the Hammond B-3 organ.

Just reading Levy's bio is exhausting. Yet he talks like he's just getting his second wind.

"I feel like I'm 18 years old again," Levy exclaims during a recent interview. Part of the reason for his new-found enthusiasm is the re-formation of his "acid-blues" band, Wild Kingdom, a seductive amalgam of blues, jazz and funk with a dash of Memphis-flavored R&B propelled by Levy's soulful organ grooves. Of all the musical hats he's worn, he says, "I have to say that me actually playing music does come first.

I've expenoced an this energy for all these other various companies and artists and producing everyone else; it's probably high time I do something for myself."

Levy dove back into his Wild Kingdom project after losing his stake in Cannonball Records this year in what he describes as a "hostile takeover" by his partner. "It was taken away from me, and I have to say it broke my heart. It was one of those classic examples of the creative guy versus the business guy," says Levy; the "creative guy" in the partnership.

Cannonball exploded on the scene in 1997 and within a year spawned 18 releases featuring some of the freshest names in blues — Bernard Allison, Shawn Pittman, James Harman — as well as some respected older names such as Johnnie Bassett and Melvin Sparks. "It was a lot different than any other record company I ever worked with. It was more like an artist-run label," says Levy.

"They afforded me an opportunity to record a lot of good stuff. I got a chance to bring some real good people to the forefront, like Johnny Bassett and Shawn Pittman, and got to record a lot of my jazz friends and idols," he continues. "All the musicians and I appreciate the opportunity Cannonball gave us. We wish it had worked out better."



1. Ralph Dersog, Ron Levy, Melvin Sparks, Gordon Beazle, Idris Muhammad, Stanley Banks, Ray Greene
 2. David Baker, Melvin Sparks, Ron Levy, Leon Spitzer, Karl Denson, Zak Major, Chris Wood, Erik Newson, DJ Logic
 3. BB King's Band circa 1970s
 4. Carlos Washington, Jeff Lockhart, Warren Grant, Ron Levy
 5. Ron Levy, Jusier Wells
 6. Karl Denson, Chris Wood, Melvin Sparks, Ron Levy
 7. Bonnie Raitt, Ron Levy, Charles Brown
- [All names left to right]

timeline and highlights

- 2001** SOLD OUT superstar jam featuring **Ron Levy** on Fender Rhodes, **Melvin Sparks** on Guitar, **Clyde Stubblefield** on Drums and **Leon Spencer** on Organ. Subteranean, Chicago IL.
- 2001** **Karl Denson's Tiny Universe** releases *DANCE LESSONS #2* on **Blue Note Records** with two new Levy compositions.
- 2000** SOLD OUT Halloween Bash with **Carlos Washington** on trumpet. Elbo Room, Chicago IL.
- 2000** STANDING ROOM ONLY at all Goodlife Downtown appearances. Boston MA.
- 1999** **Ron Levy's Wild Kingdom** on tour... first time ever!
- 1998** Elected to Board of Directors, **Blues Foundation**. Memphis TN.
- 1998** Release of *Greaze is Whats Good* on Cannonball Records **rated 4 stars** by **Jazziz**.
- 1997** Co-founder, producer and A&R representative for **Cannonball Records** (18 releases).
- 1996** Release of *Zim Zam Zoom* on Bullseye Blues & Jazz **rated 4 stars** by **Downbeat**.
- 1993** Release of *B-3 Blues and Grooves* on Bullseye Blues and Jazz **rated 4 1/2 stars** by **All Music Guide**.
- 1990-1997** Co-founder, producer and A&R representative for **Rounder Record's Bullseye Blues & Jazz** label. **93+** releases, full catalog distributed by **Mercury Records**.
- 1984-1987** Signs with New Orleans **Black Top Records**, releases 2 solo albums and contributes to 18 sessions. (keys, arrangemer, A&R, associate producer)
- 1983-1987** Pianist, organist with **Roomful of Blues**.
- 1980-1983** Organist with **Luther "Guitar Jr." Johnson and the Magic Rockers**.
- 1969-1976** Pianist for **B.B King**.
- 1968-1969** Organist for **Albert King**.
- 1966-1969** Backed up **Chuck Berry, Freddie King, Bo Diddley, Big Mama Thornton, Big Joe Turner, Otis Spann, John Lee Hooker and others**.
- 1951** May 29th, Born in Cambridge MA.

discography

SOME OF THE ALBUMS RON HAS CONTRIBUTED TO:

BB King	(1971) LIVE AT COOK COUNTY JAIL	Piano
BB King	(1972) GUESS WHO	Piano
BB King	(1975) LUCILLE TALKS BACK	Piano
Ron Levy's Wild Kingdom	(1985) RON LEVY'S WILD KINGDOM	Organ, Piano, Vocals
Ron Levy's Wild Kingdom	(1988) SAFARI TO NEW ORLEANS	Organ, Piano, Vocals
Ronnie Earl	(1988) SOUL SEARCHIN	Organ, Piano
Rebirth Brass Band	(1989) FEEL LIKE FUNKIN IT UP	Producer
Georger Porter Jr.	(1990) RUNNIN PARTNER	Producer, Organ
Charles Brown	(1990) ALL MY LIFE	Producer, Organ
Rebirth Brass Band	(1991) REBIRTH: KICKIN IT LIVE	Producer
Ron Levy's Wild Kingdom	(1992) B-3 BLUES AND GROOVES	Producer, Piano, Organ
Ron Levy's Wild Kingdom	(1996) ZIM ZAM ZOOM	Organ, Producer
Pucho and his Latin Soul Brothers	(1997) GROOVIN' HIGH	Producer
Charles Earland	(1998) JAZZ ORGAN SUMMIT	Producer, Editing
Ron Levy's Wild Kingdom	(1998) GREAZE IS WHAT'S GOOD	Producer, Organ, El. Piano
Charles Earland	(1999) LIVE	Producer
Karl Denson's Tiny Universe	(2001) DANCE LESSONS #2	Organ, Electric Piano
