

By Jay N. Miller

For The Patriot Ledger

Posted Nov 25, 2008 @ 12:58 PM

Last update Nov 25, 2008 @ 02:14 PM

Music review - Ceresi's All Starz live up to billing

There's no hyperbole at work when Roger Ceresi's band is called the All Starz, for the octet includes some of New England's best rock, blues, and R&B musicians.

Take Rob Nelson on guitar, who's played for many years with Rhode Island's superb blues band Loaded Dice and done a few stints with Roomful of Blues. Or take baritone sax player Barry Fleischer, best known as 'the bottom' of Evil Gal's gritty R&B sound. Or how about Carl Querfurth, who was part of Roomful of Blues' horn section for many years, and can achieve that rarest of musical happenings – a riveting trombone solo.

If you're not impressed by the band's pedigrees, there are the clear baritone and irrepressible energy of the singer, and a set list that spans rock, blues, and classic R&B. And don't forget the drummer, Joey Sullivan, who's capable of tasteful surprises on nearly every song.

Saturday's late set was an appealing selection of rock and blues classics, all done with verve and pinpoint musicianship. Ceresi, a former drummer who became a singer kind of by accident, dominated a blissfully swinging "Farther On Up the Road" with his warm, engaging and celebratory vocal. The slow steamy blues of "How Long" found Ceresi strolling through the crowd, delivering the lines to lucky women along the way.

On "Too Hot to Handle," Nelson's guitar took on a "walking" progression for a much different style solo. The band gave keyboardist Matt McCabe a break for an even more stripped-down take on Chuck Berry's classic "Memphis," a chugging rock treatment that highlighted even grittier Nelson lines, and a perfectly modulated, wink-and-a-nod Ceresi vocal.

The band performed a romping, stomping march through Lazy Lester's "Sugar-coated Love," and why not, as bassist Kenny "Doc" Grace is a former Lazy Lester sideman. Sullivan's signature moment began as a routine drum solo, moved to the mic stand and then the floor, and continued on cowbell as he toured the C-Note, stopping to craft a curiously compelling solo on the bottles lined up behind the bar. Bartenders acted like this kind of craziness is par for the course with this band, but it made for a unique highlight for first-time fans.

“C’mon Let’s Boogie,” a title cut from the band’s 2007 album, was fabulously vibrant jump blues, the kind of musical blast of adrenalin that could be the band’s trademark.
