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It's **BIG AL**
ANDERSON
INTERVIEWED

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On the occasion of the release
of his Sony/Legacy CD **After Hours**

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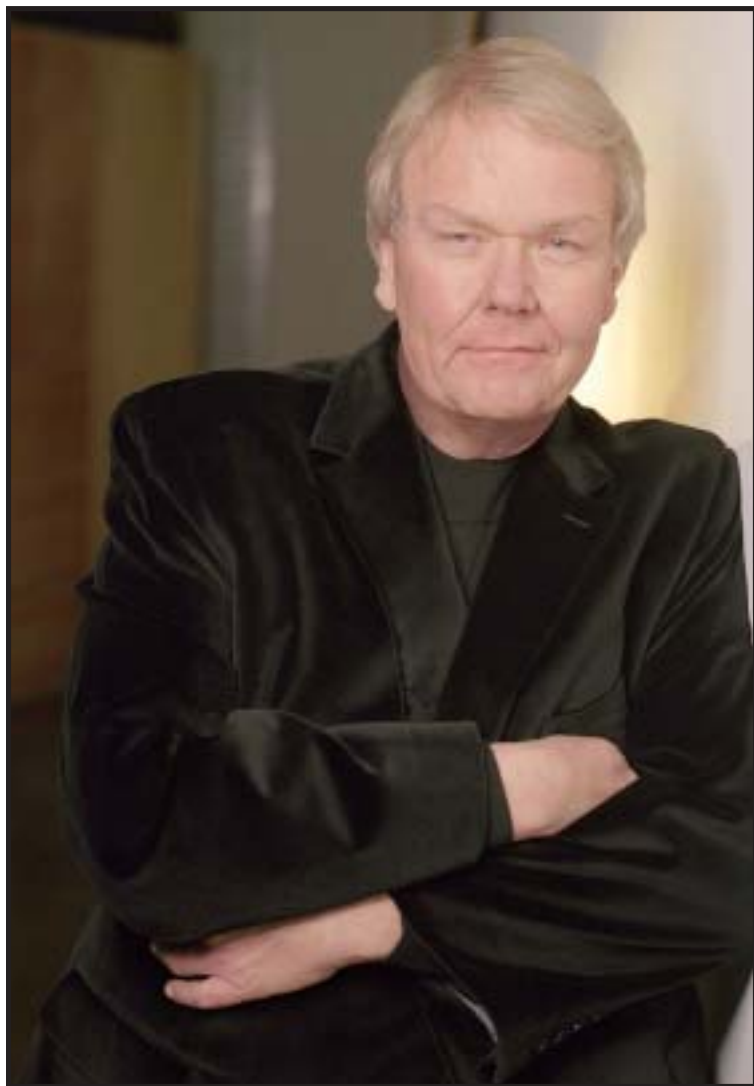


By Duane Verh

“These are all songs I thought would never get cut, that’s why I put them on there. Over 15 years I’ve had these songs that have just meant a lot to me in one way or another.” The “I” in those words is Al Anderson, masterful and super-versatile guitarist, songwriter and singer. “There” is his first solo release in ten years. Known best for his double-decade tenure as lead guitarist for the terminally eclectic band NRBQ, and perhaps second best for his formidable physical presence- “Big Al” is returning to the performing scene with high hopes for the new disc and big plans for the recording future.

“At the end of the day I’ll take black music over white...[it’s] the spirit. We owe the black man everything. Every white guy does.”

Anderson has spent his recent years crafting songs on his own and with partners in Nashville. Speaking from Santa Fe, where he splits his time, he explains how **After Hours** is not technically a new disc. “It never really had a real release. I had it on my website. I didn’t do the CDBaby or iTunes or anything so it was word of mouth. I sold about 600 copies.” The hook-up with a major label was a fluke. “{I was playing} in East Nashville. Nobody knew we were playing because the band hadn’t played in so long. We did three nights straight. Then Sony decided to have a party, that’s why they came...it all just came together like that.”



Nashville has been Anderson’s creative stomping ground since his departure from NRBQ at the close of 1993. His time in Music City has been marked with a batch of hits cut by country luminaries such as LeAnn Rimes (“Big Deal”), Tim McGraw (“The Cowboy In Me”) and Vince Gill who snagged a Grammy in 2002 with Anderson’s “Next Big Thing.” It also has been a place of frustration as illustrated in a jibe on “Another Place I Don’t Belong” from **After Hours**. Some music biz suit suggests a tune isn’t demographically correct and the lyric mirrors Anderson’s difficulty in getting some songs cut.

“It took me eight years to get ‘Trip Around The Sun’ cut.” This cut being a bittersweet gem from the new disc that Jimmy Buffet and Martina McBride met with chart success with in 2004. The tune’s protagonist reflects on his birthday upon another year gone and is apparently possessed of special emotional clout. “I’ve had three people tell me it stopped them from committin’ suicide. I got letters from ‘em. I never looked at it that way. I thought it was a happy song.”

Country has been the big man’s focus for the past decade and is the most pervasive influence on the new disc, but there’s an undeniable thread of jazz influence that shows up throughout the set.

Jazz was an early influence on Anderson, who gigged in jazz lineups in his native Connecticut while in early teens, pre-dating the formation of his British Invasion-era rock band, the Wildweeds. “But [jazz] really [influenced me] more with NRBQ..” It wasn’t just the jazz that showed up in the band’s repertoire “also

“ [There's] a lot of people I love...Ray Charles, that's my real favorite.”



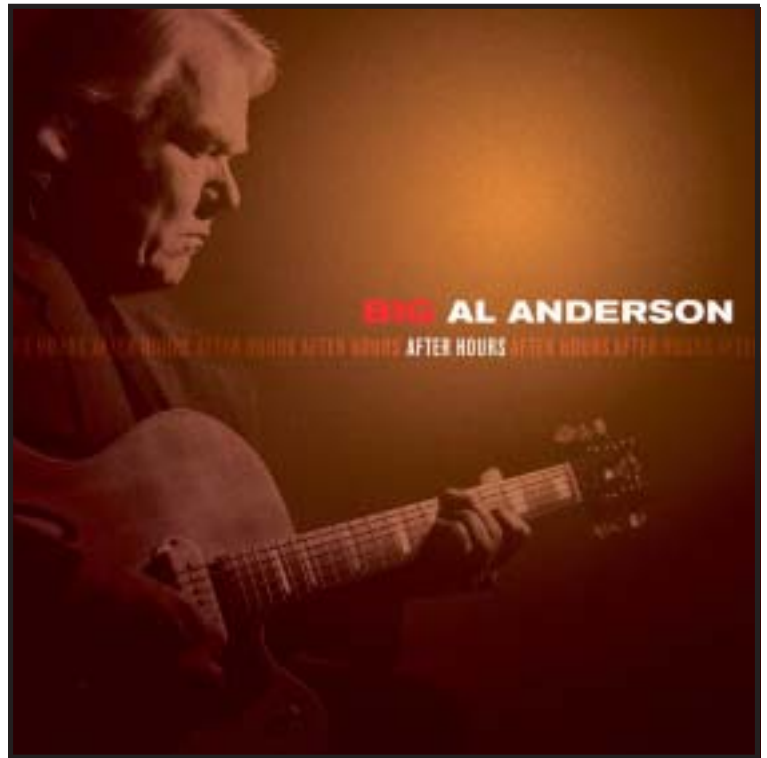
all the records you'd have to hear in the bus." Favorites include Ellington and Jack McDuff "...but there's so many I can't put my finger on, [There's] a lot of people I love."

A reference to Anderson's first national splash, a minor 1967 hit for the Wildweeds, "No Good To Cry" brings the man to his bottom line. Thanks to Anderson's booming, soulful voice the band was frequently mistaken for black and the regionally released record was picked up by Chess and released on its Cadet subsidiary.

"At the end of the day I'll take black music over white...[it's] the spirit. We owe the black man everything. Every white guy does. Even on the country side. Hank Williams learned from a black man and Bill Monroe learned from a black man. I think even George Jones was taught by a black man...Ray Charles, that's my real favorite."

The release of **After Hours** marks a return

of Big Al from writing for others to solo artist. He plans on being a prolific recording artist. Though both he and his label are going to take their time working the new one- beginning with SXSW this March, he's already got the beginning of the next one in the can. "It's like a Stax record. More rock and roll and soul."



Read the review of Big Al's Legacy CD **After Hours** in our March/April issue (280) - available to download at jazz-blues.com

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