

MUSIC

Voodoo Daddy Lounge

A band continues working the swing shift

Writer: MIKE SCALISE

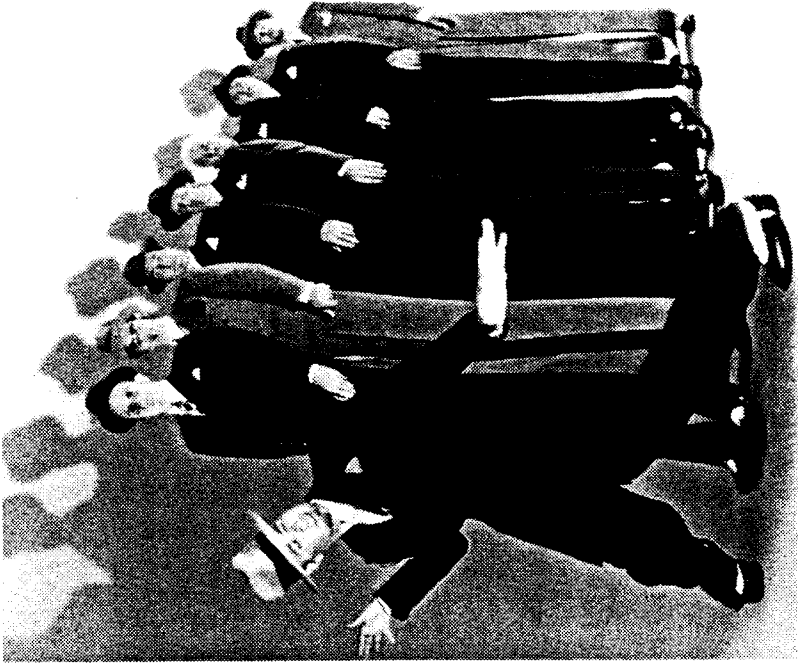
Big Bad Voodoo Daddy is not a typical swing band. They don't float in and out of mainstream radio on a media revival wave: Big Bad Voodoo Daddy is straight from the 1940s, warped into this decade to show other swing revivalists that they lack the sharp swagger that is imperative when paying respect to that unique era of music.

This Beautiful Life, the follow-up to their self-titled, platinum, Grammy-nominated debut, is aptly named. For a band best known as the backdrop to a twirling Jon Favreau and Heather Graham in 1996's cult hit *Swingers*, they go to great lengths on this album to prove that they are more than just a bar room band who plays bar room songs. With *This Beautiful Life*, they show something that is rarely seen in so-called swing bands — growth.

Although lead-off tracks "Big and Bad" and "I Wanna Be Like You" harbor the big-band explosiveness that people have come to expect from Big Bad Voodoo Daddy, that is all on this album that is expected. The mood quickly changes to a

sexy medley of tunes that harken back to the days of Bogart. Listening to the swooning strides of "Who's That Creepin'" does everything except literally put the trench coat and fedora on you. To finish the trip, "What's Next?" smoothes out sultry snaps and saxophones and walks you, trench coat and all, through dimly lit streets of 1940s Los Angeles in search of lost love.

Vocalists Joshua Levy and Scotty Morris share a rare chemistry, alternating between Levy's brazen lyrical style and Morris' upbeat, sly interjections. And as a group, the trumpets, trombones and snares act as the punctuation to Levy's James Ellroy-esque tales of those who walk the line between a married name and an urban legend. "2000 Volts" tells the story of a fugitive Vegas hustler on the run for murder: "Broke from jail without a gun/ Public enemy number one/Killed a man on the run/On the lamb without bail/Headin' straight back to jail/Nowhere



else for him to go, Daddy-O".

Big Bad Voodoo Daddy does not entirely abandon the formula that placed them on the musical map, however. The bumping melodies and lyrical candor of "Big Time Operator" is a sequel their retro-alcoholic anthem, "It's You and Me and the Bottle Makes Three Tonight": "I like to sneak a drink and roll a smoke/You see I like my col-lars pressed/I wear big ol' hats and fancy ties/And I hang late with my friends".

Beautiful ballads like "Still In Love With You" show that Big Bad Voodoo Daddy can sing about more than just hard-drinking bad guys. The love songs on *This Beautiful Life* express a romantic side of the band that completes the album both lyrically and musically. "When It Comes to Love" sounds like it was pulled straight from the heart of Tony Bennett himself while light accordions accompany the moving "Sleep Tight," which plays as an homage to the songs of the late Dean Martin.

Martin isn't the only Rat Packer who receives a tribute on this album. Big Bad Voodoo Daddy knows who their grand-Voodoo Daddy is. *This Beautiful Life* closes out fittingly with a cover of "Ol' MacDonald," a tribute to the godfather of the lifestyle, Frank Sinatra. This band knows where they came from, they know where they're going, and they want to bring you with them — trench coat, fedora and all. **5**

Big Bad Voodoo Daddy

Big Bad Voodoo Daddy and The Blue Hawaiians perform

Thu., Feb. 3, at Laga, Oakland. The all-ages show starts at

7:30 p.m. 682-2050.