

What other harp players influenced you?

Rick Estrin taught me about (right side) tongue-blocking many years ago. I've always thought he was one of the greatest ever. Kim Wilson just kills me with his 1st position Sonny Boy (II) stuff. Jerry Portnoy was with Johnny Young when I was performing with Sam Lay, and I learned a lot from him.

Favorite harp? Favorite Key?

I always used Hohner Marine Band (old school).

Favorite harmonica song?

"Chicago Bound" (Jimmy Rogers w/Little Walter) sets the pace in the very early post-war Chicago Blues.

Why did you pick the harmonica? How long have you been playing it?

Tried to avoid competition with all those guitar players. There just weren't many harp players. I've been playing now about 41 years

Favorite Microphone? Favorite Amp?

I use an Astatic JT-30 or Honer Bluesblaster mic and 1991 Reissue Fender Bassman (tube) amp I bought from Paul Carey.

Do you play any other instruments?

Just a singer/harp player.

Favorite guitarist?

I always loved guys like Hollywood Fats and the (young) Robert Jr. Lockwood and of course Detroit's triad of Doug Demming, Paul Carey and Kenny Parker.

Do you have (or had) a day job?

I work in Engineering Configuration Management at General Dynamics Land Systems.

Do you have a name for your harps? (Like BB King and Lucille)

Harp come and go too quickly - unlike guitars there's no attachment.

If you could "come back" in the next life as something other than a man, what would it be?

I'd be a cat working at the Dunleith (Inn) in Natchez MS siding up to southern debutantes!

Jason Ricci

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Jason Ricci is one of the most innovative harp players on the scene. Bringing a punk rock look and a jazz attitude, this young man seemed to burst on the blues scene, but he's been working for more than



a decade to bring his ideas to the stage. If you're going to break new ground, you better be on a solid footing, and Jason has the awards and the experience to back up his stand. He's won the Sonny Boy Blues Society Contest, the Mars National Harmonica Contest, the "Muddy Waters Award" for most promising new talent. He turned down an endorsement with Hohner in order to play his own customized harps. Jason has just released his new CD *Rocket # 9* on Eclecto Groove Records. His is only the second release on the new imprint and the New Blood's mix blues, rock, funk and jazz are the perfect eclectic blend for this label.

Your band is presenting something different for a blues format; how is that being received?

"I can read an audience and if the blues are really going over, I'll make some compromises here and there. I can tell when they're saying, 'I wonder if this white kid with the funny hair and crazy outfit can actually play the blues.'" Sometimes you have to qualify with some audiences, so I'll play something traditional to show I can actually play. The New Bloods have some very complex arrangements. Our rhythm section, Ron Sutton and Todd Edmond, are incredible. Our fans expect 30 minute odysseys. But it's nothing new. Butterfield was doing it in the 60's. Jam band or blues are just

labels. Nobody ever asked what kind of music Jimi Hendrix or War were playing. Now you've got jazz, blues or rock clubs and three minute songs for the radio. But the Internet has opened that up."

You're making a big splash, but you've been around for a while.

"It's always been that way. Guys win awards for best new artist, and been plugging away for years. We started off just four guys in an Astro van, pawning stuff on the road just to make it to the next gig, but we're doing better now. With Eclecto Groove we're getting more exposure, and working with John Porter was incredible. They've been exceptionally supportive, allowing us to continue in the direction we want to go musically."

Why did you pick "Rocket Number 9" for the title of your new CD?

"Randy and I shot back 126 ideas before we settled. It's a Sun Ra tune and actually older than a lot of Little Walter's songs. People say, wow that's such a modern approach, when actually the original version is just as outside. I started as a traditionalist. I still play that stuff to keep me grounded so when I play something like Rocket Number Nine, I can pull it off."

Did Little Walter influence you?

"I feel he was the greatest. His timing and technique is very allusive. He reminds me of those snakes that slide sideways across the desert. I think he was 36 when he died, but the body of work he did and his stuff with Muddy, Jimmy Rogers and Otis Rush as a sideman was incredible."

What other harmonica players have influenced you?

"I got a lot from Paul Butterfield. He lead me to contemporary guys like Pat Ramsey and Adam Gussow. Also Al Wilson was a humongous influence on me. Most people don't know who he is, but the Canned Heat things he did were amazing. I love Kim Wilson. I can listen to him the most and not get bored."

Favorite harp or key?

"I play customized harmonicas, either made by myself or Joe Spiers. Favorite key would be like asking a painter what color he likes to paint with."

Favorite harmonica song?

"Norton Buffalo did a beautiful job on 'Puerto De Azul' with a chromatic harmonica. A lot of people don't know him, but they've heard him. He's been around the block more times than most. He's done stuff with Steve Miller, Bonnie Raitt

and been putting out stuff with Roy Rogers forever. I would also have to say the song "Seresta" by Howard Levy and Trio Globo; that's my favorite song."

Why did you pick the harmonica? How long have you been playing?

"I thought it was going to be easy, and I wasn't a good singer. I started when I was 14, began playing locally and teaching by 18. I've been playing almost 20 years and I'm still learning. It's like climbing up a little peak, and when you get to the top all you see is more mountains. It's pretty hard to have a big head about the instrument when there is so many brilliant players."

Whats your favorite microphone and amplifier?

"The Shure SM 57, just a run of the mill instrument mic you can get at any local music store. And the Fender Bassman amplifier because it rattles just right. I also use a lot of different things, in fact I made the videos because people were asking. You can get all that on my video's on You Tube, but you don't need all that." (He has over 40 free instructional videos available)

Do you play any other instruments?

"I play guitar and I just took up violin. I've become obsessed with classical violin, it's beyond healthy. I don't play very well but I love to try because it gives me a greater appreciation for the music."

Favorite guitar player?

"My guitar player Sean Starkey, he's been with me for five years, we're best friends and he wrote about half the music on this CD. And, of course Ronnie Earl. But, I've been fortunate, I've played with some of the greatest players in the world like Nick Curran, David and Junior Kimbrough and R. L Burnside. I've had several guitar players that have gone on to do well, but it's great to finally be making a name for ourselves."

Do you have a day job?

"No! I haven't had a day job since I got out of jail. But I have worked at a dry cleaners, waited tables, and as a counselor at a detox clinic helping people suffering from substance abuse."

Do you have a name for your harps?

"I used to call them bitches because you use them up and throw them out. But these new harps are really nice, I tend to think of them as my Stradivarius."

If you could come back in the