

## New wind blowing - Jason Ricci & New Blood showcase diversity over blues

By Glenn BurnSilver  
The Reporter-Herald

In a world that is opening up to more and more musical ideas, Jason Ricci finds himself trapped. Only 21 when he won the Sonny Boy Blues Society, the power-blues harmonica player toured with blues legends Junior Kimbrough, R. L. Burnside and later Big Al and the Heavyweights before forming his own band, New Blood. And that's where the problems arise. Ricci is now less a blues player than a musician also dabbling in rock, punk and jazz — his new album "Rocket Number 9" proves as much — yet he's constantly categorized, much to his frustration, as a blues artist.

"It's all intellectual nonsense," he says from his van in the middle of the Arizona desert while on the way to a gig in Los Angeles. "The brain is an organ in the body that gets in the way of the interpretation of music. I don't really enjoy just playing for a blues audience, or even a jamband audience that would get upset if we played some blues. I just want to play music. I love all kinds of music and I'd like to play music that isn't easily categorizable."

Ricci's new album might help open some new eyes to his diversity as an artist. His band, which features guitarist Shaun Starsky, bassist Todd Edmunds and drummer Ron Sutton, shreds away the notion that Ricci and New Blood are blues-centric. Moments of metal, power rock and jazz fusion, all accentuated with Ricci's exceptional harmonica work, mix with a faintly blues essence and Ricci's smooth vocals. So does Ricci still consider himself a blues artist?

"No, I really don't," he says after a short pause. "I can play blues so I can temporarily be a blues artist, but we cover a lot of different ground. This

is way more of an extension of the entire band. It's not intentional. We never set out to move away from the blues. We all listen to a lot of different music so we can't help but be influenced by everything we hear."



Ricci also blows his harp less than on past albums, opting instead to sing and give his band more breathing room for improvisation, something the band excels at in concert.

"I wasn't interested in doing a record aimed at the harmonica community, there are only about 600 or 700 of them," he says. "Every other one of my albums is a harmonica showcase. For the first time ever I have a band where everyone musically is 10 times better than me. In cases like that you want to show a sound that is a band. The album to me is more about the songs and the band than harmonica solos."

Still, both live and on the album there is plenty of harmonica to get excited about and Ricci understands that's what helps bring people into the venue, even if he hopes the overall band image will one day change.

"The only reason the name Jason Ricci fronts the band is because when I started the band I had a name from touring with other artists and I wanted people to come to my show. I knew if I put my name on the marquee I'd have at least five or six people show up," he says. "But the band has never been about me."

Maybe soon, others will notice that as well.