

Jason Ricci & New Blood cross genres, crafting an indefinable sound

By LIZ STINSON / Lincoln Journal Star
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Jason Ricci is not redefining blues music. That's what he says, at least.

Though the front man and his band New Blood, are stretching genres, breaking musical molds and garnering applause from critics for their innovative take, Ricci maintains that he's never had a master plan to be the crusader for a new generation of blues.

"I'm not out to be the guy who revitalized the blues. I don't take myself that seriously. That would be kind of pretentious of me," he said during a phone interview. "People have said I've changed the harmonica or the way they see the harmonica, but I'm not doing anything new. I'm just doing something that's unique to me. I guess in that respect it would be sort of new. But it's not like I've found any new notes that didn't exist on the harmonica."

Playing since he was 15, Ricci established himself as a top-notch performer at a young age and began touring with bigwigs of blues such as Big Al and the Heavy Weights and Junior Kimbrough before breaking out and forming his own band.

Jason Ricci & New Blood, which is made up of Ricci on vocals and harmonica, Shawn Starski on guitar, Todd Edmunds on bass and Ron Sutton on drums, came together around 2002 after Ricci decided he wanted to create his own music instead of playing behind other musicians in various blues bands.

"I was tired of playing in other people's blues bands and I wanted to start a band that played just music. When I started my own band, we just started playing whatever we wanted," he said.

The result is an indefinable hybrid of blues, rock and jazz. Critics have likened the band to the Rolling

Stones, Lou Reed and blues greats. But putting a finger on what Ricci & New Blood does is nearly impossible, which is an accomplishment that Ricci readily owns up to.

"What we're doing is a lot of songwriting and doing the same thing that Muddy Waters did, which is mixing genres of music. And it's not even intentional," he said.



The band's songwriting duties are carried mostly by Ricci and Starski, but the influences of all of the members shine through, giving the band's sound an eclectic vibe.

"When we get together and write a song, even if the song started out sounding like a Junior Kimbrough tune or a Lou Reed song, by the time it gets interpreted by the rest of the band ... no one, not even the greatest ear in the world could trace it back to what it was originally inspired by, if it was even inspired by anything at all," he said.

Ricci & New Blood recently signed with Eclecto Groove Records, which put out their recently released album "Rocket Number 9."

Ricci said he hopes the label will ease their jump from the blues circuit to the jam-band circuit, which he feels is a better fit for their sound.

The band's diverse sound has in some instances strengthened its draw with blues lovers, yet at the same time alienated people who believe the only school of blues is the old school.

"Blues people mostly accept us, but there are some people who don't feel we're blues enough to be playing blues clubs," he said.

"It's going to be a crossover thing," he added. "It's something that takes a little time to happen."