

SHORT TAKES: JASON RICCI

— Ron Wynn
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Growing up in Maine Jason Ricci didn't hear a lot of great harmonica players. In fact he began playing the instrument more as a defense mechanism than anything else.

"I was the lead singer in a punkrock band and they wanted me to play something that they felt wouldn't deconstruct the song," Ricci said. "So they gave me a harmonica, and for a while I was just sort of playing around with it. But then I started to really listen to some of the great blues players on the instrument like Little Walter (Jacobs), George "Harmonica" Smith and Sonny Boy Williamson (II), plus others like Paul Butterfield and I decided it was time to take the harmonica seriously."

Since that rough beginning, Jason Ricci has emerged as a contemporary harmonica wizard, someone whose lengthy lines, angular phrases and exceptional control and sound have stamped him among the best of his generation on the instrument. A winner in his 20s of the Mars National Harmonica Contest and later an endorsee for Hohner harmonicas, Ricci has been a Nashville resident since 2001 and now heads the band Jason Ricci and New Blood.

They'll be at 3rd and Lindsley tonight (7 p.m., 818 Third Ave. S., 259-9891) where

Ricci will be celebrating the group's second release *Rocket Number 9* (Electro Groove).

Ricci joins guitarist Shawn Starski, bassist Todd Edmunds and drummer Steve Johnson in a band whose idiomatic diversity can be astonishing.



There are elements of jazz, Chicago blues, jam band, funk and punk reflected through the material.

Oddly Ricci has been attacked in some quarters by the very jazz and blues purists who would seem to be the champions of someone leading a band whose music is so deeply rooted in improvisation.

"We usually don't really write out the long pieces, or plan them that way," Ricci said. "Instead it's a case where we start with some riffs and kind of let them develop. What changed things a little this time was that we had a great producer (Grammy winner John Porter) who wrote some things out for us in more detail. But the funny thing is that some of the jazz and blues purists have attacked us for the way we did the Sun Ra cover (the title track "Rocket Number 9"). That song was written in 1950 and our version isn't anywhere as chaotic as his original, so if you're going to attack us for something, you should at least know your history."