



One Track Mind: Peter Novelli with Dr. John and David Torkanowsky, “Since the Hurricane” (2011)

Posted by Nick DeRiso



Half a decade later, Hurricane Katrina still has this devastating power to inspire, as heard on Peter Novelli’s new self-titled release, issued by Chalet Records out of New Orleans. Witness the power of this song, which provides an emotional crest despite appearing in advance of a fascinating, star-studded six-track tribute to Slim Harpo.

“Since the Hurricane,” a Novelli original, opens with the guitarist playing in the clean, crying style of B.B. King. He’s paired up with a ruminative piano and organ backing from Dr. John and David Torkanowsky, respectively. Together, they lament not what happened to the Crescent City on that awful evening in August 2005, but what didn’t happen afterward.

Novelli approaches the lyric, a sad recrimination, with this nimble authority — moving, it seems, at will from the howling blues force of Ray Charles to the damaged romanticism of the Band’s Richard Manuel, and back again. Throughout Torkanowsky, who came to fame in New Orleans as a member of Astral Project, is an almost translucent presence, more felt than heard. David Hyde — the album’s producer — and David Peters add quietly insistent support on the upright bass and drums, as Novelli and then Dr. John take solos. Novelli’s turn is one of thrumming emotion, sometimes sad and at others grittily determined, while Dr. John offers a sequence that sounds more like grim acceptance.

“That old moon don’t shine the same on New Orleans,” Novelli concludes, syncing his swooning guitar lines with the lyric, “since the hurricane.” Thankfully, its best musical talents still do.

The 16-track *Peter Novelli*, which has already shot to No. 2 on the Roots Music Report’s Louisiana airplay chart, also features Augie Meyers, Greg “Fingers” Taylor, Bobby Henderson and — on the Harpo sequence, which itself is worth the price of admission — Raful Neal, James Johnson and “Big” Johnny Thomassie. Novelli and his band, currently on tour with dates in New York, Ohio and Tennessee, will appear at a special in-store CD release party scheduled for Nov 12 at the Louisiana Music Factory on Decatur Street in New Orleans.

Author: Nick DeRiso Nick DeRiso, writing from various kudzu-covered locales across the Deep South, has explored jazz, blues, roots and rock music for Gannett News Service and USA Today, Blues Revue Magazine, AllAboutJazz.com, Rock.com, Popdose, Living Blues magazine, the Louisiana Folklife Program and NoDepression.com, among others. He’s also been programmer and host for a series of radio shows across the same genres. So, yeah, you could call it an obsession.