

**ROD PIAZZA &
THE MIGHTY FLYERS
BLUES QUARTET**
ThrillVille
Delta Groove 118



Rod Piazza lights up a blue note 40 years in the making each time he draws and blows through the reeds.

Some are sweet, others wail like a train a-comin'. And when he sings, Piazza's full of tuneful authority. After all these years, the West Coast harpist's exquisite talent continues to flourish. By his side for the 25-plus years the Flyers have flown is his wife, Honey, an Otis Spann devotee who tickles *and* manhandles the piano with the best of them. The material is always superb, never repetitive, and the Piazzas hire only the best to make it swing like mad.

ThrillVille is the first album credited to the Mighty Flyers Blues Quartet, which features guitarist Henry Carvajal and new drummer Dave Kida, with two guest sax players adding extra heat. Longtime bassist Bill Stuve is out of the picture, so Honey has retrained her left hand to hammer less and finesse the low end more. On the cool-strolling "Westcoaster," you might check the credits twice to make sure there's no standup string puller in the shadows. Another instrumental, the horn-pumped "MFBO," named for the Flyers, might just as well have been called "JBFUNK" in tribute to the Godfather of Soul. Carvajal — in the tradition of all the great Flyers guitarists — is a marvel at slinky, savory nuance. "The Civilian" is his own neat showstopper. Then there's "Sugar," a downright addictive, cheery finger-snapper that'll have 'em doing the jitterbug, guaranteed.

The album begins and ends with takes on Little Walter, first fired-up and then settled in late at night. The teamwork is brilliant, and it's no wonder Piazza is respected these days in the same way he once looked up to his own mentor, George "Harmonica" Smith. Entering *ThrillVille* at age 60 isn't a bad deal for Piazza and his bandmates. For the rest of us, it's an absolute ball.

TOM CLARKE