



Album review originally published in *Living Blues* magazine, Issue #254

# The Healing

Dave Keyes can play the piano, and here he lines up a great band of some good friends for a tour de force album featuring impeccable instrumentation.

By Frank Matheis

THEY SAY THAT if you can make it in New York, you can make it anywhere. New York keyboardist, singer and songwriter Dave Keyes has indeed made it and has been part of the music scene for more than 30 years. The pianist has played with the best: Odetta, David Johansen, Bo Diddley, Sleepy La Beef, Popa Chubby, Ronnie Spector, Alexis P. Suter and the Ministers of Sound, Eddy Clearwater, Big Jay McNeely, Tracy Nelson, Gladys Knight, Pam Tillis, Darlene Love, Ruth Brown,

Lou Rawls, Marie Knight and Levon Helm. Enough said. If you don't know him for that, perhaps you know his work as a bandleader and conductor for both Broadway and TV—most notably conducting more than 600 performances over six years for the Grammy-winning, Broadway smash run of *Smokey Joe's Café*—will ring a bell.

On *The Healing*, an album that evokes a 1940's, opulent, uptown, showboat-lounge vibe, he is joined by guitarist Popa Chubby, who plays uncharacteristically sensitively, avoiding his considerable blues-rock riffs in favor of the song. Harmonica player Rob Paparozzi also adds tasteful instrumentation. The horn section of Chris Eminizer on sax and Tim Ouimette on trumpet add an important dimension. Keyes' big ace up the sleeve is backup vocals by Vaneese Thomas, Alexis P. Suter, Vicki Bell and Ray Grappone, Diane Cricchio and the Brooklyn Interdenominational Choir. Keyes' strong originals dominate the album, showcasing his impressive songwriting prowess. They also pull off a cool cover of Sister Rosetta Tharpe's *Strange Things Happening*, but somehow it's not happening on the cringe-worthy cover of Robert Johnson's *Travelling Riverside Blues*. They more than make up for that mistake on the awesome standout *Faith Grace Love and Forgiveness*, a lovely and moving Keyes original, perhaps one that could enter the American piano songbook. That one alone is a true masterpiece, a wonderful statement by Keyes. He also tears the piano down on the instrumental solo *Boogie For Stefan*, making clear why he is such a sought-after sideman.

Good fun, wall to wall.