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“Hammond B3 Heroes”
CHRIS SPIES
John Milham . Roland Cobb . Chris Clifton . Christopher Spies
Monday . 26 January 2015
Gulf City Lodge . Mobile, AL . USA
Narrator . Tim Coffman
Tim Coffman/Carmen Brown . Developers
There’s something a Hammond B3.
Listening to its pedal bass punctuate the mellifluous, distinctive tones of the keyboard backing the foot-stompin’ choir evoke memories of a 1950s Daddy Grace tent revival. Oh, and there’s the de rigueur Leslie speakers – a true “wrap-around-sound” experience.

The electric organ first showed up in 1935. Invented by Lauren Hammond (who also invented 3-D glasses) and John M. Hanert, it generated sounds by making a current from rotating a metal tonewheel near an electromagnetic pickup.

The Hammond Organ Company found success with churches. Wind-drive pipe organs were expensive, so the early models were low cost alternatives. The B3 model appeared in the mid-50s. Since all great music comes out of the church (and revival tents), jazz musicians picked up on it real quick. Once again, economics – a cheaper substitute for a big band.

The B3 has some distinctive features that are not usually found on other keyboards. Some are similar to a pipe organ, but others are unique to the instrument. One example was the addition of "harmonic percussion", a concept designed to emulate the percussive sounds of the harp, xylophone and marimba. Pre-set keys are another.

The “Boss of the B3” was Jimmy Smith. His albums popularized the instrument in the 60s and created a permanent link between jazz improv and soul. Brother Jack McDuff, Jimmy McGriff, Big John Patton and the DeFrancescos (Papa John and son, Joey) are a few of the organmeisters who shared a modicum of success.

Tonight, Chris Spies, a multitalented Gulf Coast artist, brings his 425-pound magic music machine and a band of seasoned sidemen to share his “Hammond B3 Heroes”. Hang on for the ride!

Tim & Carmen