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Sun shines on local bluesman Walkin' Cane Charanghat

Austin "Walkin' Cane" Charanghat was in good company at Sun Studio in Memphis, especially in spirit. Elvis Presley recorded there. So did Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis and other famous rock 'n' rollers, along with an equally impressive list of blues greats. But Charanghat, a popular fixture on the Northeast Ohio blues scene, one-upped those legends. He not only cut a couple of tracks for his new album at the landmark studio last year. Charanghat got married there, right before the recording session. "It was a cool, intimate wedding," says Charanghat, 33.

The same adjectives could describe this singer-guitarist's latest CD, "706 Union Ave." It takes its title from Sun's address. Hell mark the release of this acoustic-blues album with a performance tomorrow at Fat Fish Blue.

Charanghat and his bride, Karen, tied the knot in Sun's main studio, surrounded by framed photos of Presley and other stars. "Karen loves '50s-era Elvis, so she was up for it," Charanghat says. By day, he's a computer graphics designer. On the side, he helps his wife run Reilly's, their West Side Market stand specializing in British pub grub.

A judge presided over the nuptials in Memphis. Later in the evening, the newlyweds went out to dinner with family and friends at a steakhouse. But first Charanghat recorded nine tunes in one hour. The vibe at Sun was "amazing," he says. "All my heroes took their first steps there. B.B. King did some of his first songs there. So did Howlin' Wolf and Rufus Thomas.

They haven't updated the room. It's exactly the way it was, with all this vintage equipment." Two tunes from the session. "Forever Lovin' Man" and the autobiographical "Ballad of the Honeymooners," are included on "706 Union Ave." The other eight tracks were done at Suma Recording Studio in Painesville.

This is Charanghat's first solo effort. He was backed by a band for his previous releases, "Help Yourself" (1996) and "Radio Cafe" (2001). He'll do two sets tomorrow at Fat Fish Blue, one on his own and one with his Walkin' Cane Band, featuring Michael Bay on guitar, Mike Barrick on bass and Jim Wall on drums.

The new album features five no-frills numbers written by Charanghat and Chris Allen of the local roots-rock group Rosavelt. Listen closely to "Better Than I Should," a slow-burner showcasing Charanghat's smoldering slide guitar, and you can hear his stomach growl. "I hadn't eaten all day," he says. "For most songs, I only did two takes. There are little mistakes here and there. If you listen to the old-school blues guys, there are mistakes all over the place. The mistakes give it character."

Charanghat's 11-month-old son, Isaac, makes a giggling cameo on a sweet reworking of the traditional "Fishin' Blues." Alongside tips of the hat to Robert Johnson ("Walkin' Blues"), Big Bill Broonzy ("I Can't Be Satisfied") and Snooks Eaglin ("I'm a Country Boy"). The CD also includes an update of "Look Over Yonder Wall," a blues chestnut popularized by Arthur Crudup. Charanghat was destined to do the latter tune, too, if only because of the tailor-made lyric: "Hand me down my walkin' cane..."it's a song I've been playing on and off for years," says Charanghat, whose left leg was amputated below the knee in 1996 because of an arterial venous malformation. (Translation: "My arteries and veins were tied up in knots," he says.)

But with a new wife, a new baby boy and a new home to go along with his fine new album, life would seem to be looking up for Charanghat. So why is he still singing the blues? "Not all blues is sad," he says. The blues perks me up. More than anything, it pulls me out of the hole if I'm down."

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