

The Cleveland Scene, July 19, 2001.

Walkin' Cane: Radio Cafe

Austin "Walkin' Cane" Charanghat was born with a diseased left leg that was eventually amputated five years ago. He was also born with two strong hands and 10 nimble fingers that have enabled him to become one of the best guitar players in Cleveland history. The self-styled "world's finest one-legged East Indian blues guitarist" is probably the only axe slinger who can give Glen Schwartz a run for the rupees in Cleveland. And that's the one thing that makes *Radio Café*, the new album by the Walkin' Cane Band, a full-frontal assault of blues guitar virtuosity. Charanghat's brilliant guitar work drives all but a few of the tracks on this, his first CD since 1996's *Help Yourself*.

Charanghat's backing band, the Bad Boys of Blues -- guitarist Michael Bay, bassist Michael Barrick, and drummer Jim Wall -- helps make the album an eclectic affair. But somehow there's a feeling of denial when horns, saxophones, or a Hammond B3 organ shove Charanghat's guitar into some corner. Better the band should throw its Sunday punch every chance it gets. Fortunately, even the heavily arranged songs on *Radio Café* are damn good. Eleven of them are originals, with seven by Charanghat (including three he co-wrote with Rosavelt's Chris Allen) and two each by Barrick and Wall. The cover is a blues-rock version of Stevie Wonder's 35-year-old smash "Uptight." Standouts include the lugubrious Delta blues of "U.S. Crawl," the witty jump blues of "Hush Mouth Money," and the Robert Cray-influenced "Till I Fell." Okay, so it's not a blues guitar clinic from start to finish, but taken as a whole, this is one sizzling effort that can only enhance Charanghat's rep as a blues artist.

Steve Byrne