University of Florida Performing Arts

presents

Big Bad Voodoo Daddy

Monday, November 4, 2013, 7:30 p.m.
Phillips Center

Sponsored by
Big Bad Voodoo Daddy

**Rattle Them Bones**

2013 marks the 20th Anniversary of Big Bad Voodoo Daddy’s remarkable arrival onto the music scene. In its first years, having secured their legendary residency at the Derby nightclub in Los Angeles, they reminded the world — in the middle of the grunge era, no less — that it was still cool to swing, big band style.

Today the high-energy nine-piece ensemble continues the party and takes things to the next level with the release of *Rattle Them Bones*. The follow-up to the much lauded 2009 release, *How Big Can You Get?: The Music of Cab Calloway*, *Rattle Them Bones* still urges their millions of fans worldwide to shake and move to their inimitable grooves while also expanding their horizons with new musical inspiration and influence.

The intensity of the Calloway project helped the band further hone its ability to honor the great musicians and music of the past while pushing the genre forward through interpretation and vision. Leader Scotty Morris has called that experience “The greatest musical education possible, and one that again solidified the brotherhood of the band.” While by design the musical focus of that session was Calloway’s heyday of the ’30s and ’40s, *Rattle Them Bones* is a more expansive, ultimately liberating work that began with Big Bad Voodoo Daddy’s singer and chief songwriter drawing from some unexpected cultural wells.

“The goal with every album is to take the listener on a unique journey and the process this time involved choosing from my originals and a handful of covers we thought would fit the spirit of where the project seemed headed. Often as we start making sense of the material, the record tells us what it’s going to be, and it was clear this time that we weren’t going to be limited to a single decade or vibe. We feel like we left Cab and started thinking about Don Draper and Mark Twain and along the way some fascinating ideas emerged that turned *Rattle Them Bones* into a real celebration of the landscape of American music we love so much.”

“After all these years,” Morris says, “I still enjoy writing in a vintage style. I’m always looking for ways to challenge myself as a writer, so for this record I wanted to do something I had never done before and that was to write a duet.” Not only was Morris able to rise to the challenge, but *It Only Took A Kiss* is one of the album’s real standouts. With its irresistible charm and timeless bounce it’s hard to believe it’s not an 80 year-old standard. “We were looking for the classic, simple yet timeless kind of love song that Gershwin did so well. So influence from this particular era is foundational, but on the new album, the tune falls right in the middle of a grand sweep of musical Americana.”

That sweeping BBVD vision begins with *The Adventures Of*... a 35-second introduction that starts with the sound of an old film projector and transitions into a classic take on 20’s silent film music. “We wanted the listener to know that they were in for something wild!” says Morris.

*Diga Diga Do* is the album’s first full-length track and is a wild journey through the speakeasies of prohibition America.”We wanted to take one of the most popular songs of its time and breathe new life to it.” And breathe new life they did — *Diga Diga Do* is a roller coaster ride of ’20s imagery; big horns, jungle drums, and dancing flapper girls. Think *The Great Gatsby* meets *Boardwalk Empire* meets Big Bad Voodoo Daddy.

Next up is the fiery *The Jitters*. Morris sees the spirited tune as “A straight up, old school big band instrumental, like a ’30s horn section on steroids.” This one really draws the listener in and when the trumpet duel comes to a climax in middle of the tune, you really can’t deny that BBVD means business! With the rock and roll/swing hybrid *Let It Roll Again*, BBVD jumps ahead to the ’40s and early ’50s when big band and early R&B were making cozier bedfellows than we might remember.
Next is the easy swaying charm of the aforementioned duet, *It Only Took A Kiss*, which features the beautiful voice of Canadian singer/songwriter Meaghan Smith. “The second I finished writing that tune I heard only her singing it!” says Morris. The band then dives into the dance — dance — dance of *She’s Always Right (I’m Never Wrong)* — a toe tapping jump blues that playfully reflects on the wordplay, misunderstandings, and conflict that can arise between lovers.

Morris has a great anecdote for the whimsical banjo driven *Why Me?* “An artist from Florida created a poster for one of our shows illustrated in the style of the old black and white Disney cartoons. We all loved the artwork and thought it would be fun to do a song that would sound like those guys playing.” *Why Me?* might be the most dangerous tune on the record — once you hear that hokey chorus, you’ll be singing it for a week.

*Devil’s Dance* (featuring a lyric that gives the album its title) is a bright and brassy number full of New Orleans flavor and lively call and response that was initially inspired by Morris’ reading of Mark Twain’s *Pudd’head Wilson*, the 1894 satirical novel about life on the Mississippi. BBVD’s choice to cover Randy Newman’s mournful, sarcastically self-loathing ballad, *It’s Lonely at the Top* is interesting in that the song, originally offered to Frank Sinatra, was turned down as Sinatra felt it portrayed him as too egotistical. “I love Randy Newman’s directness and the irony of this song felt like a perfect match for us. His take is more angry than ours — ours is a little more woe is me.” Ultimately it captures the idea that success is a double-edged sword.

Romance beckons on the lush and gently swinging, *Still In The Mood*, a tune harking back to the great ballads of the ’50s and the tender side of Count Basie. The band roars into the ’60s with the challenging and brilliant storytelling of Jon Hendricks’ *Gimme That Wine* and then brings things full circle with fast and furious swagger of album closer, *5-10-15 Times*. Featuring a full big band, this is the sound of 18 musicians going all out, pedal to the metal in a take no prisoners approach that brings *Rattle Them Bones* to a close with excitement, passion, and energy as the band pulls into the station at the end of another wild ride.

By now the world knows the essential story of Big Bad Voodoo Daddy — the band co-founded by Morris and drummer Kurt Sodergren made their debut in their hometown of Ventura, Calif. in April of 1993 helping to usher in the swing revival founded on a colorful fusion of classic American sounds including jazz, swing and Dixieland mixed with the energy and spirit of contemporary culture.

They proved to be among the standout groups that launched the new swing era in the ’90s. The group, whose core lineup has been in place since 1995, includes Scotty Morris (lead vocals and guitar), Kurt Sodergren (drums and percussion), Dirk Shumaker (double bass and vocals),
Andy Rowley (baritone saxophone and vocals), Glen “The Kid” Marhevka (trumpet), Karl Hunter (saxophones and clarinet) and Joshua Levy (piano and arranger.) Joining them on the road are Anthony Bonsera Jr. (lead trumpet) and Alex Henderson (trombone.)

Although music by other composers have been featured on each of the band’s albums, Big Bad Voodoo Daddy has always focused on original music, producing an impressively diverse songbook, while embracing the past and today’s times with current perspective and new stories to tell. The band’s originals rocketed the group into its first phase of stardom when You & Me and the Bottle Makes Three (Tonight) and Go Daddy-O were featured in the 1996 indie film landmark Swingers. The film launched the careers of Vince Vaughn and Jon Favreau and established BBVD as a cultural force beyond their home base of L.A.

The band has built a career through relentless touring and an impressive discography that includes the platinum selling, Americana Deluxe and follow-ups This Beautiful Life, Save My Soul and Everything You Want For Christmas. Their music has appeared in countless films, television shows and trailers including Swingers, The Wild, Despicable Me, Family Guy, Phineas and Ferb, Malcolm in the Middle, Ally McBeal, as well as multiple uses of songs for dance routines on Dancing With The Stars and So You Think You Can Dance. The band’s songs have also been featured in multiple Olympic gymnastic and figure skating routines (including Carly Patterson’s 2004 gold medal win) and have been widely used for years as part of television broadcasts of high profile sporting events including the NFL, NBA, MLB and PGA.

The band’s numerous television appearances include Dancing With The Stars, The Tonight Show with Jay Leno, Late Night with Conan O’Brien, Last Call with Carson Daley (the last of which the band wrote and recorded the show’s theme song.) The band has shown true bipartisanship having played private events for the three of the last four presidents as well as events at both the Democratic and Republican National Conventions on multiple occasions.

Big Bad Voodoo Daddy hit pop music superstardom with their appearance in front of millions during the halftime show of the 1999 Super Bowl, while their 2003 New Orleans inspired album, Save My Soul, shifted focus to playing theaters, performing arts centers and large outdoor venues to selling out shows at the Hollywood Bowl, Walt Disney Concert Hall, Lincoln Center, Chastain Park and Constitution Hall, to name just a few. The band often plays more than 150 shows a year and has appeared as special guests with many of the great American symphony orchestras including the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra and U.S. Air Force Band.

While Big Bad Voodoo Daddy has sold millions of albums, the stage has always been the band’s first home. “We make records because we have to, but play live because we love to,” says Morris. Americana Deluxe was really the first album to capture what we were doing live and we strive to capture the energy and excitement of the live show in all our recordings. It’s amazing how the chemistry in this band still works after so many years. Whether on stage or traveling down the road on the bus, everyone is hanging out together, laughing and enjoying being part of such a remarkable enterprise and enduring friendship — one that is so rare in this business.”

“We’ve never tried to put on airs or make people think we’re something we’re not,” he adds. “There’s an integrity that comes from writing and playing songs the way folks did in the old days, when they did it to capture the audience’s imagination; not simply to click with a specific demographic. Our fans always know they’re getting the real thing from us and true emotion that comes from the heart. We have no interest in being pop stars, but we have an absolute love of American music and a strong desire to share that with people.”

As Big Bad Voodoo Daddy approaches their 20-year anniversary, Rattle Them Bones clearly demonstrates that the nine-piece band is very much like a fine wine or spirit that gets better with age. “We’re far from finished making music,” claims Morris. “We have big plans for the next 20 years!”