



By Roger-Z

The NRG Band with Nicole Hart takes a big step forward with this live release. The core of the group, vocalist Nicole Hart and musical mastermind, keyboardist Lance Ong, introduce original material. As Ms. Hart sings in Mr. Ong's composition, "I Heard," "the clock is ticking, baby...it's time to draw the line." And they do just that. With Gil Parris and Rich Cohen alternating on guitar, the rhythm section of drummer Joe Piteo and bassist Vonnie Hudson create a jazzy, R&B groove reminiscent of The Doobie Brothers. Take it a step further. Imagine that classic band fronted by a beautiful blond with a gospel voice and all the moves of Tina Turner. Get the picture?

Think about it. Making it in the music business revolves around four main ingredients: vocals, groove, looks, and material. Playing many nights a week for the past year (and probably working out a lot at the gym), this band (an outgrowth of THE SHADES), easily refined the first three. With the introduction of original songs, the group takes the final step in creating an indelible image. "I Heard" can be heard on national radio. "Treasure," co-written by Hart and Ong, focuses on the old axiom, "One woman's trash is another woman's treasure." The ballad, "Think About Love," written by their friend, Joe Mack, paints the picture of a woman totally in love with a man who no longer wants her. With these new songs, the group has successfully extended the blues and put their own, unique stamp on it.

The incredible sound recorded and captured by Joe Piteo and Sean Moffit (mixed and produced by Ong and Hart) focuses on the space between the notes -- and the incredible, high-energy vocals of Ms. Hart. At a recent gig at [The Lazy Lounge](#) in downtown White Plains, I spoke with the band about the introduction of original material. Interestingly enough, as much as they enjoy it, they face a conundrum as old as musical time. The many blues festivals they play require mostly recognizable covers. The group achieves an admirable balance on this CD with three originals out of seven tunes.

Live, this band kicks ass! Keyboardist Lance Ong wears his keyboard like a guitar and thinks nothing about running out into the audience, jumping onto tables, and getting into people's faces! Mr. Hudson took a bass solo the other night that astounded me with its originality. Most bassists will try to impress with their thumb slapping. Hudson achieved funkiness with incredibly fast 32nd notes. Mr. Piteo lays down a razor sharp groove. On occasion, he can subdivide it into more parts than I ever imagined possible. The band features one guitarist per gig. Rich Cohen and Gil Parris provide an interesting contrast. Cohen plays with a louder, rockier, Telecaster sound. High points include trading licks with Ms. Hart on "Treasure" and his forceful, in your

face, wah-wah powered solo on "Voodoo Woman." Gil Parris lays back more on rhythm guitar, subtly enhancing the groove. But when it comes time to solo, he wraps the band in the palm of his hand as in "I Heard." I love it when he emulates a pedal steel player on acid in "Think About Love."

And finally, let's talk about Ms. Hart. What a great, high-energy performer. Men can't take their eyes off her -- and women view her as a sister! When she sings "They call me the voodoo woman," you don't doubt it for a moment. When Hart sings "It's raining on the other side of the world," she doesn't realize that the water comes from the tears of joy her music causes. Or maybe the tears of jealousy streaming from the eyes of those less talented. Catch The NRG Band with Nicole Hart at [The Turning Point](#) in Piermont, New York on Friday, January 12, 2007