

## Young Neal & The Vipers – “LIVE”



By Don DiMuccio  
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Calling Neal Vitullo of The Vipers “Young Neal” is a little bit like branding 66-year-old Anthony Gourdine of The Imperials “Little Anthony”. It’s simply the brand name that has stuck after all these years. And just like Little Anthony, Young Neal defies age and the passing of time by keeping a youthful energy that only seems to get more sharply honed with each of his ensuing projects. The latest such work is a sweltering live set, recorded entirely in one shot during a gig at The Viper’s old stomping ground Theodore’s in Springfield, MA. Appropriately titled *Live*, Young Neal & The Vipers offer sixteen examples of what they’ve done best for well over twenty years – high-energy rhythm & blues and roots rock & roll.

For the better part of the late eighties and early nineties, there wasn’t a band on the East Coast who could touch the almost-mythical aura created by Young Neal & The Vipers. During Dave Howard’s frontman tenure in the organization, the band came as close to obtaining the ultimate rock & roll prize than perhaps anyone around these parts ever will, that prize being a highly coveted recording contract with Atlantic Records. However those dreams dematerialized from the band along with Dave Howard’s affiliation, and thus a reorganized, reinvented three-piece Vipers with Neal Vitullo as singer-guitarist-frontman emerged. With this lineup the Vipers have not only survived the musically-devoid naught doldrums, but have indeed thrived as one of the area’s most consistently potent bands.

On their latest CD release *Live*, Vitullo along with longtime Viper bassist Hub O’Neil, and drummer Mike Labelle (Rhode Island’s answer to John Bonham) offer an exacting sample of what a typical evening with the trio sounds like. Neal hits on all the touchstones that make up the obligatory roots-rock, rhythm & blues set. Standards like “Flip Flop & Fly”, “Little Sister”, and “Good Rockin’ Tonight” are given a good shot of guitar-driven steroids, without ever losing its omnipotent swing.



However longtime Viper fans will most definitely find Neal’s original numbers (many co-penned with Howard) the most satisfying of the set. Vitullo pulls out tracks from various points of his recording career, starting with The Vipers’ 1991 debut CD release *Hoolooovoo*. Ironically, those particular offerings somehow sound more vital and fresher as presented here than on their sixteen-year-old studio counterpart. Tracks like “Little Miss Prissy”, “March On”, and the latter day “Don’t Come Too Close” will remind loyal supporter and casual fan alike why Young Neal & The Vipers have remained such a mainstay throughout the area and beyond.

Unlike the vast majority of major label “live records” which are aided with post-production overdubs, Young Neal & The Viper’s *Live* CD is not titled such just in theory. These songs represent an accurate and precise replication of what this power trio continues to deliver on a nightly basis. If you haven’t done so already, hear the CD, see the band ... thank me later.