

Little Charlie & Nightcats – Nines Lives (2005)

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1. *Keep Your Big Mouth Shut*
2. *Handle With Care*
3. *So Good*
4. *Got to Have a Job*
5. *Circling the Drain*
6. *Don't Cha Do Nothin'*
7. *Cool Johnny Twist*
8. *Tag (You're It)*
9. *Quittin' Time*
10. *Deep Pockets*
11. *Wall to Wall*
12. *Sugar Daddy Sweet*
13. *Slap Happy*

Little Charlie & The Nightcats:

Rick Estrin - vocals, harp

J. Hansen - vocals, drums, percussion)

Little Charlie Baty - guitar

Lorenzo Farrell – bass

This is Little Charlie & the Nightcats' tenth album (counting a live one and a best-of) for Alligator Records, and it delivers nothing new or innovative, which is hardly surprising, since the group, particularly when harmonica man Rick Estrin is singing, has always essentially been a caricature in the first place, and caricatures, almost by definition, don't grow or change. The problem on *Nine Lives* isn't the playing, since guitarist Charlie Baty, Estrin on harmonica, and yet a new rhythm section of J. Hansen on drums and Lorenzo Farrell on bass are all solid, road-tested professionals, capable of delivering blisteringly heavy instrumentals like the one that closes this album ("*Slap Happy*" is easily the best track here). The problem is a general lack of

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fresh vision. Song after song features the same protagonist, a hard-working, hard-drinking simple man who has trouble with women, spends (or loses) all of his money, and seems generally amazed at it all. Ten albums of this same guy staring down the same old state of affairs means songs like this album's "Circling the Drain" simply don't resonate anymore, maybe because this guy's life has been circling the drain for some 20 years now. Everything here sounds fine, but it simply doesn't ignite a spark, and since the blues format is so familiar, without a spark it quickly goes flat. And that's the problem here, and no matter how well the band plays, Little Charlie & the Nightcats seem stuck in a deepening, unintentional, and almost comedic blues ennui. Time to put out the box set and move on to new territory. ---Steve Leggett, allmusic.com

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