

In a city that has more than its fair share of limp disco cover bands led by afro-wig and polyester wearing white guys, I am happy to put the word out on a real deal local groove machine. The band is called Family Funk, a kind of generic name that initially gave me some pause. However, after witnessing the thick soul stew that the band conjured up at Slim's, I'd be hard pressed to come up with a more appropriate moniker.

The band wears its old school influences on its sleeve, as was evident from their opener, "Keep Your Cool". Grafting the chorus melody from "Grease" to a Sly Stone type groove, it showed off the band's penchant for incorporating classic riffs into their own compositions. Musical director Kenne James led the group through the extended tune's numerous changes with hand signals and nods. His rumbling baritone and fluid ax wielding (he plays both bass and guitar) provided the focus for much of the evening's proceedings, but he received able support from his extended Family.

Stunning singer/percussionist Lehua shared lead vocals with James, taking center stage with ease and adding dead-on harmonies when not in the spotlight. Saxman John Ervin brought his sweet alto and tenor sounds to the mix. Rod Kutulas and Bruce Kevin Greenstein contributed drums and percussion respectively, laying down a percolating foundation as James, guitarists Roy Lettiere and Will Friedwald, and bassist Bryan Dean traded syncopated riffs. The arsenal of stringed instruments onstage gave Family Funk the pyrotechnical firepower of an R&B Lynyrd Skynyrd.

"Soul Tip" and "Funky Feeling" featured the band's catchy chantalong group vocals and got the crowd into the party vibe. On the latter song James switched to bass, dueling with Dean and deepening the low end. The fierce four string battle, featuring Bootsy Collins-style fuzztone solos, raised everyone's level of intensity as the band launched into their final song. "Ode to Shawn" was a monster guitar groove in the vein of Parliament's classic show closer "Night of the Thumpasorus People". Family Funk's sampledelic songs put a fresh twist on 70's grooves that disco cover bands can't touch.