

Chicago Sun Times CD Review Sept. 2005

★★★★½

THE SIEGAL-SCHWALL BAND, "FLASH FORWARD" (ALLIGATOR)

The Siegal-Schwall Band was ubiquitous in early '70s Chicago. If you caught them at a suburban festival on a Saturday afternoon, you'd probably see them again that night opening for some rock band. Harpist-vocalist Corky Siegel then successfully ventured into classical music – composing "chamber blues," as he called it – and his appearances with guitarist-vocalist Jim Schwall and his blues mates became limited to special reunions.

"Flash Forward," the first Siegal-Schwall album of new material in 30 years, is better than any of the 10 albums they recorded in their heyday. Drummer Sam Lay plays a vital part in this new set, his shuffle-style rhythms and growling vocals giving "Going Back to Alabama" and his other tunes on the album a straight-forward blues sound. Siegel fronts the gentler, airier country-blues numbers, such as "Can't Stop," while Schwall puts his quirky sense of humor to use on his novelty songs and anthems such as "The Underqualified Blues." Bassist Rollo Radford adds a couple of solid numbers.

Leave it to these innovators to come up with a fresh, exciting new Chicago blues sound.

Jeff Johnson

Note: *The Siegal-Schwall Band will appear at 9 p.m. Sept. 10 at FitzGerald's, 6615 W. Roosevelt, Berwyn.*