

Ray Bonneville - Easy Gone (2014)

Written by bluesever
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01. *Who Do Call The Shots* [03:52] 02. *Shake Off Them Blues* [03:05] 03. *Where Has My Easy Gone* [03:45] 04. *Love Is Wicked* [04:09] 05. *When I Get To New York* [03:50] 06. *Lone Freighter's Wail* [03:57] 07. *So Lonely I Could Cry* [03:33] 08. *South Little One* [04:18] 09. *Mile Marker 41* [02:57] 10. *Two Bends In The Road* [03:14] Ray Bonneville - Guitar, Guitars, Harmonica, Vocals Geoff Arsenault - Drums Eliza Gilkyson - Vocals (Background) Richie Lawrence - Piano Gurf Morlix - Bass, Guitar Mark Norvel - Vocals (Background) Rick Richards - Drums Will Sexton - Bass

On 2011's *Bad Man's Blood*, singer/songwriter/guitarist Ray Bonneville revealed himself as a songwriter in the same tradition that begat J.J. Cale: equal parts blues, rockabilly, folk, country, and R&B. On *Easy Gone*, he establishes that he is also a unique stylist. His words and metaphors are skeletally spare, stiletto sharp. There aren't any extended guitar breaks. His pace is unhurried and deliberate, rhythm and melody parts of the same animal. Produced with Justin Douglas, Bonneville's band is small and his grooves tight. The settings in these songs are the American highway, the road in all its seduction and fury. His traveling characters are all vulnerable to the gnawing hole of loneliness; they're hungry for connection but can only inhabit it for a moment if at all, because they're haunted -- or pursued by -- the spirits of restlessness and movement. Bonneville has always been drawn to hard-bitten characters, not for what they signify, but simply for who they are. In the first person songs here, his narrator is inseparable from them. "Who Do Call the Shots" is a snaky, mercurial blues with snarling guitar lines that testify against the harsh blackness: "Four hundred miles of dark road on this no mercy night/Lie-telling shadows tryin' to fool my eyes...Riding a line thin as razor between eternities/used up luck against a long cold sleep..." "Shake Off Them, Blues," with its slippery, sleepy NOLA R&B, is deceptive in its emotional depth. "Where Has My Easy Gone," with Eliza Gilkyson on backing vocals, is sweet, weary Americana that asks questions we all have to answer as we age. "Love Is Wicked" contains a brooding Willie Dixon-esque groove that retells the eternal "Frankie and Johnnie" story with the drama of a film noir script. "Lone Freighter's Wail" is a tender, soulful, ballad whose title image bears witness to the lost and those who will be: "I wail for the old man/Alone on a porch/looking back on/what is no more....I wail for the drifter/who is like me/no direction/or sure place to be..." Hank Williams' "So Lonesome I Could

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Cry," with a low-moan harmonica and silvery guitars, is a modern country-blues that exemplifies its subject matter chillingly. The murder ballad "Mile Marker 41," uses sinister slide and fingerpicked electric guitars, a tense bassline, and martial snare; it connects directly to Cale's slow-churning grooves that ratchet tension like a coiled rattlesnake. The evil in its narrative is balanced by his protagonist's suffocating, consumptive paranoia. The songs on Easy Gone depict aspects of the wandering life without romanticizing it. Bonneville skillfully strips the veneer from popular illusions about the freedom of the road. His characters choose it or are cursed by it, but either way, they accept it as the price of doing business. Easy Gone is not just another chapter in his remarkable late-blooming saga, but the finest one to date. ---Thom Jurek, Rovi

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