

Delta Moon - Hellbound Train (2009)

Written by bluesever

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01 - *Hellbound Train*

02 - *Room 429*

03 - *Lonely*

04 - *Get Gone*

05 - *True Love Lies*

06 - *You Got To Move*

07 - *Stuck In Carolina*

08 - *Ain't No Train*

09 - *Ghost In My Guitar*

10 - *Take The Back Road Home*

11 - *Plantation Song*

Personnel: Tom Gray (vocals, lap steel guitar, keyboards); Mark Johnson (guitar); Darren Stanley (drums, percussion); Franher Joseph (background vocals).

Atlanta's swamp-blues kings add another notch to their belt of tough, Southern, slide guitar-dominated blues/roots rock with this, the band's fifth studio release. Although little has changed musically since slimming to a quartet, frontmen/guitarists Tom Gray and Mark Johnson's songs have continued to refine their sense of groove, and Gray is increasingly comfortable with his lead vocal status. The group's confident dynamics and the combination of Gray's homey sandpaper voice with the intertwining guitar leads, perhaps best exemplified by "Stuck in Carolina"'s low-boil funk, keeps getting more incisive. Although there are plenty of solos, they are in service to the tunes, not vice-versa, surely an anomaly for acts that boast the sheer firepower of these two guitarists. When Gray nails a grimy, rust-colored riff as he does on the opening title track or the obsessive "Lonely," it seems like something ZZ Top would kill for in that band's earlier days. Add the dueling/overlapping guitar lines and the result is a gritty, distinctive attack that is driving when necessary, yet subtle enough to keep the spotlight on Gray's detailed, occasional story-song lyrics that often find him or his protagonists down but not quite out somewhere in the South. Country overtones inform "Take the Back Road Home," altering the approach somewhat, similar to the haunting unplugged, acoustic ballad "Plantation

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Song" that closes the disc. It's a sporadically spooky, even ghostly vibe, a point Gray articulates on "Ghost in My Guitar" with a distinct Dr. John feel enhanced by bubbling congas. Johnson's six-string banjo and the occasional guest saxophone also shows that though Delta Moon isn't straying from its core sound, there are plenty of ways to tweak the basics without changing the result. Even after five albums over the past eight years, it seems that the group is just starting to explore the possibilities inherent in their blues-based Southern genre. It's a style that could be confining, but in their hands, never is. ---Hal Horowitz, Rovi

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