

Steve Miller Band - The Joker (1973)

Written by bluesever

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A1 Sugar Babe 4:32 A2 Mary Lou 2:24 A3 Shu Ba Da Du Ma Ma Ma Ma 5:40 A4 Your Cash Ain't Nothin' But Trash 3:14 B1 The Joker 4:26 B2 Lovin' Cup 2:10 B3 Come On In My Kitchen 3:58 B4 Evil 4:35 B5 Something To Believe In 4:40 Vocals, Guitar, Harmonica – Steve Miller Drums – John King Bass – Gerald Johnson Organ, Clavinet – Dickie Thompson

The Joker is, without question, the turning point in Steve Miller's career, the album where he infused his blues with a big, bright dose of pop and got exactly what he deserved: Top Ten hits and stardom. He also lost a lot of fans, the ones who dug his winding improvs, because those spacy jams were driven by chops and revealed new worlds. The Joker isn't mind-expanding, it's party music, filled with good vibes, never laying a heavy trip, always keeping things light, relaxed and easygoing. Sometimes, the vibes are interrupted, but not in a harsh way -- the second side slows a bit, largely due to the sludgy "Come in My Kitchen" and "Evil," the two songs that were recorded live but lacking any kinetic energy -- but for the most part, this is all bright and fun, occasionally truly silly, as on "Shu Ba Da Du Ma Ma Ma Ma." This silliness, of course, alienated old fans all the more, but that sense of fun is both the most appealing thing about The Joker and it set a touchstone for the rest of his career. Here, it's best heard on the terrific opener "Sugar Babe" and, of course, the timeless title track, which is sunny and ridiculous in equal measure. If nothing else is quite up to that standard in terms of songs -- certainly, it's not as jammed-pack as its successor, Fly Like an Eagle -- The Joker nevertheless maintains its good-time vibe so well that it's hard not to smile along...provided you're on the same wavelength as Miller, of course. ---Stephen Thomas Erlewine, AllMusic Review

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