R.L. Boyce – Roll And Tumble (2017)

01. R.L.'s Boogie (9:13) 02. Child Of God (5:55) 03. Roll And Tumble (6:22) 04. Poor Black Mattie (6:38) 05. Going Away (6:09) 06. Don't Worry My Mind (7:34) 07. Been Around The World (5:36) 08. Which RL Do You Want (5:34) 09. Going Down South (7:27) 10. Shotgun (5:51) Bass Drum – Andre Otha Turner Drums – Calvin Jackson, Cedric Burnside Guitar – Lightnin' Malcolm Guitar – Luther Dickinson Guitar, Vocals – R.L. Boyce

This is the most important honest to God Hill Country Blues Record made since R L Burnside's A Ass Pocket Of Whisky. The only record capturing the father and son double drumming team of Cedrick Burnside (RL Burnside's drummer and grandson) and Calvin Jackson. RL Boyce is a first hand protégé of Fred McDowell, Ranie Burnette and RL Burnside but with an added rhythmic edge he honed from his time playing drums with Jesse Mae Hemphill. RL's endless boogie keeps the She Wolf style alive. The record is a revelation of improvised blues lyrics, my favorite being, "bury me face down. don't come to my funeral looking to see my face, you won't see nothin but ass and nuts." Lightnin Malcolm laid down the 2nd guitar bass line with R.L. throwing in abstract blues splashes of lead guitar. I laid out with the slide until he would ask me to play, "Give it to me. I need it." RL and I formed our friendship and both learned to play hill country blues sitting on Otha Tunrer's front porch. He would berate us if our playing seemed uninspired but if we got a feeling raised up he would jump, throw his hat down start dancing and singing eventually passing around his own ass pocket of corn whisky. That is what RL and I lived for in those days. ---Luther Dickinson, Liner Notes

R.L. Boyce is a master of the Mississippi Hill Country Blues style. He learned to play music in his uncle Otha Turner’s Rising Star Drum and Fife Band and brings together many years of experience working alongside friends Fred McDowell and R. L. Burnside. This album was

nominated for 2018 Best Traditional Blues Album Grammy but lost to the Rolling Stones Blue & Lonesome. Luther Dickinson and David Katznelson produce here by simply setting up the microphones and getting out of the way. Dickinson's (North Mississippi Allstars) smooth guitar licks accentuate the tracks. Rounding out the album's lineup is one man band, Lightning Malcom on Guitar; Cedric Burnside on Drums (R.L. Burnside's grandson); Cedric's father Calvin Jackson on Drums; and Andre Otha Turner on Bass Drum (Otha Turner's grandson).

On Roll and Tumble there is a penchant for going long, stretching each song out and working it out until the life has been breathed into it and it starts to fly. Each ultimately crashes down to earth after the climax somewhere between 5 and 7 minutes. No sharp endings here. It's all laughter and R.L. shouting "Who bad?". The endings are interesting because each musician stops playing at a different time. As the saying goes, it sounds so loose because it's so tight.

The opening track, "R.L.'s Boogie", puts the listener right on the front porch. R.L.'s clear smooth voice says what's on his mind. The voice is connected to the guitar, or as he calls it his box. He never learned how to play from anybody else, never practices and always plays in his own tunings. The other musicians tune to him. There is a structure that this first boogie lays out. There's the motif, then a hanging half riff, and then the full riff turnaround back to the beginning. The slick "Smokestack Lightning" type lines are always original, tied to the vocals, sometimes double, sometimes calling and responding or slightly behind, but always focused, leading to a specific point at which the groove breaks down. Then they go and build it up again. As Boyce says "This is the way Rule used to do." Rule is a nickname for the other R.L. or Robert Lee Burnside. For Boyce "R. L." is just his name and doesn't stand for anything. He wears his influences on his sleeve and lets us know what he's thinking. It's all improvised but played close to the vest. There is no jamming here.

"Child of God" brings us to the nexus of the Devil and the Church. The Saturday night boogie has brought us to the dawn of Sunday light where the blues becomes the spiritual awakening. With Andre's bass drum, the stripped-down backing shows us the heart of Fife & Drum picnic style.

"Roll and Tumble", the title track, has an up tempo beat keeping the music light and frisky. It's a real good one for dancing and keeping your feet moving. With the up-stroked guitars and double drummer racket, this song is the highlight of the album.

"Going Down South" was penned by R.L. Burnside. On his A Bothered Mind (Fat Possum 2004)

the looped electronically enhanced style was great for reaching out to younger fans. The Boyce version avoids the remixed quality in favor of a more traditional style. There are no mechanical sounds on Roll and Tumble. He keeps it pure the way blues was meant to be.

On the closer, “Shotgun”, he comes out and says “Ain’t doing this no more. It may have been OK before, but not now. I ain’t gonna shoot the gun no more.” It’s a clear message that older folks used to be at peace with guns as a part of a rural way of life. He has a way of looking at the problem that does what blues does which is talk plainly about life in a way that makes sense to the individual. He’s not telling people what to do but what he is doing. This is a great way to end a near perfect set of songs where none of them have a distinct beginning and none really have an end either.

Highly recommended for those who like their blues unadulterated. ---Steve Gabe, bluesblastmagazine.com

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