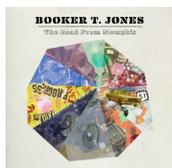


Booker T. Jones – Road From Memphis (2011)

Written by bluesever

Sunday, 24 July 2011 08:47 - Last Updated Monday, 27 November 2017 16:28

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01. *Walking Papers* 02. *Crazy* 03. *Progress (Featuring Yim Yames)* 04. *The Hive* 05. *Down In Memphis (Featuring Booker T on vocals)* 06. *Everything Is Everything* [play](#) 07. *Rent Party* 08. *Representing Memphis (Featuring Matt Berninger & Sharon Jones)* 09. *The Vamp* [play](#) 10.

Harlem House 11. *The Bronx (Featuring Lou Reed)*

Personnel: Booker T. Jones (piano, Hammond b-3 organ, chimes); Dennis Coffey, Kirk Douglas (guitar); Ahmir Thompson (drums); Stewart Killen (percussion).

The Road from Memphis starts with a young Booker T. Jones hauling his stack of newspapers to Phineas Newborn's front yard where, while folding them for his after-school delivery route, he could listen to the jazz great practice piano. It ends with Booker and The Roots roaring through a set of both timeless and contemporary originals (and propulsive covers of Gnarls Barkley's "Crazy" and Lauren Hill's "Everything Is Everything"). Along for the ride are vocalists Matt Berninger of the National, Yim Yames of My Morning Jacket, Sharon Jones, Lou Reed, and Booker himself, telling the story of how the funk/soul sound that Booker helped invent spiraled out from Memphis, touching The Roots' hometown of Philadelphia, New York (where engineer Gabe Roth has been recreating classic soul sonics for everyone from Sharon Jones to Amy Winehouse), and Detroit. Detroit as in Dennis Coffey, legendary Motown session guitarist who introduced driving rock funk rhythm to hits like "Cloud Nine" and "Ball of Confusion" by the Temptations, and brings his Detroit grit to these tracks. The Road from Memphis is classic Memphis soul, and classic Booker in the tradition of "Green Onions", but beyond that it is the story of a sound, and how Booker, working with the inheritors of his sound, is keeping a tradition alive. ---Editorial Reviews

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Booker T. Jones could have gone in any direction after 2009's Grammy-winning *Potato Hole*. He's traveled the musical map with his ubiquitous MG's as recent reissues -- 1977's disco-centric *Universal Language* and the 1970 classic *McLemore Avenue*, a collection of Beatles covers -- attest. On *The Road from Memphis*, Jones and his B-3 choose to do some non-linear musical storytelling: in the title lies the key. This set reveals Jones' musical odyssey from the early days in Memphis to the places that influenced his thought and playing: the soul sounds that emerged from Detroit, Philly, and Los Angeles; all along a labyrinthine, groove-laden path into the present day. He enlisted the Roots -- the seemingly ubiquitous go-to house band of the 21st century -- with Amhir Questlove Thompson and Rob Schnapf as co-producers, with Dap-Kings' Gabriel Roth engineering. *The Road from Memphis* is loaded with treats: Detroit Funk Brother Dennis Coffey adds his trademark wah-wah and the Roots' Captain Kirk Douglas adds his jazz guitar sounds. Both men do excellent work, adding buckets of feel to Jones' B-3, Questlove's breaks and beats, and bassist Hub (Leon Hubbard)'s low-end theory. Vocalists appear on some of the album's key tracks: Sharon Jones and the National's Matt Berninger duet on the slow, summery, "Representing Memphis"; My Morning Jacket's "Yim Yames" does a stunning turn as a soul singer on the Motown-inspired "Progress" (who knew?); Jones takes his own authoritative turn on the deep, funky fingerpop of "Down in Memphis" (even his voice has rhythm). And even Lou Reed gets in on the act on album-closer "The Bronx," doing his usual "real life happening on the streets" croak. It's in the instrumentals, however, that Jones reveals his story best. Opener "Walking Papers" uses the main vamp from Johnnie Taylor's classic "Who's Making Love," (he was backed by Jones and the MG's on the original), and perform it more like the "Cissy Strut"-era Meters. The reading of Gnarls Barkley's "Crazy" offers some of Jones most subtly inventive melodic organ work. Donny Hathaway's "Everything Is Everything" weaves hard, souled-out blues, funk, Philly soul, and rock in a dark, bubbling, irresistible groove led by a startling set of breaks from Thompson. "The Hive," "Rent Party," and "The Vamp" have exactly one transcendent idea each (how often can anyone say that about a song?); the band works them to death firing on all levels. *The Road from Memphis* has grease, grit, groove, and yes, greatness. Jones' story is compelling listening, but more than that, it's a backbone-slipping monster of a dance record. ----Thom Jurek, allmusic.com

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