

Omar and The Howlers - Bamboozled: Live in Germany (2006)

Written by bluesever

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1 *Shake for Me (Dykes)* 2:22 2 *Mississippi Hoo Doo Man (Dykes)* 5:16 3 *Bamboozled (Dykes, Hubbard)* 4:59 4 *East Side Blues (Dykes)* 6:03 5 *Magic Man (Dykes)* 5:59 6 *South Congress Blues (Dykes)* 5:56 7 *Boogie Man (Calif, Dykes)* 4:31 8 *Muddy Springs Road (Dykes, Ehmig)* 4:54 9 *That's Just My Life (Dykes, Welbourne)* 3:48 10 *Snake Oil Doctor (Dykes)* 6:10 11 *Bad Seed (Dykes, Field)* 3:03 12 *Wall of Pride (Dykes, Wommack, Wommack)* 3:12 13 *Hard Times in the Land of Plenty (Dykes)* 4:15 14 *Monkey Land (Dykes)* 6:54 15 *Rock N' Roll Ball (McCain)* 6:31 Omar & the Howlers: Omar (vocals, guitar); Barry Bihm (bass guitar); Jon Hahn (drums).

Mississippi-born but Texas-based Omar Kent Dykes understands a fundamental fact about modern electric blues. He knows there are only a handful of rhythms and themes in the blues grab bag, and he uses them all over and over again in slightly different guises. This isn't necessarily a bad thing. The blues has lasted this long because it's supposed to sound like the blues, and if you stretch it too far you end up with something like prog rock. It is this fundamental conservatism of the blues and its limited palette that has kept the form alive long after its colorful offspring (R&B, soul, rock & roll etc.) have flown the roost, taking a large part of the audience with them. But Omar understands all this. He has had a 30-year career playing these rhythms, and he knows how to keep it all simple, direct, and powerful, and how to build new songs out of the fabric of the old songs without destroying their familiarity. Bamboozled, a live set recorded at the Musa in Gottingen, Germany on October 20, 2005, finds Omar & the Howlers looking back over that 30 years of bars, sheds, and studios and hitting some of the high points. The opener, "Shake for Me," pretty much sets the tone with its gritty and overdriven guitar tone and harsh, ragged vocals that sound a bit like Wolfman Jack fronting a Texas blues trio. Omar slows things down for a couple of tracks here, like "East Side Blues" and the resonant "South Congress Blues," but pretty much the Howlers keep things chugging at a brisk pace as Omar trots out the Bo Diddley rhythm for "Magic Man," dips into the John Lee Hooker bag of rhythm tricks for his tribute to Hooker, "Boogie Man," continually recycling the history of the blues into a solid, 70-some minute example of what a modern blues band does. A clear highlight is the ominous, swampy realism of "Muddy Springs Road," which is informed by Omar's childhood memories growing up in McComb, MS, and it is easily one of the best songs

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he's ever written, bringing the personal and autobiographical to the familiar rhythmic structure of the blues. This is what the best blues is supposed to do: locate the personal within a familiar framework that everyone -- band and audience -- understands. If Omar has a fault as a writer, it is that he doesn't do this enough, all too often falling prey to the easy clichés that seem to be part and parcel of the blues. Keeping things fresh while still keeping things familiar inside a tradition is a hard thing to do. On "Muddy Springs Road," Omar & the Howlers walk that line perfectly. ---Steve Leggett, Rovi

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