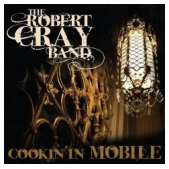
The Robert Cray Band - Cookin' In Mobile (2010)



01. Our Last Time
02. Anytime
03. Love 2009
04. Right Next Door
05. Chicken In The Kitchen
06. Sitting On Top Of The World
07. One In The Middle
08. Lotta Lovin '
09. Smoking Gun
10. I Can't Fail
11. That's What Keeps Me Rockin '
12. Time Makes Two
Personnel: Robert Cray (vocals, guitar); Jim Pugh (organ, keyboards); Richard Cousins (bass); Tony Braunagel (drums).

Robert Cray is a dependable, professional performer who has been criticized for being too reserved on-stage. He loosens his tie on this set though, recorded at a single show in February 2010. The veteran frontman tears into his staccato guitar solos with gusto here, extending the tunes and singing with a rawness often lacking in his studio work. His band also pushes harder, especially longtime keyboardist/songwriter Jim Pugh, whose featured solos match Cray's own intensity and are spotlighted throughout. This is soul-bluesman Cray's third live release in four years (2010's Authorized Bootleg dated back to a 1987 show), but the only one that includes a full concert DVD -- adding two more cuts, "Phone Booth" and "Twenty" -- along with the audio. He has only recorded one studio disc in that time, four selections from which are reprised. Only a few songs will be familiar to anyone but hardcore fans, including spirited workouts on '80s hits "Smoking Gun" and "Right Next Door," along with "Our Last Time," the latter two already included on 2006's Live from Across the Pond. Two other tracks also appear on that previous double concert CD, which raises the question of why, with as many albums as Cray has accumulated, he couldn't dig back and find different material. A cover of "Sitting on Top of the

World" is dirtier than you'd expect, and in general the sweat flows when the guitarist pushes his R&B deeper into the blues as his band grinds into a groove often absent from his more polished catalog. He pulls out guitar effects that creatively double-track his solo on "Lotta Lovin'," another ballad that sounds far more heartbroken and personal here than on 2003's Time Will Tell, where it first appeared. Cray's vocal howls and grunts as he tears into tight, energized guitar solos show that he's been captured on an inspired night, even on "Smoking Gun," a tune he's been playing nightly for over two decades. It makes for a surprisingly tough and uncompromising performance that shows Robert Cray in a different light than many would have expected based solely on his impressive if somewhat similar-sounding and often sterile albums. ---Hal Horowitz, Rovi

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