

Free – Free (1969/2001)

Written by bluesever

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Side one 1. "I'll Be Creepin'" – 3:27 2. "Songs of Yesterday" – 3:33 3. "Lying in the Sunshine" – 3:51 4. "Trouble on Double Time" (Fraser, Rodgers, Simon Kirke, Paul Kossoff) – 3:23 5. "Mouthful of Grass" – 3:36 Side two 6. "Woman" – 3:50 7. "Free Me" – 5:24 8. "Broad Daylight" – 3:15 9. "Mourning Sad Morning" – 5:04

Extra tracks (2001 reissued)

10. "Broad Daylight" – 3.09 11. "The Worm" – 3.03 12. "I'll Be Creeping" – 2.47 13. "Sugar for Mr. Morrison" – 3.01 14. "Broad Daylight" (BBC Session) – 3.21 15. "Songs of Yesterday" (BBC Session) – 3.11 16. "Mouthful of Grass" – 3.33 17. "Woman" – 4.00 18. "Trouble on Double Time" – 2.37 19. "Mourning Sad Morning" – 5.10

Musicians: Paul Rodgers – vocals Paul Kossoff – lead guitar Andy Fraser – bass guitar Simon Kirke – drums

Gee, what a nice collection of songs... I actually hated it first time around, but this is one Free album that really grows on you, unlike most of the others. Just one thing, though, that I don't understand nohow, is what the hell made people classify Free as a 'hard rock' band. Out of the nine tunes here, three are folkish acoustic ditties, two or three more are moderate blues rockers, and then there are a couple really 'weird' numbers thrown in, like 'Songs Of Yesterday' and 'Free Me'. Just because a band records a couple hard rock classics like 'All Right Now' doesn't mean it's "hard-rocking". This is their most consistent and enjoyable album, and there's maybe, like ten or fifteen seconds of hard rock on the whole album, for Chrissake! But it's still really good, anyway. Paul Rodgers is the star on this album, reveling in its overall gloomy, creepy atmosphere, whether it be the mid-tempo blues numbers or the dreary, dragging along acoustic stuff. The way the record opens, with those ominous wah-wah notes and Andy Fraser's famous bass riffing on 'I'll Be Creepin', shows you you're in for an 'evil' record - of course, just a moderately evil record, after all, these guys were no Black Sabbath, so calm down! More gritty blue-rock can be found on 'Woman' and 'Trouble On Double Time', but I'm not really discussing these here: there's little to mention about them except that both are based on catchy little riffs, all played by Kossoff in his gruff, nonchalant manner, and dumb little lyrics, all sung by Rodgers in his gruff, raunchy way. Not to mention that, in the best 'blues' tradition, he proudly announces in 'Woman' that his lady only comes third for him after his guitar and his car. Now that's what I

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call a man who got his priorities straight... In case you're wondering, these songs rule.

Personally, though, out of the 'fast' numbers (yeah, right, the quotes are there and they're gonna stay, because 'fast' for Free is always mid-tempo) I prefer 'Songs Of Yesterday', a groovy rocker that's distinguished by the clever way it alternates the fast, boppy parts and the slower, bluesier parts. It also has the best bass workout on the entire record - Andy is giving it his all, and Kossoff inserts an intoxicating guitar line now and then. If anything, this song is way more sophisticated, exciting and entertaining than 'All Right Now', although, of course, it's nowhere near as gut-spinning and if you drink beer you probably won't like it. I mean, if you drink beer and listen to it at the same time - 'All Right Now', on the other hand, is a generic beer-drinkin' anthem.

And say, even the acoustic stuff on here is friggin' interesting. Yes it is yes it is ohhh yes it is. There's the totally gorgeous ballad 'Lying In The Sunshine' - you have to appreciate that lazy folksy vibe, of course, but the acoustic guitar there is just stunning - a relaxed, almost comatose intonation that, nevertheless, totally suits the song and its lazy, distracted lyrics. Then there's 'Free Me', a song that, unfortunately, drags on for far too long (it would be much better if trimmed in two), and at first glance dismissable as based on a riff stolen from Led Zep's 'Dazed And Confused', but don't you dare dismiss it until you've given it a couple of accurate listens. It has a certain charm of its own, you know, like that drugged out Grateful Dead stuff - not an inch of energy or anything, but so darn pleasant to listen to in any case. Oh well, maybe it's my masochistic instincts rearing up their head (no, I'm not a masochist, but to a certain extent, we all are).

The best, of course, is still 'Mourning Sad Mourning', a deeply tragic ballad that's also draggy, slow as a tortoise and creepy as a rattlesnake (no, forget that last metaphor, it ain't one of my best), but when Rodgers chants that magic line 'mourning mourning sad day - AAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!', you can bet your life that they really succeeded in capturing some of that hard-to-capture genuine folk tragedy feel and stuff it into the song. Definitely second best on the record, and maybe their best ballad overall.

So, despite a couple tracks that are typical Free-filler (the instrumental 'Mouthful Of Grass', for instance, is just plain unnecessary, a stupid acoustic shuffle based on the same melody as 'Lying In The Sunshine' but nowhere near as captivating - and it keeps dragging on for what seems like eternity; the dull plodder 'Broad Daylight', that was perversely released as a single and did nothing but mar the band's reputation), this here record works and does everything it is supposed to do. Which is, yes, which is to present Free as a good, drunken roots-rock band with heavy folk and blues influences. But no hard rock in sight! Not a teeny-weeny bit of hard

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rock! Of course, if you do not consider Paul Rodgers' voice a hard rock instrument all by itself. I know I don't, and, like I said, the guy's abilities as a vocalist are somewhat overrated. All the more exciting is the fact that with so many slow, dirgey, lethargic numbers they still manage to stuff the record with various kinds of vocal and instrumental hooks and make it truly atmospheric. Unfortunately, they managed to almost completely lose that magic power by the time of their next album - perhaps the 'cock-rock' image was taking away too much energy. ---
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