

Aerosmith - Honkin' On Bobo (2004)

Written by bluesever

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"Road Runner" (Bo Diddley) – 3:46

"Shame, Shame, Shame" (Ruby Fisher, Kenyon Hopkins) – 2:15, originally sung by Smiley Lewis

"Eyesight to the Blind" (Sonny Boy Williamson II) – 3:10

"Baby, Please Don't Go" (Big Joe Williams) – 3:24

"Never Loved a Girl" (Ronny Shannon) – 3:12

"Back Back Train" (Fred McDowell) – 4:24

"You Gotta Move" (Rev. Gary Davis, McDowell) – 5:30

"The Grind" (Steven Tyler, Joe Perry, Marti Frederiksen) – 3:47

"I'm Ready" (Willie Dixon) – 4:15

"Temperature" (Joel Michael Cohen, Little Walter) – 2:52

"Stop Messin' Around" (Clifford Adams, Peter Green) – 4:32

"Jesus Is on the Main Line" (Traditional) – 2:50

Steven Tyler – lead vocals, harmonica, producer Joe Perry – lead guitar, backing vocals, producer, lead vocals on "Back Back Train" and "Stop Messin' Around" Brad Whitford – rhythm guitar Tom Hamilton - bass Joey Kramer – drums Tracy Bonham – vocals on "Back Back Train" and "Jesus Is on the Main Line" Johnnie Johnson – piano on "Shame, Shame, Shame" and "Temperature" The Memphis Horns – brass on "Never Loved a Girl" Paul Santo – piano, electric piano, organ, engineer

Aerosmith prove that a band can be inspired by the blues and play the blues without ever feeling like a blues band. Then again, the nature of the blues is that every musician who plays it stamps his or her own identity on a set of familiar chord changes and songs. While it might not feel like the blues, Aerosmith do indeed stamp their identity on each track on their long-promised blues album, the atrociously named Honkin' on Bobo. Other rockers who have cut full-length blues albums have always played the music with a kind of scholarly reverence, taking care to pay tribute to their influences. Not Aerosmith. They turn up the amps and cut loose, playing slick and sleazy blooze-rock that feels indebted to second-generation blues-rock instead of blues forefathers. But that's the nature of the band. Surely, they loved Chess and

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country blues as much as they loved the Stones, but they are so thoroughly the children of Mick and Keith, they can't help but sound like a rock & roll band no matter what they do, no matter what they play. That might mean that Honkin' on Bobo is something that could be close to anathema to blues purists, since it's a rock album pure and simple, but chances are the bandmembers don't care, since they're just here to have a good time playing songs they love.

Besides, the song selection proves they're no purists. There are some warhorses with "Road Runner," "Baby, Please Don't Go," "I'm Ready," and "Eyesight to the Blind," but there's also a heavy dose of Fred McDowell, a Fleetwood Mac tune, a little-known Little Walter song, an obscure song from the obscure band Freedom, a Smiley Lewis number, and one casual original. While the warhorses are predictable, the rest is not, and the album itself is a bit of a surprise, too. Every indication, from the awful title and silly album art to the notion that the band was going back to its roots, suggests that this is going to be an embarrassment from a band that has been no stranger to embarrassment during the '90s. Instead, it's the best flat-out rock album Aerosmith have made in ages, ever since Joe Perry rejoined the band for Done With Mirrors. Re-teaming with producer Jack Douglas, who helmed all their greatest albums in the '70s, Aerosmith sound reinvigorated, even liberated from the need to have a hit power ballad, and they tear through these 12 songs with an energy they seemed to lose sometime after Pump. Sure, they can still be tasteless and ridiculous, whether in Steven Tyler's vocal affectations or in the band's oversized riffs, but again, that's the nature of the band -- no other band does sleaze better. When they do it well, it can be irresistible rock & roll, and it's been a long, long time since they've sounded as good as they do here. Despite that awful title, Honkin' on Bobo is a real surprise and a real return to form for Aerosmith. (Special thanks to legendary pianist Johnnie Johnson, who plays on a couple of cuts here and lends the band just a little genuine blues grit.) --- Stephen Thomas Erlewine, allmusic.com

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