

Cream - Rock Hits Collection (2010)

Written by bluesever

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1. *Strange Brew* 2. *World Of Pain* 3. *Outside Woman Blues* 4. *Born Under A Bad Sign* 5. *Pressed Rat And Warthog* 6. *Tales Of Brave Ulysses* 7. *SWLABR* 8. *N.S.U.* 9. *Deserted Cities Of The Heart* 10. *Take It Back* 11. *Crossroads* 12. *Cat's Squirrel* 13. *Traintime* 14. *I'm So Glad* 15. *Passing The Time* 16. *Rollin' And Tumbling* 17. *Lawdy Mama (Version 2)* 18. *Spoonful* 19. *White Room* 20. *Politician* 21. *Wrapping Paper* Eric Clapton – guitar, vocals
Jack Bruce – bass, vocals Ginger Baker - drums, vocals

To begin with, Cream, as its name boasted, consisted of three of the top musicians in the UK in the late sixties. Eric Clapton had established his mastery of the electric blues guitar with the Yardbirds and John Mayall. Jack Bruce was the most inventive bass player around. Ginger Baker was a demon on drums, specializing in a kit that boasted two bass drums. While Clapton was mostly a student of the blues, Bruce and Baker were at least as influenced by jazz. Their live shows relied heavily on improvisation and included long jam sessions on many numbers.

While the musicianship of the band's three members tell much of the story concerning their live performances, their studio work is another tale altogether. Probably no other rock band in history had such a strong dichotomy between their two modes of expression. As live performers, they were the definitive power trio. Much of their concert work was recorded and released with great commercial and critical success. The compositions used were often old and rearranged blues classics, such as Robert Johnson's "Crossroads," "Howlin' Wolf's "Sitting On Top of the World," and Willie Dixon's "Spoonful," combined with a few self-penned numbers such as "Toad." In all these cases, though, the songs used were simply launching pads for the trio's improvisational gymnastics.

In the studio, though, they became an entirely different proposition. Engineer Tom Dowd and

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producer Felix Pappalardi were significant contributors to the group's sound, with Pappalardi co-composing and playing viola, piano and mellotron on some of their tracks. Dowd was a great contributor to their sound on record, and was responsible for editing a longer live performance into the fairly concise version of "Crossroads" that became a hit single. Their sometimes startlingly original compositions were co-penned by a variety of contributors, most importantly poet Pete Brown, but also including illustrator Martin Sharp, Gail Collins, the afore-mentioned Pappalardi and Beatle George Harrison. This unusual combination of talent was capable of producing all sorts of different sounds in the studio, but what emerged most often, and with greatest success, was a sort of psychedelic blues.

Cream was also very much a product of a unique point in time, starting as they did in 1966 and continuing through 1969. Older British bands, such as the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and the Kinks were not doing American tours at this time, for various reasons, creating a vacuum in the American market. Previous tours had relied on older amplifiers even after the bands began playing huge venues such as stadiums, making the music less important than the appearance of the bands. Cream was one of the first groups to use the newer Marshall amplifiers on the road, and thus was able to produce an overwhelming sound in the largest of halls, even with only three musicians on stage. Dylan had just opened up the Top 40 to meaningfully vague lyrics and longer songs. Jimi Hendrix had introduced the possibilities of a power trio featuring a wildly improvisational guitarist. Hendrix had also demonstrated the possibilities of electronically distorted guitar sounds, extending the definition of psychedelia, using new tools such as the wah-wah pedal. So in many ways Cream was in the right place at the right time to be able to take advantage of all these new possibilities.

Although Cream stayed together for only two years — and long enough to produce three and a half studio albums — this group still has the distinction of being the only band to feature the talents of Eric Clapton for this long a run. And given their perfect timing, and the accelerated pace of activity in the rock world during this period, they were able to be enormously productive and influential over this relatively brief span. ---reasontorock.com

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