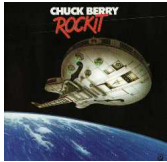


Chuck Berry - Rock It (1979)

Written by bluesever

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1 *Move It* 2:27 2 *Oh What A Thrill* 3:06 3 *I Need You Baby* 3:09 4 *If I Were* 3:02 5 *House Lights* 4:28 6 *I Never Thought* 3:50 7 *Havana Moon* 5:05 8 *Wuden't Me* 2:41 9 *California* 2:16 10 *Pass Away* 5:33 Bass – Bob Wray, Jim Marsala Drums – Kenneth Buttrey Piano – Johnny Johnson Vocals, Guitar, Producer – Chuck Berry

After a long, long run at the label, Chuck Berry left Chess Records after 1975's *Chuck Berry '75* and wound up on Atco, where he released what stands as his last studio album (at least as of this writing), *Rock It* in 1979. There are two concessions to the modern age: the production is a bit bright and tight, particularly in the rhythm section, and the artwork bizarrely (and somewhat appealingly) rides the post-*Star Wars* wave as it features Chuck's signature Gibson orbiting the Earth (which also nicely plays into the pun of the title, a pun so slight that it's possible to not realize it's a pun without the artwork). Minus these, *Rock It* is a classic Chuck Berry album, resting heavily on his chugging, clever rock & rollers balanced by a few slow blues. A familiar formula it might be, but it still packed a punch, even if it wasn't as powerful as it used to be. That diminished power is almost entirely due to the slightly canned rhythms and production, which make the overall sound of *Rock It* just a little bit too stiff, but that's somewhat redeemed by Johnny Johnston's piano, sounding every bit as enthusiastic as it did in Chuck's Chess heyday, and Berry himself, who tosses off these songs with a nonchalant charm. And, of course, there's the fact that Berry could still write a hell of a rock & roll song. Of these ten songs, he revives only two older songs: the Caribbean ballad "*Havana Moon*," here given a campy arrangement that renders it the worst cut by far here, and "*It Wasn't Me*" is turned into "*Wuden't Me*" with a brand new set of lyrics, all about being on the run from racism in the South. As impressive as this new "*Wuden't Me*" is -- and it is; it's barbed, cynical, clever, and funny -- it's overshadowed by several new songs that may not be major but they are satisfying, including the West Coast valentine "*California*," the lively love tune "*If I Were*," the car song "*Move It*," and, best of all, "*Oh What a Thrill*," an infectious, exuberant rocker that could have been released as a sequel to "*You Never Can Tell*." It's a great song crying out for a truly great treatment -- which it got a year later when Rockpile covered it on their *Seconds of Pleasure* album, making it sound like a lost classic instead of a new Chuck Berry tune thanks to their loose-limbed playing. While Chuck could have used some of that looseness here on *Rock It*, the preciseness of the

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production doesn't ruin the record; it merely dampens the impact of the performances -- and by doing so, it makes it harder to hear the songs that are still very good. So, Rock It is neither a grand final statement or a neglected gem: it is merely another good Chuck Berry record, graced with three or four terrific songs and a bunch of enjoyable straight-ahead rockers that aren't quite as memorable but sure sound good as they play -- and in that sense, even if this is not a great record, it is a fitting final record since it stays true to the strengths and weaknesses of Chuck's albums since the very beginning. ---Stephen Thomas Erlewine, AllMusic Review

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