

## Mississippi Fever - 300 Miles To Memphis (2015)

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01. *I Feel Like Superman* (3:38) 02. *Traveling Riverside Blues* (3:31) 03. *Steal Away Your Love* (4:31) 04. *Downtown Train* (4:14) 05. *Till The Sunrise* (3:04) 06. *Black Dress* (3:48) 07. *Out All Night* (4:50) 08. *300 Miles To Memphis* (2:40) 09. *The Devil's Got You Now* (3:53) 10. *Jesus Just Left Chicago* (6:50) Brent Barker – vocals, guitar Ted May – bass Tom May – drums

300 Miles to Memphis is the band's second album and a highly enjoyable slice of blues-rock it is too. The album features eight self-penned songs, together with covers of Robert Johnson's "Traveling Riverside Blues" and ZZ Top's "Jesus Left Chicago" and the two covers are a pretty accurate reflection of Mississippi Fever's influences and sound. Opening with "I Feel Like Superman", a wah-wah-inflected funky rock song with great keys from Steve Grimes, Barker's warm, husky voice sings "Get Your Body Feeling Free, come on here, sit down next to me. It's time to liberate your mind. Let's get it started, ain't wasting no time. I feel like Superman with a master plan." The May brothers' rhythm section nails down the Hendrixian groove with authority.

"Traveling Riverside Blues" is next up, with the band nicely updating Johnson's classic. They start with single noted acoustic guitar and subtle rhythmic backing from the May boys, replacing Johnson's classic slide guitar riff with a cool descending run, before overdriven guitar and more assertive drums and bass kick in on the second verse. Barker's singing is a particular pleasure on this track, truly inhabiting the lyrics.

The ZZ Top-ish "Steal Away Your Love" is a fine, slower-paced groove, with guest Rick Steff adding sensitive piano before the pace picks up again with the funky riff-based "Downtown Train". Barker is a fine guitar player with a gritty, slashing style that suits the music perfectly, playing short, muscular solos that never overstay their welcome. He cleverly varies the texture of songs by adding wah-wah ("Black Dress") or using an acoustic in unexpected places (that

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last song....) And when he steps up to solo, the May brothers perfectly demonstrate the art of filling out (but not over-filling) the spaces that inevitably arise in any trio group. Grimes and Steff add keys to a couple of songs and Brandon Santini adds fine harp to the rollicking title track.

One of the highlights of the album is “Jesus Just Chicago”, which the band again re-works in an innovative fashion. Starting with a solo acoustic guitar playing a single note descending riff that contains echoes of the band’s earlier re-working of “Traveling Riverside Blues”, Barker suddenly merges in one of the reverend Willie G’s patented turnarounds and the band kicks off the ZZ Top classic. Apart from the added keys of Rick Steff, at the first it sounds like they are playing a relatively faithful recreation of the original, with Barker even channeling Billy Gibbons’ guitar style on the first verse of the first solo. But then the guitar drops away entirely and the rhythmic section pull back, highlighting Steff’s subtle keys and Barker’s voice, before the band builds the tension back up as Barker returns for a second solo. Great stuff.

Recorded and mixed at the legendary Ardent Studios in Memphis, 300 Miles to Memphis is a fine album of good-time barrel-house party blues-rock. If your tastes lean towards late-era Buddy Guy, early-era Johnny Winter or any-era ZZ Top, you will find a lot to enjoy in this release. ---Rhys Williams, bluesblastmagazine.com

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