

Billy Gibbons - The Big Bad Blues (2018)

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1 *Missin' Yo' Kissin'* 2 *My Baby She Rocks* 3 *Second Line* 4 *Standing Around Crying*
5 *Let The Left Hand Know* 6 *Bring It To Jerome* 7 *Thats What She Said* 8 *Mo' Slower*
9 *Hollywood 151* 10 *Rollin' And Tumblin'* 11 *Crackin' Up* Bass Guitar – Joe
Hardy Drums – Greg Morrow, Matt Sorum Guitar – Billy Gibbons, Elwood Francis Harmonica
– Elwood Francis, James Harman Keyboards – Mike Flanigin

Whenever you go and watch ZZ Top there's a moment (and probably two or three) where Billy F. Gibbons looks at the crowd from behind his beard, his shades and the suit that you simply have to be a rock star to pull off and says: "Are we having a good time now?"

We are, of course, because ZZ Top are the best little ol' band from Texas, but these solo records always seem to be the equivalent for the man himself.

If that is the case – and I am prepared to wager Billy's top hat that it is – then "Big Bad Blues" sounds like it was a real blast.

"BFG meets the blues giants" is how he dubs it himself, but working with Producer Joe Henry (who released an album with Billy Bragg a year or so back and who was superb when I saw him live) and an all-star cast, this collection of old and new is just about as greasy and real as it gets.

Brilliantly, it matters very little which are covers and which are not – because frankly it all

sounds like Billy Gibbons of ZZ top playing the blues with his mates. "Missin' Yo Kissin" is the filthiest boogie you can imagine, but oddly, perhaps, as much as this is about Gibbons returning to his roots, then the record seems as much driven by Mike 'The Drifter' Flanigin's harmonica as it is by the guitar. His stamp is all over "My Baby She Rocks" which is as basic as the very day that Robert Johnson went to the crossroads.

The timeless "Second Line", bursts out with a knowing double entendre, and an incessant lick to become particularly special, while such an aficionado of the genre as Gibbons has very little trouble adding his own stamp on the classic Muddy Waters tune "Standing Around Crying" just as one of the new ones (I think – I can't find any reference to it anywhere else) "Let The Left Hand Know" sounds just as steeped in the history, as well as having a real nose for trouble.

"Bring It To Jerome" might be Bo Diddly's but here it belongs to BFG, while "That's What She Said" would sound perfect played in a ZZ Top show right after "Gotsta To Get Paid". "Mo Slower Blues" is built around a piano tinkle from Flanigin and it is notable just what a quality line up Gibbons has got here – Matt Sorum is one of the drummers, the aforementioned Hardy is on bass and there are a couple of real gunslinging guitarists.

"Hollywood 151" is a glorious, gleeful 12 bar shuffle, and whilst to be honest I don't know if George Thorogood has ever recorded "Rollin' And Tumblin'" but if he did, it absolutely would sound like this.

As it ends with the Latin tinged on "Crackin' Up" – about the only time on this album things aren't turned up to the max, and wherein it sounds like its summer every day The irony is not lost that in "...Blues" there's a line that goes – and its gruffly spoken as only Billy F. Gibbons could: "I went to see a musical band on Tuesday – and they weren't very loud. That's not the case here.

After his last solo record, "Perfectamundo" doused itself in hot sauce and got all Cajun, then "The Big Bad Blues" is as perfect as it is perfectly named. A very Texan take on the blues, it could have only come from one man – and it is wonderful.

And yeah, a good time? That's a given. ---Andy Thorley, maximumvolumemusic.com

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