## Toronzo Cannon - John The Conquer Root (2013)

*1 John The Conquer Root 6:17 2 I've Been Doing Fine 5:40 3 Cold World 5:06 4 Gentle Reminder 5:05 5 If You're Woman Enough To Leave Me 4:04 6 Shame 4:47 7 You Made Me This Way 5:55 8 Been Better To You 4:36 9 Big Ray Bop 5:10 10 Let It Shine Always 3:06 11 Sweet, Sweet, Sweet 4:51 12 Root To The Fruit ... She's Mine (Reprise) 2:51* Toronzo Cannon - Vocals, Lead Guitar Roosevelt Purifoy – Organ, Piano Lawrence Gladney - Rhythm Guitar BJ Jones - Drums Joanna Connor – Guitar (10,11), Vocals (10) Omar Coleman – Harmonica (1,6,9) Dave Forte – Bass (2, 7, 9, 11) Larry Williams – Bass (2) Jerry DiMuzio – Baritone Saxophone (3,8) Dudley Owens – Tenor Saxophone (3,8) Kenny Anderson – Trumpet (3,8) Norman Palm – Trombone (3,8) Mike Wheeler – Vocals (10) Kay Reed, Theresa Davis, Vanessa Holmes - Backing Vocals (3, 12)

From his seat at the helm of his CTA bus, Toronzo Cannon gets a unique daily view of the mean streets of Chicago. By night, our intrepid driver turns into a bluesman extraordinaire, melding the details of what he has witnessed and the wisdom gained from his experiences into cutting contemporary blues songs that stick with you through repeated listens. Delivered with his impassioned voice and razor-sharp guitar playing, Cannon continues to prove that blues music is not a dying art form.

On the first three tracks of his second release for Delmark Records, you quickly get an in-depth look at the scope of his artistry. Opening with the title track, Cannon offers a searing update of the traditional mojo theme complete with distorted, wailing guitar that would make Jimi Hendrix proud. Next up is a strong shuffle rhythm on “I’ve Been Doing Fine” with Cannon taking great delight in telling a departed love to stay gone. Then he summons up the spirits of Tyrone Davis and Otis Clay on the rousing “Cold World”, complete with a four piece horn section and strong vocal support from Kay Reed, Theresa Davis and Vanessa Holmes. When Cannon lets out a gritty shout mid-song and follows it with a melodic solo, you are hooked.

For a good-looking bluesman, Cannon seems to have an excessive amount of woman trouble. “If You’re Woman Enough to Leave Me” finds him standing tall as he makes it clear to a cheating woman that they are through, driving the message home with two solos full of sharp edges. Roosevelt Purifoy does double duty on “You Made Me This Way”, switching between piano and organ on the slow burner as Cannon points the finger in the other direction to explain his own indiscretions, finishing with a surprising twist on the standard cheating sagas. The horns return for “Been Better to You” but their presence is no consolation of the singer, weary of the lack of attention from a money-grabbing woman but unable to escape her clutches. He finds solace in the fiery runs he wrings out of his guitar.

Lawrence Gladney on rhythm guitar, Brian “BJ” Jones on drums and Dave Forte on bass set a ferocious pace on “Sweet, Sweet, Sweet” for the blistering slide attack from guest Joanna Connor. “Shame” tackles some of the enduring problems of life in the modern world with Omar Coleman adding some eerier harp tones. Coleman is featured again on “Big Ray Bop”, which pays tribute to a fixture at a Chicago nightspot who had a fondness for blues shuffles.

Cannon delivers a fervent sermon on what means to be a bluesman on “Gentle Reminder” while unleashing another powerful guitar assault. Connor and Mike Wheeler join Cannon for another highlight, ”Let It Shine Always”, done in a gentle, acoustic format with the three singers offering different views of man dealing with the issue of mortality. The disc closes with the instrumental “Root to the Fruit…She’s Mine (Reprise)”.  Cannon gives his over-driven guitar a final tortured workout over Larry Williams’ deep bass line, bringing you full circle back to the title track.

The all-original program highlights Cannon’s skill as a songwriter. He has a knack for seeing the road less obvious, for adding an unexpected viewpoint or outcome that keeps things exciting and fresh. Mix in his exceptional vocals and incendiary guitar playing and you have a formidable package that belies any notion of the “sophomore slump”. Bob Koester and the folks at Delmark Records should be commended for giving this talented musician another opportunity to share his many talents with a wider audience. Toronzo Cannon is the real deal and this one comes highly recommended! ---Mark Thompson, bluesblastmagazine.com

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