

The Soul Of John Black - The Soul Of John Black (2003)

Written by bluesever
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1. *Scandalous (No. 9)* 2. *Lost & Paranoid* 3. *Joy* 4. *Carolyn* 5. *Honey* 6. *The Bridge* 7. *Interlude* 8. *The Odyssey* 9. *Time (Losing My Mind)* 10. *Two Strikes* 11. *Glorious* 12. *Supa Killa* 13. *No Mo'* Personnel: John Bigham (vocals, whistling, guitar, kazoo); Cree Summer, Jonell Kennedy, Laura J. Jones, Audra , Fanny Franklin (vocals); Alma Cielo (violin); Chelsea Rasmussen (cello); Tracy Wannomae (flute, saxophone); Keith Ciancia (keyboards); Oliver Charles (drums); Davey Chegwiddden (percussion); DJ Kiilu Grand (loops, turntables); Truly Odd (turntables). Chris "CT" Thomas (bass).

The debut effort by this collaborative duo -- John Bigham (late of Miles Davis, Everlast, and Fishbone), and Christopher Thomas (Betty Carter and Joshua Redman) -- is a seductive mash of old-school funk, minimal rhythms, Donny Hathaway-tough soul, roots-style hip-hop -- and a mess of rock and folk influences, too. Got your attention yet? No? Okay, the difference between this pair and the rest of the jobs on the block trying to raid the vaults of the past for ideas is simply that these cats can write their asses off -- not hooks, not beats, but songs, where melody, harmony, and rhythm add up to something that gets added to real, live lyrics and becomes something you can hum and groove to. The album's first two tracks are worth their weight in gold: there's the slippery loose acoustic guitar and bass groove of "Scandalous (No. 9)," where traces of Fresh-era Sly Stone meet Hathaway in the cut, and lay back to allow the tune to emerge from right outta the groove. On "Lost & Paranoid," greasy, vintage keyboards set the stage for a monster guitar chunka-chunka, before the soul choir kicks the chorus and leaves a door wide open and hanging for the lead vocal to just ease on down into the dark heart of the funk. The Soul of John Black is singing about love, brokenness, poverty, good times, more love, women -- and not in any blustery, gangsta, ignoramus way either -- heaven, and truth. Check out "Joy," a soul ballad that Terry Callier would have given a finger to record. Stevie Wonder's atmospheric spirit of bliss and peace wafts down on "The Bridge," and smiles with its profound lyrics about the wisdom of no escape. The slip-hop and shimmy of "Two Strikes," has a pairing of guitar and drum loops that underscores a chorus of male and female voices in one of the most infectious refrains to come out of the Urban League in a decade. "Gloria," with its faux-calypso psychedelia is off the hook like the Brothers Johnson, and the set ends with the dirty Delta blues and drum funk of "No Mo." Slide guitars, strummed to excess,

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ripple over punched up backbeats before P-Funk-styled choruses chant the truth at the listener. This is one hell of a record: it's smart, its fun, and it's the only record you'd need at a party.
---Thom Jurek, Rovi

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