

The Jon Spencer Blues Explosion - Meat + Bone (2012)

Written by bluesever

Tuesday, 30 October 2012 18:12 - Last Updated Wednesday, 23 May 2018 14:19

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1. *Black Mold* 2. *Bag Of Bones* 3. *Boot Cut* 4. *Get Your Pants Off* 5. *Ice Cream Killer* 6. *Strange Baby* 7. *Bottle Baby* 8. *Danger* 9. *Black Thoughts* 10. *Unclear* 11. *Bear Trap* 12. *Zimgar* Line up: Jon Spencer - vocals, guitar, theremin Judah Bauer - bass guitar, backing vocals, harmonica Russell Simins - drums

It's understandable that Jon Spencer might be seeking a little payback these days. The refashioned blues of Jack White, The Black Keys and the growing list of artists connected to them have come to dominate conversations about the current state of rock and roll. Yet, few recall that it was Spencer who had proclaimed, "the blues is number one!" back in the early 1990s, a time when the fledgling JSBX was a borderline novelty act—a bass-less trio led by a punk who suddenly couldn't decide whether he was Elvis Presley or James Brown.

But what Spencer, guitarist Judah Bauer and drummer Russell Simins were into back then was in fact a noble pursuit of rekindling rock and roll's minimalist fire and reconnecting with the music's African-American origins. Whatever grunge was, it was not black, and Spencer can be credited for boldly pointing that out, even though his past history within the NYC underground made the JSBX seem at times like an exercise in performance art.

Still, there's no denying the band made a lot of great records up until their 2004 hiatus, and a potent reminder of that came in the form of the 2010 compilation *Dirty Shirt Rock 'n Roll: The First Ten Years*. The more-to-come promise of that title has been fulfilled with *Meat And Bone*, an album that shows Spencer and company have something to prove to those new legions of Black Keys fans.

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Exhibit A is the track “Bottle Baby,” which finds Spencer giving an award acceptance speech, proclaiming that “I feel like I’m a god, but I still got a problem paying the rent.” By the song’s conclusion, Spencer reconfirms his principles, as only he can with the fire and brimstone persuasion of a backwoods preacher. I always found it fitting how Spencer once said that some of his biggest inspirations were the countless interviews Sun Records founder Sam Phillips gave about his label. At no time did his passion for what he’d done ever waver, and I get that sense now whenever I hear the JSBX.

No one can doubt Spencer’s conviction at this point, and there’s hope that hearing him rhyme off the names Little Richard, Little Walter, Shakey Horton and others in the blistering opening track “Black Mold,” will lead some listeners to do a little iTunes searching. Those and other primary JSBX influences are unabashedly evident throughout, from the nod to Rufus Thomas in “Get Your Pants Off,” to the many Stooges, MC5 and Black Flag echoes. But in spite of the neo-garage wave that pushed them to the sidelines a decade ago, none of those bands could, and still can’t, match the flair of the JSBX at full throttle, as they are on nearly all of Meat And Bone. It’s a monumental return—pure, unfiltered American rock ‘n’ roll—and has to be considered one of the party albums of the year. ---Jason Schneider, pastemagazine.com

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