

Allman Brothers - Hittin' The Note (2003)

Written by bluesever

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1. "Firing Line" (G. Allman/W. Haynes) – 5:17
2. "High Cost of Low Living" (G. Allman/W. Haynes/J. Anders/R. Burgin) – 7:52
3. "Desdemona" (G. Allman/W. Haynes) – 9:20
4. "Woman Across the River" (B. Crutcher/A. Jones) – 5:51
5. "Old Before My Time" (G. Allman/W. Haynes) – 5:23
6. "Who to Believe" (W. Haynes/J. Jaworowicz) – 5:38
7. "Maydell" (W. Haynes/J. Neel) – 4:35
8. "Rockin' Horse" (G. Allman/W. Haynes/A. Woody/J. Pearson) – 7:23
9. "Heart of Stone" (M. Jagger/K. Richards) – 5:06
10. "Instrumental Illness" (W. Haynes/O. Burbridge) – 12:17
11. "Old Friend" (W. Haynes/C. Anderson) – 6:12

Personnel Gregg Allman: Hammond B-3 Organ, Piano, Clavinet & Lead Vocals Butch Trucks: Drums Jai Johanny Johanson: Drums Warren Haynes: Lead, Slide, Acoustic, & Acoustic Slide Guitars (Left Side), Lead & Background Vocals Marc Quiñones: Congas & Percussion Oteil Burbridge: Bass Derek Trucks: Lead, Slide, & Acoustic Slide Guitars (Right Side)

There have been many tales of terror, nervousness, and depression -- as well as raw excitement and anticipation -- since the Allmans went into the studio to make their first album of new material in a decade, and the band's first record ever without guitarist Dickey Betts, who wrote and sang the last of the band's true hits in the 1970s. The result weighs on the latter side of the equation -- nervousness and fear that the old-road dogs didn't have it in them to make new music are completely unfounded. Hittin' the Note is the band's finest studio outing since Brothers and Sisters over 20 years before. The level of songwriting, inspiration, and execution is more than admirable; it's downright bone-chilling in places. The Allman/Haynes collaboration "Desdemona," while centered in Southern soul and earthy blues, is a rock & roll powerhouse with glorious jazz overtones à la "In Memory of Elizabeth Reed" in the instrumental break. Haynes, whose ringing, stinging tone cuts through the mix like a fine-edged stiletto, is complemented beautifully by Derek Trucks. Trucks displays the round-toned beauty that adds

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warmth and dimension to the twin-guitar interplay that is very much built on the Duane Allman/Betts model, but creates shadowy chord figures that come more from jazz than blues, adding another shade to the tonal palette. But it's the sheer melodic power and soul feel that comes right through a studio soundboard that is most astonishing. It feels like the Allmans live, which is the thing they most wanted to get across.

Instrumentally, the band's fiery exuberance is in abundance -- the organ-guitar duel in "Woman Across the River," which features a fine Haynes vocal, is given more thudding intensity by drummers Jaimoe and Butch Trucks and percussionist Marc Quiñones. The bass chair is held down by newcomer Oteil Burbridge, who, like Derek Trucks, adds a younger, more ambitious feel to the rootsy sound of the brothers, with his popped and thumped basslines that pay often just behind the beat to add space to the framework of a given track. The sprawling "Instrumental Illness" displays the awesome guitar power that the Allmans have at their disposal, as well as their ability to improvise off cues and feelings in a way that would make some jazz musicians jealous. "Old Before My Time," a Haynes/Allman collaboration, is the most haunting song on the record. Allman sings with all the world-weariness that has truly been his lot as a road dog who has endured his share of tragedy. It begins as a folk song, with Haynes' acoustic under Allman's voice before the band enters with slide guitar; staggered in 4/4 time and littered with hand drums and a swell that transforms it into a country song of regret, remorse, and resignation, it literally stops the listener in his or her tracks. There's little time to think about the tune, however, before the spooky, dark, bluesed-out funk of "Who to Believe" comes uncoiling from the speakers like a crawling king snake from the swamp. A wonderful surprise on this set is an absolutely riveting cover of the Rolling Stones' "Heart of Stone," transformed into a rock & roll version of a Ray Price honky tonk song as if it were reinterpreted by Albert King. In sum, Hittin' the Note does exactly what its title claims -- 11 tracks' worth and it burns on every one. This album is in-the-pocket, deep-grooving Allman Brothers Band blues-rock at its best.---Thom Jurek, Rovi

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