

The Midnight Ghost Train - Cypress Ave (2017)

Written by bluesever

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01. *Tonight* 02. *Red Eyed Junkie Queen* 03. *Glenn's Promise* 04. *Bury Me Deep* 05. *The Watchers Nest* 06. *Break My Love* 07. *Lemon Trees* 08. *The Boogie Down* 09. *Black Wave* 10. *The Echo* 11. *I Can't Let You Go* Steve Moss – guitar, vocals Alfred Jordan – bass Brandon Burghar – drums

The Midnight Ghost Train's decade long love of ferocious riffs and explosive live shows has made them a favorite band among the stoner rock crowd, but the Topeka group has always asserted themselves as merely being an especially loud blues band. They've proven this before by placing the occasional spoken word piece or gospel tune alongside their heavy jams, but their fourth full-length album really ups the ante in terms of genre experimentation. Some will say that The Midnight Ghost Train has lost its way, but I think the band is just putting its money where its mouth is.

Before one even takes the genre exploration into consideration, *Cypress Ave.* immediately stands out for its more song-oriented approach compared to previous outings. This was demonstrated right away on lead single "Red Eyed Junkie Queen"; while the band's signature guitar rumble and gravelly vocals are on full display, the song is much more organized with a prominent vocal line and a clear verse-chorus structure on display. Elsewhere, tracks like "Glenn's Promise" and "The Echo" opt for a similarly heavy vibe but the performances are much more restrained.

When you get into the meat of the album, it may be fair to say that The Midnight Ghost Train has gotten soft. Several songs are either ballads or feature much more scaled instrumentation as the opening "Tonight" starts things off with soft/loud trade-offs that are downright theatrical by Ghost Train standards and "Lemon Trees" is a pleasantly old school number. Elsewhere, "Break My Love" just might be the best track on the album as its minimalist instrumental dynamic and

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foot tapping tempo show the band's long hinted-at Tom Waits influence fully blossoming.

But the most interesting track and likely biggest point of contention is "The Boogie Down," which sees the guitar and traditional vocals completely drop out in favor of a horn section and guest rapper Sonny Cheeba. Such a decision would easily be a recipe for disaster in the wrong hands but it works incredibly well thanks to the raps showing off enjoyable flow and the horns making the song too damn happy sounding for me to hate. It also helps that the move doesn't feel like a calculation for mainstream exposure but rather just a thing that they would be fun to have on the album. Maybe the mixture of hip hop and heavy rock needs a second chance, if only so the doom guys can try it out this time around...

In a way similar to their peers in All Them Witches, The Midnight Ghost Train is evolving beyond the stoner rock tag by experimenting with their more subtle influences. But rather than completely losing themselves to their jams, the band opted for a more song-oriented approach that avoids sounding commercial. As a fan of the Ghost Train beyond the Buffalo days, I applaud this direction and am curious to see how it'll affect the intensity of their live performances. --- PsychicChris, sputnikmusic.com

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