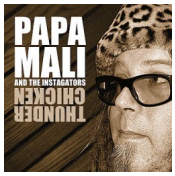
## Papa Mali – Thunder Chicken (2000)




*01. All Right You Got It 02. Bon Ton Roulet 03. Man Of Many Words* play *04. Walk On Guilded Splinters 05. Im The One 06. La Bebida Por Su Vida 07. Keep Happy*
play
*08. Fleabite Junior The Third 09. If I Ever Get Right 10. Fire Water 11. Cottonfields And Bayous 12. Skeleton Bug 13. South Austin Lullaby*
Papa Mali And The Instagators: Malcolm "Papa Mali" Welbourne (vocals, guitar); Tomas Ramirez (saxophone); Claude McCan (keyboards, background vocals); Courtney Audain (bass, background vocals); Barry "Frosty" Smith (drums); Bevis "Katdaddy" Griffin, Paul "Buddha" Mills (percussion, background vocals). + George Carver (bass harmonica, background vocals); Sarah Brown (bass, background vocals).

According to legend, Thunder Chicken is the moniker for a kind of fortified wine that helped Malcolm "Papa Mali" Welbourne) evolve, from his early years as a crazy music-freak kid with a six-string slung over his shoulder to the swamp-funk-hoodoo-slide-guitar-choogler he's become. Along with his smoking band, the Instagators, he concocts a back-alley brand of Louisiana parade sass that meets bluesy Austin, TX grit in a gumbo of the deeply greasy variety; it becomes something joyfully lusty and intoxicating in its own right. As a singer, Mali's dirty-ass slide axe struts in front of him and he's a deep-voiced soulful growler. But it's drummer Barry Frosty Smith who whips the band into the tight, cracking, oily funk machine that can slay you on record as well as in a live setting. And that's what Thunder Chicken is, a beautifully dose of voodoo blues, and raucous pumped up Southern funk and roll. Produced by the Dan Prothero, the true king of raw, Thunder Chicken is one of the few truly wild and unruly records to come from the rock & roll tradition in the 21st century.

Mali and Smith are assisted by bassist Courtney Audain who also plays udu and bones, otherworldly vocalist Bevis Griffin, Claude McCan on various in-the-pocket keyboards, percussionist Paul "Buddha" Mills, and sax ace Tomás Ramírez. The program includes a hefty dose of Louisiana swamp and party music. There's a joint-poppin' nasty read of Clifton

Chenier's "Bon Ton Roulet," and a completely reinvented predatory version of Buddy Guy's swaggering "Man of Many Words," with a killer meat-and-potatoes sax line by Ramírez and one of the filthiest basslines in recorded music history. In addition, Mali's cover of the Wild Magnolias' "Fire Water" takes the chant at the heart of the original and turns it into some kind of way-past-midnight hallucinatory processional. The hinge of this set, though, is the nearly ten-minute read of Dr. John's classic "Walk on Gilded Splinters." The tune is a tranced-out, stoned, lonesome unholy blues with a Fender Rhodes and Mali's droning electric guitar punctuated ominously by the whip-crack snare of Smith. His vocal and Griffin's spooky wail in the background take the listener on a labyrinthine journey into the heart of darkness. Smith and Welbourne's "Keep Happy" is a cut-time guttural funk blues with lots of slide-guitar power chords, whomping snare, and maniacal distortion -- it feels like Buddy Guy fronting the Rolling Stones on "Midnight Rambler." The rest of the Welbourne originals stick close to the vein, the vein that is murky and unruly, full of surprises and killer riffs and hooks that could seduce a virtual street-full of revelers. "Cottonfields and Bayous" makes a case for this band being a thoroughly modern construct.

The Instagators may deeply honor their musical heritage, but they're far from stuck in it. This feedback and slow strolling, freak-out hymn to the backwaters could only have been made in the 21st century with its hypnotic, twisted basslines that bust like a geyser from the speakers and reverb-drenched guitars behind the whispering keys and backbeat-driven drums. Originally issued on Prothero's Fog City and re-released by Jim Markel's Swampland, this record is timeless, sexy, and dangerous in its roots-man groove.. ---Thom Jurek, allmusic.com

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