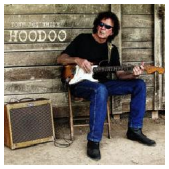
Tony Joe White – Hoodoo (2013)



01 – The Gift 02 – Holed Up 03 – Who You Gonna Hoodoo Now 04 – 9 Foot Sack 05 – Alligator, Mississippi 06 – The Flood 07 – Storm Comin' 08 – Gypsy Epilogue 09 – Sweet Tooth Musicians: Tony Joe White - Guitar, Harmonica, Vocals John Catchings - Cello Steve Forrest - Bass Bryan Owings - Drums, Percussion Tyson Rogers - Organ, Piano Brady Surface - Bass Nc Thurman - Keyboards, Organ

There's no mistaking Tony Joe White's signature swamp boogie. Patented in the late '60s, White has been working that same low-down blues grind ever since, taking a long sojourn from recording in the '80s before settling into a regular groove sometime around the time of the new millennium. Usually, these collections of new songs were on tiny labels -- including his aptly named Swamp imprint -- but 2013's Hoodoo appeared on Yep Roc and received an appropriately larger push than its recent predecessors. Apart from that publicity, not much has changed in White's world. He favors thick, laid-back Bayou blues heavy on atmosphere even when the production is bright and clean. He's there, supported by a lanky, languid rhythm section and colored by another guitar and organ or harmonica, sometimes working up a head of boogie but usually settling so far back into the groove it feels like they can't be rousted. Some dread creeps at the edges of Hoodoo -- it surfaces on "The Flood" and "Storm Comin'," references to the storm that washed away large portions of Nashville in 2010, also damaging White's own home -- but White's fondness for spontaneous takes dilutes these ominous undertones and, sometimes, his own groove. As appealing as the lived-in, swampy jams are, there's a laziness that drifts throughout Hoodoo, apparent in the sauntering rhythms and Tony Joe's mush-mouthed vocals. If he were issuing warnings, they'd be hard to hear through his grumble, and the band doesn't work for your attention -- they expect you to either be on board or not. And while they do their voodoo well on Hoodoo, that nonchalant attitude keeps the record from being compelling. ---Stephen Thomas Erlewine

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