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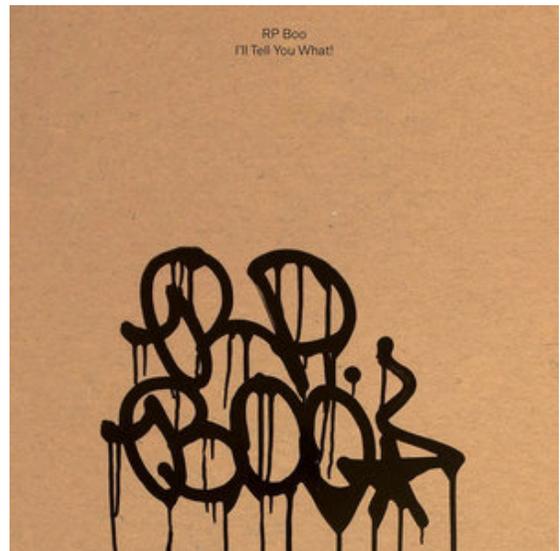
I'll Tell You What!

RP Boo

Planet Mu

6 July 2018

It's so satisfying when a purist statement comes along that still pushes the boundaries of its chosen medium. RP Boo's *I'll Tell You What!* is such an album. It's the first collection of new material from the producer born Kavain Space, who helped invent the regional Chicago house style known as footwork in the 1990s and released one of its best full-length statements, *Legacy,* in 2013. That was a compilation of older works, as was 2015's *Bank Pads & Shoe Prints*. *I'll Tell You What!* is his first album of all-new material, and it's the sound of a wily old vet expanding the genre's territory by pushing inward rather than outward.

At times, Space seems to be testing how few elements he needs to generate the gravity-defying momentum of footwork, which at its best can make the casual listener feel as if they're standing in the center of a maelstrom. Long stretches of the album are just drums—including the album's first 20 seconds, just before an acid bass-worm winds its way across the stereo field. "Earth's Battle Dance" lets the sample just ride for much of its midsection, like a dusty hip-hop beat. "U Belong 2 Me" coasts on the hairpin melisma of its vocal sample, and when all but voice cuts out, it's nearly as dramatic as John Bonham's drum solo on "Moby Dick".

There's no fat, no concessions to vaporwave or big-tent EDM. When Space raps on"Bounty" it's to remind us that hip-hop is an inexorable element of footwork's DNA, and when he invokes Blondie's "One Way Or Another" in his verse it's not a bold nod to rock, à la Traxman's ridiculous edit of AC/DC's "Let There Be Rock", but an indication that he probably remembers "Rapture" coming out. Only the closing "Deep Sole" seems like a compromise, its maudlin guitar loop serving as a reward for patient listeners who'd rather listen to something pleasant. The stark purity of this record is frightening. The snares are sharp as knives—which we remember are sharpened by whittling away bits of the blade, just as RP Boo's whittled away at his sound.

RP Boo's music has always bristled with fearsome intent, a sense of fuck-you-I'm-RP-Boo, from the knowing, feline glare on the cover of *Legacy* to the way he punctuates the most thrilling developments of his music with a sort of live commentary ("watch and witness," he intones on one track before bringing the drums in). *I'll Tell You What!* , in particular, feels like

an apex predator staking claim to his hunting grounds. The title itself suggests he's laying down the law—to younger producers, perhaps, or simply to haters. When a sample screams "nobody's fucking with me in these streets" on "No Body", we believe it.

RP Boo's status in footwork is more or less unimpeachable. The only way he could really mess things up is to make a bad album of new material. Luckily, *I'll Tell You What!* is a fantastic record. It's also a deft transition to the album format, which wasn't really a concern in footwork until outside labels like Planet Mu started packaging the stuff and selling it to hip crowds worldwide. RP Boo's compilations of older work felt like just that, but *I'll Tell You What* is a linear and symmetrical album that swallows us and spits us back out.

I'll Tell You What is purist, but it's not a reaction against more open-ended trends in footwork. The genre started slipping out of Chicago around 2010 with Mu's *Bangs & Works* compilation, and though it's since crept onto hipster and raver playlists, it hasn't been totally decontextualized like house and techno. It's still associated with an inner circle of black Chicago producers, many of them associated with the late DJ Rashad's Teklife crew, and if RP Boo is less famous than a founding father of footwork should be, it's because of his conservative, challenging approach. He could've easily called up Chance the Rapper, whom he's remixed, for this album. But he hasn't, and even if this is an album made with listeners in mind, he's not going to let us off easy.

Rating:
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