

Boosie Badazz: Boosie Blues Café

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The easy conclusion to draw from *Boosie Blues Café* is that the legendary Baton Rouge rapper Boosie Badazz is trying to unite the languages of blues and rap. There's a lot of common ground between the two, especially in Southern rap, which has always paid tribute to the region's great blues tradition from Pimp C's beats to Juvenile's voice to Young Thug's way of making unintelligibility an art form. But Boosie isn't writing a compare-and-contrast essay. Nor is he making a genre piece. He's simply looking the other way in regards to genre.

Boosie Blues Café doesn't sound much like a blues album, though it maintains a down-home, sentimental feeling that evokes venues far smaller and more intimate than those the rapper is likely to rock. The one-chord vamps are closer to funk. "Let's Talk About It" sounds like Weezer covering Ariana Grande's "No Tears Left to Cry." The accordions and fearsome drums on "I Know How to Have a Good Time" position the music closer to South African shangaan electro than the Cajun music to which it seems to tip its hat.

What's astonishing is this all coheres. The use of a few consistent sounds helps, most notably a midrange bass sound that's so chintzy it's either MIDI or the work of someone who's been listening to way too much Tool. Maybe a real bass sound would've been better, but the 2D digital sheen (the horns and organ on "Confused" are obviously GarageBand presets) means it sounds more like a mixtape than one of those laboredly authentic electric blues records that works very hard to sound like it was recorded at some whiskey-soaked late-night jam in Chicago.

Boosie's technically singing rather than rapping, but his nasal cartoon-goblin yawp is melodic enough that there's not much difference. Rather than hackneyed blues scales, he prefers major-key melodies with some of the same baby's-first-song simplicity we find in dancehall. "I'm on My Way" builds tension through its rhymes, and when he barks, "Everybody love me like whiskey" – snarling the last word like a dog defending its scrapyard, just as the crunch of an electric guitar enters – we remember what a good rapper he is.

But for all its dazzling style, *Boosie Blues Café* is lighter on substance than we've come to expect from the "Tupac of the South." "Rap Star Heaven," which name-drops the deceased and famous, plays like a wax museum. His lyrics about women are consistently execrable.

"Worth It" argues his mistreatment of women in the past was worth it – for him – and he sees no discrepancy between sensuously comparing a woman to how being paid makes him feel and arguing, "*Can't even trust your lady if she love money*" on "Where I'm From."

There are a few moments that stop us in our tracks. "Devil in My Bedroom" ends with a play-by-play of his 2009 murder trial that evokes nothing less than Stevie Wonder's "Living in the City." (Boosie served three and a half years on death row for murder before being found not guilty.) The shouts of "*Fuck 12*" on "Where I'm From" sound genuinely panicked and frightened. But Boosie has always been harrowingly direct. It's hard to shake the feeling that the difference between *Boosie Blues Café* and other Boosie tapes is simply that it takes the scenic route.

