



photo by A. McBride



OLD MAN BROWN
return
2007

It can take years for a band to find their sound and create magic on an album.

The journey means hard work,

replacing band members or losing one in the process. Old Man Brown's original drummer John Scott Wakefield passed as the band was finishing tracks for their demo. They carried on and recorded *Return*, an astounding album that conjures up the blues, gospel, soul and rock while eschewing associated stereotypes.

On *Return*, Old Man Brown captured lightning in a bottle, getting back to soulful and earnest songwriting. *Return* just flows, as if without effort, sounding timeless, as though the album has been lying around waiting to be played again. It is emotional yet smooth, something fresh by the likes of four young men from the Baltimore area. Recorded in Nashville, the band marks a return to southern soul, taking familiar music and making it new again. Think Black Rebel Motorcycle Club or The Black Keys.

Adam Scott-Wakefield's vocals sound older than his age, coming off as if Ray Charles and Steve Winwood were singing at the same time. Tracks navigate from



the soulful 'Fool to Love' to the blues of 'It's a Shame' and 'Like Bees to Honey.' Mixing funk and rock on 'Steal Away' the track elicits a

different take on relationships, trading a life of marriage for the road. *A man don't need a woman, a ship don't need no anchor/Mama taught me self reliance/I'm gonna thank her.*

Standout songs include 'Seek My Arms,' 'Return' and the fantastic mini-epic that is 'Come Rain, Come Shine.' Part slow ballad, with its church service feel, the Hammond organ lends character to a song already rich in the tapestry of Wakefield's vocals singing *I can't keep holding onto you/I know you're longing to stay too/I could always be your gentle warm breeze/that lifts you up when your cold man drops you on your knees.* It's a beautiful song that collides Muscle Shoals with Motown-era loveliness.

'Return' opens with a guitar melody a la Eric Clapton during his mid-nineties,

elegantly acoustic period. A song about the comfort of home when things get hectic, it strides along coolly, not letting the blistering sound of guitar over power the whole.

'Seek My Arms' is sure to be a ladies' favorite. Shuffling, bouncing and a smooth dance number, its descending riff and funky piano playing make it ripe for the dance floor. The piano and guitar play off one another, the middle like a mini-jam. If some tracks call to mind the jazz flow of The Allman Brothers it didn't hurt that Allman brother Johnny Neal recorded the album and played organ as well.

For fans of Allman Brothers, Jack Johnson, The Black Crowes and Robert Bradley's Blackwater Surprise.



FU MANCHU
we must obey
2007

It has been far too long between albums for this band. The California stoner band returns with an angry fuzzed-out guitar tour de

force. The drums pound harder and heavier than before, while still mixing classic rock and early eighties punk. It's less "laid back" than previous discs *California Crossing* or the passive hard rock drive of *King of the Road*. *We Must Obey* is a sonic bomb of sludge metal. Sounding like a punkier version of Black Sabbath, vocalist Scott Hill sears each song sounding like Dave Grohl and Sammy Hagar over-adrenalized.

'Hung Out to Dry' has colossal riffs moving in and out like 'Summertime Blues' but with more blast, *Been hung out to dry/One more time.* 'Shake It Loose' reverberates like rusted metal banged on a rail and breaks down in a funk up chorus. The guitar is heavy in the left speaker on 'Land of Giants,' a slow burning knock to machinery.

'Moving in Stereo' is the one track that breaks traditional style, sounding like James Hetfield vocally while covering The Cars 1978 classic. And 'Sensei vs. Sensei' opens with slide guitar reminiscent of an old kung fu film. It bounds to life, punching and preaching, *Sensei vs Sensei/Tell me who won?*

We Must Obey is a musical retort to people being told what to do, an unpretentious blast of anthems and rally cries. It's a far more aggressive record, pissed off and sheds light on the band's punk influences.

Musically, it's an onslaught, primed to burst beams at old clubs. The band strings it out to great effect, heavy like Rollins Band and the softer side of Ozzy. Listening to *We Must Obey* rekindles the feeling of power a live band is like in a small club or hearing a band play in a rehearsal room. It is in your lap, standing over your shoulder like a brute. It's California hard rock at its best, energetic, heavy and dangerous.