

Artist: One Ton Pig

Album: *Big Norm*

Review by Wildy Haskell

Jackson Hole Wyoming is a skiing Mecca and all-around party town, and it takes a special sort of band to really rock such a swinging party scene. Luckily for Jackson Hole, One Ton Pig broke and broke hard on the local bar scene several years ago. Featuring the songwriting and vocals of Michael Batdorf, the band is an all star cast including Justin Smith (Mandatory Air) on guitar and vocals; Jason Baggett on drums; Andy Caldar (Banyan) on bass and Tim Farris (Jet Black Ninja Funkgrass Unit) on mandolin and vocals. If a song is danceable and you can drink to it, you're likely to find it in a One Ton Pig set. In November of 2010, One Ton Pig released their second album, *Big Norm*, a joyous mix of outlaw country, Americana, and gin-laden fun.

One Ton Pig practices the KISS principle on *Big Norm*, letting the inherent catchiness and vibrant melodies of the songs rule. They get things started with "Looking For Springs," a solid blend of bluegrass, country and folk. Batdorf's vocals are as smooth and pleasant as always, and the guitar and mandolin work here are superb. "Let Me Rattle" is Appalachian style folk, a train song about going back home to West Virginia. "Time Rolls On" features some of the finest instrumentation on the album, offering up an urgent, catchy feel that will draw you into its quasi-existential message. "Cruel Words" plays like water, washing over the listener like a second skin. The melody is catchy and simple, the arrangement intricate yet easy to follow, and the guitar work here is outstanding.

"Butterfly In A Hurricane" has a talk/sing style that focuses on the concept of a rambling life. You could easily remove the vocals from this song and have a wonderful jam/instrumental tune. As it is, the lyrics are here more to provide internal structure around which the members of One Ton Pig jam. "Cold Water Blues" mixes alt-folk, rock and perhaps the spirit of the blues in a song about surviving on the lamb. There's a mix of joy and resignation here that is intriguing, as if a choice is made and the path is welcome but the hardships are frustrating. "Sonoma" is a vibrant instrumental that pays tribute musically to Sonoma, California's roots as a Mexican state. As elsewhere on the album the instrumental work is over the top, with Tim Farris in particular standing out on Mandolin on this track.

Bluesy folk/rocker "Drunk To The Bone" is perfect for the bar scene, energetic and fun and built around an infectious riff. This is the sort of tune that regular fans will likely chant back to the band; a sort of bar room camaraderie that can't quite be captured on a studio album but would

not be surprising live. “Murder In The Hole” is a tragic song full of mischance and foolishness. The songwriting is solid, and fits in nicely with a long line of similar songs in American folk music. “Song In The Kitchen” is another occasion where the lyrics don’t seem to matter quite so much. This is a jam tune with lyrics added for form, and One Ton Pig does it up big. “Load Up And Be Gone” strips things down a bit, built around a simple chord progression on guitar. The premise here is somewhat banal, with a highly repetitive chorus that is more thematic than story based, but the instrumental work continues to shine. “Chilhowie Mountain Blues” takes it roots from the country/rock of Johnny Cash and expands upon this sound in one of the catchiest turns on the album. Try to sit still for this one. It can’t be done. One Ton Pig closes with “Burn It Down,” a rowdy tune that takes on the sort of progress that has seen the rise of strip malls across the country. It’s a killer closer, raucous and musically dynamic, showing off the extreme instrumental skills of the entire band.

*Big Norm* is the sort of album you throw in your CD player or call up on your playlist and leave it there for days at a time. From an instrumental standpoint it would be difficult to find a finer working group today. Some of the lyrics offered up on *Big Norm* work essentially as filler, providing a trellis over which One Ton Pig’s instrumental magic can spread. Michael Batdorf is an accomplished songwriter and storyteller, but it’s clear that in some instances on *Big Norm* he and One Ton Pig were willing to allow the music to speak for itself.

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Rating: 4 stars (out of 5)