

Artist: One Ton Pig
Album Title: *Big Norm*
Review by Michael Morgan
Rating: 4 out of 5 stars

There is nothing more American than good 'ole country mountain and bluegrass music. One Ton Pig's latest album, *Big Norm*, takes listeners through the Great Smoky Mountains, Sonoma, California and...hurricanes? The record's honky-tonk rolls and country bursts of mandolin and acoustic guitar are like one big road-trip. What makes *Big Norm* so much fun and such a great record is the band's apparent enjoyment in playing with each other, just as much as it loves playing for others. The recurring themes of country and state pride, travelling on the road in that vintage country storytelling format, give all hints away that the love for the tune is first and foremost. It's almost incidental that the band's arrangements are so tight and its honky-tonk bluegrass sound so refined; "PIG" fans should be so lucky.

The themes of self-discovery and adventure shine through on "Looking for Springs," with its quick, punchy guitar, muted mandolin rhythm and laid-back lyrics: *We've been looking for springs. And we won't travel far. We've been looking for springs. Need to know how lucky we are.* The fast-moving beat is difficult to miss and is an ideal album-opener, clearly sending a message to listeners that One Ton Pig is 2 tons of country fun. The little "skee-daddling" that the vocalist does throughout the song could have used a little help from a slide guitar to really top off the song, but overall, it's a great start to a one-hour/fourteen-song road-trip called *Big Norm*.

"Let Me Rattle" ruminates on state pride. Life on the road for any musician is always tough. There is no better way to pay homage to it than through a song full of it: *Well you know. Yeah you know. West Virginia's my mountain home.* The rocking out mandolin is a steady, country bop. The catchy chorus could easily pass for a Bureau of Commerce of West Virginia theme song on its next advertisement for luring vacationers to its Appalachian Mountains, and scenic trails and rivers. "Time Rolls On" steers *Big Norm* into the same headwinds as "Let Me Rattle" and "Looking for Springs," except with even more bluegrass gusto; the locomotive tempo chugs along while the singer wails out: *Time rolls on. Time moves on. Time moves on with a start of a new day.* The repetitive and rapturous melody is memorable for its abruptness and soulful energy. Another memorable song is "Cruel Words"; its rocked out swagger is filled with beautiful crystalline acoustic guitar fills and a honky-tonk pack of rhythm guitar refrains. Its chorus is infectious and alt-country radio-ready.

The jam-and-blues side of One Ton Pig flits out on "Butterfly In a Hurricane." The blunk (blues-and-funk fusion) echoes Phish's steady and long-winded live show jams. The song's departure from the bluegrass and country genre sticks out sorely; the vocals are not as vibrant and purposeful as those on the more country-fried tracks. From out of the hurricane, One Ton Pig returns to its mountain music form with "Cold Water Blues," a delicate yet frenetic honky tonk ditty with a short and fast lyrical

delivery. Like its earlier honky-tonk brethren on *Big Norm*, this song has got lanky long legs and will make any country music lover look good on the dance floor.

“Sonoma” best demonstrates why these boys love to play what they play. It's the only instrumental on the album, but also one of the best songs. It showcases the tight arrangements and skilful musicianship of the band; Especially, Tim Farris's undulating mandolin libations. “Murder in the Hole” also showcases the bands country guitar virtuosity, juxtaposed with a disturbing narrative of a drunken night of fighting and violence, ending in the death of a man, as he floats with a frown down a creek; Who would have thought that a song about a dead man could be so magnificent?

“By Now”'s jivey, rock beat stirs up the blues pot once again, adding whirring guitar lines that add a hint of southern rock to it. Its slow growling underbelly groove is more consistent with the country sound of the band than the Phish-like phenomenon of “Butterfly In A Hurricane.” “Drunk to the Bone” avoids the jammy incantations of “Butterfly In A Hurricane” and subsists on a rootsy blues groove; a close cousin of Canned Heat's 1968 blues rock classic “On the Road Again”; Throw in a little Jim Morrison as well á la “Texas Radio and The Big Beat.”

Big Norm is fourteen songs of country jamboree jublations and gyrations, and should not be missed. Fans of good ‘ole honky tonk country and blue grass will thoroughly enjoy this album.

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