

Artist: One Ton Pig

Album: High On The Hog

Reviewed by: Justin Kreitzer

Wyoming-based Americana band One Ton Pig is a richly talented folk-based quintet led by singer/guitarist and songwriter Michael Batdorf along with guitarist and vocalist Justin Smith, Tim Farris on mandolin and backup vocals, bassist Andy Calder, and drummer Jason Baggett. They bring more to the table than their collective years of musical experience as they throw everything into the kitchen sink, from funk, jazz and soul to county, bluegrass and straight-forward rock, and end up with a well balanced sound that they affectionately call “Chicken Fried Prison Music”. That description suits them well as they bring the fun, the heart and soul, and the raw talent embodied in that name and they know how to have a good time while making you want to join along in the fun with them. Self-released in 2008, their debut album *High On The Hog* was recorded live at the Trap Bar in Alta, Wyoming.

“Runnin’ Out Of Time” opens the album with flickering banjo and mandolin figures and fast-paced acoustic guitar strumming that added together create one rousing, toe-tapping rhythm. “Crawlin’ Down The Line” is a fun, back porch jam session featuring close-knit vocal harmonies and an acoustic guitar solo followed by a mandolin solo that both the jam-band kids and bluegrass fans would drool all over. The mid-tempo “Teton County” features pretty, swaying melodies that are roughed up just enough by Batdorf’s gritty, down-home country twang on the stand out track. Unfortunately, the rollicking swampy bluegrass of “Bayou Voodoo” begins with a goofy band introduction and continues with the corny but fun-loving lyrics and vocals of Justin Smith, but what matters most is that the excellent music rises above all else. “When The Mountain Calls” follows with a shuffling beat for a roadhouse romp with lyrics that proclaim their love of nature; and how could you not love nature when you live in a beautiful ski-town such as Jackson Hole? The danceable “Mad Rabbit” follows with a funky, Phish-like groove and a couple of extended jam sessions sure to please the Bonnaroo crowd. The jaunty neo-bluegrass of “Trial Of Moses B. Reed” showcases Andy’s jazz-leaning bass skills with a strutting bass line and also includes some superb extended solos. “Leavin’ Mother’s Bones” begins with a haunting and emotional instrumental intro but then revs up into a frenzy of fancy fretwork and tumbling drums with a lonesome and weary vocal on the stand out track. Another stand out, the barnstorming “Hamilton On A Bluegrass Flight” features some down-home guitar pickin’ and an infectious sing along chorus. “Ain’t Nothing like Lookin’ Back” kicks up some serious dust with a driving, bluegrass rhythm. Finally, “Snowfall Breakdown” closes out the twelve-song album and most likely closes out their live show as well, once they are warmed up and relaxed, and it

shows as their virtuosic soloing brings down the house night after night and ends the album on a high note.

The five members of One Ton Pig are excellent musicians and are a very cohesive live unit, as their not-a-care-in-the-world sound on *High On The Hog* clearly proves but I am curious to hear what the band could come up with if they were to focus that live energy and their great songwriting skills in the studio setting and record an album proper. I think that minus the somewhat corny stage banter that works during the live show but is distracting in recorded form, One Ton Pig would attract a much wider audience and would create a seriously great album.

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Rating: 3 stars (out of 5)