



Black Keys
ThickFreakness
Fat Possum/Anti-Records



By Daniel Q. Marek
College Times

When Fat Possum Records spawned out of the punk label Epitaph, many were left scratching their heads at what founder Brett Gurewitz was thinking. But now that the label has had a little time beneath their Texas-sized belts, it's obvious that they can step up to the plate at any Mississippi fish fry with classic blues as their pitcher and hit a home run.

In the three years since they've opened, we've seen the likes of Model-T Ford, Mississippi Fred McDowell and R.L. Burnside find a home at Fat Possum and an eclectic mix of superstars with already big fan base like Tom Waits and Tricky move to it's sister label Anti-.

Like the famed Chess Records in Chicago, where acts like the Stones, the Beatles and the Kinks drew material from Waters, Howlin' Wolf and Bo Diddley, Fat Possum draws the best of blues from across the country to capture the soul of a genre lost in a rock world.

Their latest feat comes from one of the most unlikely places imaginable – two corn fed white boys from Akron, Ohio. For those of you who forgot Ohio was even a state, you'll be pleasantly surprised at the quality blues coming out of the blue-collar middle-of-nowhere town.

With singer/guitarist Dan Auerbach and Patrick Carney, the Black Keys dish out a hybrid of retro blues/rock with savage sincerity for the genre's most important ingredient – soul.

Like Model-T Ford, who performs with only his drummer Spam, the Black Keys are a stripped down hollerin' dirt-blues guitar-and-drums duo. After making a pilgrimage from Akron to Oxford to find Ford in 1999, Auerbach found the blues man was more than gracious and played with him all afternoon, then invited him to play at a juke joint later that night – a true homage to the musician who inspired them so much.

Upon his return, Auerbach sat down to record the Black Keys' debut album *The Big Game* (originally released on Alive Records) with inspired covers of past blues influenced rock and mixed in new renditions of the Beatles' "She Said, She Said" and the Stooges' "No Fun."

For *ThickFreakness*, the boys turn up the fuzz knob and duct taped the drum kit for another blues album that echoes wisdom far beyond these twentysomethings.

Beside great renditions of Junior Kimbrough's "Everywhere I Go" and Richard Berry's "Have Love Will Travel," lie husky new juke joint stomps like the guitar driven "Hurt Like Mine" and the Cream-era Clapton sounding "Hard Row."

On "Hold Me in Your Arms," Auerbach lays down a Ry Cooder meets Jimi Hendrix guitar line while Carney backs him with an onslaught of precise drum work. While "I Cry Alone" starts off in a simplistic holler blues, the bare minimum of percussion and straight-ahead guitar work frames a classic 1940s back porch sound.

Although the guitar and drum work accent each other masterfully, it's Auerbach's dusty, gritty voice that rounds the Black Keys out so well. It's as if a passing blues man on the way to the crossroads whispered the secrets of a dying genre into Auerbach's ear. He has taken the lesson and built upon it, ready to awe a nation with his gruff voice and Pignose guitar lines.



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