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"A sinister cabal of superior writers."

# Music DVD Review: John Lee Hooker - Cook With The Hook: Live 1974

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Author: Wesley Britton — Published: Jun 25, 2012 at 10:23 pm

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I wasn't alive in 1948 when John Lee Hooker's "Boogie Chillen" launched a career that influenced generations of boogie children to follow. But I was around in 1989 when Hooker released his 100th album, *The Healer*, by which time I was one of those children myself. I hadn't heard all the 99 records that preceded it—has anyone?—but I knew the hits and knew a Hooker imitation when I heard it, whether by The Animals, Canned Heat, ZZ Top, or Alexis Korner.

During the mid-'70s, I was also one of those lucky enough to see the Hook live while he was still at the peak of his performing powers. True, the creative period when he had composed original material like "Boom Boom" and "Crawling King Snake" was far behind him, but he had earned his place as a living legend. Back then, many of us felt privileged just to see a founding father of modern blues at work.

No doubt, that's how the audience felt on Saturday, July 6, 1974 when Hooker did a short gig in Gardner, Massachusetts at an all-day festival called "Down in the Dumps." There was nothing special about this appearance, and it was clear Hooker needed to get on and off the stage to prepare for a concert he had that night in Cambridge. However, as it happened, a three camera unit was on hand and captured the 45 minute set for broadcast on local cable stations. Now, that concert has been cleaned up a tad and is available as a piece of archival musical history, especially for Hooker completists.

"Cook with the Hook" was a raw, rough, and ragged performance which is appropriate for a singer known for his raw, rough, and ragged vocals and songs. Considering this was a concert literally filmed at a landfill, it's amazing the audio-visual quality is what it is—and appropriately raw, rough and primitive itself. Hooker opens his show with four standards, "It Serves You Right to Suffer," "Sweet Sweet Thing," "Boom Boom," and "Whiskey & Women." For the rest of the gig, Hooker pretty much vamps his way through a trademark Boogie which is identical to the "Encore Medley," where the Hook just throws out blues lines hoping to get the audience worked up just because he can.

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