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## [John Lee Hooker, \*Cook With The Hook: Live 1974\* DVD](#)

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By **Jemiah Jefferson**



One of the rare live video recordings of blues legend **John Lee Hooker** was filmed with three cameras at a festival in Massachusetts called “Down in the Dumps,” the second in a hoped-for series of concerts on the site of a city landfill area, and shown on local access television in 1974. Thank heavens that this footage didn’t suffer the fate of so much video tape of the era, and survived to the 21st century to be released on a bare-bones DVD called *Cook With The Hook: Live 1974*. Additional material might have been nice, but we must assume there isn’t any, besides what’s on the explanatory, single-sheet disk insert.

Half the fun of these historic concert recordings, especially from the sixties and seventies (i.e., the decades before I was born) is to see and hear the reactions of ordinary folks at the time. This show opens with a very excited hippie dude announcer screeching, “Cook with the Hook, yeah!” and it’s all too easy to laugh at him, but imagine if you were stoned on a sunny day and one of the living gods of blues music was on your stage; you might get a bit shrill, too.

A large proportion of the sunlit audience seems more bemused by the performance than psyched beyond

belief; it was always thus. This is probably pretty far from being the best set Hooker ever played; he's taking care of business as usual, and his backing band is game and sufficiently talented to give the songs their needed structure. In the long jam in the center of "Boom Boom," one of Hooker's most beloved songs (thanks to its appearance in the film *The Blues Brothers*), they genuinely do get cooking with an excellent double-tempo rave-up, punctuated with Hooker's jagged, conversational guitar licks. They're working it out, but they're not working hard; the whole vibe is relaxed and loose.

And yet Hooker himself keeps his rhythm mathematically crisp; he knows where the song's at, even if the other guys think they know where it is. They grin at him, happy to be schooled; John Lee Hooker, in sunglasses and metal-brimmed hat, is way too above it all to give any indication that he noticed. However, he's not too cool to stand up, take the mic, and bust a few old-guy moves of his own, all while exhorting the crowd with the practiced, effortless delivery of a Baptist preacher.

If you're not already into John Lee Hooker, that's a shame that can be rectified easily any time (honestly, every adult person in the world should know "Whiskey & Women" by heart; much like "One Bourbon," there will be a situation in which it will apply to you), but sadly, this DVD is probably not going to be the experience that brings it to you. As great as this authentic East-Coast '70s hippie footage proves—and damn if it doesn't look like a really good time—the music's too live, too loose-jointed to give the most direct shot. This video is best experienced when you've already leaned across a bar moaning, "Whiskey and women almost wrecked my life," and get a sympathetic nod in return.

*Cook With The Hook: Live 1974* was released on June 19 from MVD Entertainment and can be ordered from [See of Sound](#).

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