

Lizz Wright - Grace (2017)

Written by bluesever
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1 *Barley* 5:07 2 *Seems I'm Never Tired Lovin' You* 4:43 3 *Singing In My Soul* 3:46 4 *Southern Nights* 4:14 5 *What Would I Do Without You* 3:17 6 *Grace* 4:55 7 *Stars Fell On Alabama* 3:52 8 *Every Grain Of Sand* 5:29 9 *Wash Me Clean* 4:34 10 *All The Way Here* 3:47
Acoustic Guitar, Electric Guitar – Chris Bruce, Marvin Sewell Contrabass – David Piltch Drums, Percussion – Jay Bellerose Piano, Organ [Hammond] – Kenny Banks Vocals – Lizz Wright

Lizz Wright was bound to cross paths with modern roots music specialist Joe Henry. It happened in late 2016, when the singer and the producer got to work on the follow-up to the former's *Freedom & Surrender*. Wright co-wrote the majority of the songs for that 2015 set. For this one, Henry selected enough songs to fill seven albums, from which Wright narrowed it down to this mix of contemporary and traditional folk, gospel, blues, jazz, and soul. The result is nourishing, a lulling yet ringing affirmation of Wright's deeply rooted connection to the South and its music. Although it was recorded in Hollywood -- with Henry's associates among the core and ancillary musicians -- and consists primarily of covers, the album is Southern through and through, and as personal as any of Wright's previous recordings, with resolute faith, enduring romantic devotion, and earthly gratitude among the prominent themes. On the surface, the album's geographic connection is most evident in "Southern Nights," lucid basking compared to Allen Toussaint's hazy original version and Glen Campbell's jovial remake, and in a softly glowing version of standard "Stars Fell on Alabama." Whether the source material dates back to the early 1930s (Thomas A. Dorsey's "Singing in My Soul") or early 2017 (Rose Cousins' "Grace," from a Henry-produced session), it fits together and translates across the timeline. As usual, Wright is always in complete control of her voice, even during the three songs that feature an eight-member gospel choir. At the very end, Wright links again with Maia Sharp -- the two wrote "Real Life Painting" for *Freedom & Surrender* -- for "All the Way Here," the lone original. It's one of Wright's most serene performances: "Took a cold call from deep inside/The voice was sweet and sanctified." Just like the record, then. ---Andy Kellman, AllMusic Review

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