

Joss Stone – LP1 (2011)

Written by bluelover

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01 – Newborn 02 – Karma 03 – Don't Start Lying To Me Now 04 – Last One To Know 05 – Drive All Night 06 – Cry Myself To Sleep [play](#) 07 – Somehow [play](#) 08 – Landlord 09 – Boat Yard 10 – Take Good Care Bonus Track: 11 – Cutting the Breeze

Steadily rising Brit-soul teenager Dionne Bromfield – currently 15 years old – would be wise to study the career path of Joss Stone, who broke into the mainstream at the age of 16 with 2003's *The Soul Sessions*. Study it, carefully, and then walk in the opposite direction for a few albums. For while Stone's a multi-million-selling artist, her catalogue to date is a classic example of diminishing returns. Her second set, 2004's *Mind Body & Soul*, diluted the singer's natural grit for a mainstream-pleasing pop-soul sound to a chorus of general indifference, and 2007's *Introducing...* couldn't commercially compete with Amy Winehouse's all-conquering *Back to Black*, released five months earlier, despite expert production from Raphael Saadiq. And the less said about her final disc for EMI, 2009's ironically drab *Colour Me Free!*, the better.

LP1 represents something of a rebirth, though – like its title isn't a clue – and is certainly a better collection than the pair immediately preceding it. Here, Stone has full control over what material makes the cut, and she's undeniably in an upbeat mood as a result. Recorded in Nashville alongside Dave Stewart (the pair comprise two-fifths of weird-on-paper supergroup SuperHeavy, with Mick Jagger, Damian Marley and A.R. Rahman), and reportedly completed in just six days, its rough-and-ready feel is several post-production miles away from the major label gloss layered onto the singer's mid-00s sets. There's less purring here; instead, Stone adopts a one-take-style approach to her performances, channelling the old-school rock-and-soul swagger of Tina Turner, and the results – while mixed – are certainly a lot more engaging than the Auto-Tuned masses. The inconsistencies are actually fairly endearing, cracks allowing the human at the heart of these songs to be glimpsed.

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The arrangements vary incredibly, too. Karma rides a slithering funk bassline, while the following Don't Start Lying to Me Now could have been beamed in from Broadway, albeit via Music Row; Drive All Night is a late-night soul ballad with a rare understated vocal, and Somehow is a summery stomp-along that deserves better than its top-50-in-Luxembourg chart success. Inevitably, this produces a fairly incoherent single-sitting experience – and Stone's pussy-cat-one-minute, lioness-the-next attitude can become tiring (what does this girl want, exactly?). But she's one of this country's most gifted singers, and when she shines the effect is positively blinding.

LP1 is no successor to The Soul Sessions. It's too loose, too unkempt to promote its maker back up to pop's uppermost leagues. Stone packs all the power you expect, but her control misfires enough for some of these tracks to never quite click as they might. Ultimately this is more of a feeler release than a comeback proper; a testing toe-in-the-water affair to ascertain what interest there is in this once-feted, soon-damned artist. Turns out there's enough to warrant another, albeit more focused, turn from the Dover-born, Devon-based pop-rock-cum-funk-soul chameleon. As for Bromfield: if she can side-step the awkward third and awful fourth LPs and skip straight to the compelling-in-places fifth, she'll be just fine. --- Mike Diver, bbc.co.uk

"Forget the standard. The standard, in my opinion, is wrong." So says Joss Stone, explaining the ethos driving her new record company, Stone'd, for which this is the first release. Standard, however, is the word that springs to mind when listening to LP1. Recorded under the aegis of Dave Stewart in Nashville over the course of a solitary week, this album is desperate to evoke adored music of the past; any number of low-slung country riffs, honky-tonk organ flourishes and, of course, soulful vocal howls being deployed in the cause. It's proficiently played and Stone's voice has a range and tonal dexterity that few of her peers possess. Sadly, however, the final product is so familiar and so shorn of genuine emotion that LP1 quickly loses any sense of identity and becomes standard fare, indistinguishable from any number of other recordings. --- Paul MacInnes, guardian.co.uk

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