

Betty LaVette - I've got my own hell to raise (2005)

Wpisany przez bluesever
Środa, 14 Sierpień 2013 18:58 -

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01. *I Do Not Want What I Haven't Got* 02. *Joy* 03. *Down To Zero* 04. *The High Road* 05. *On The Surface* 06. *Just Say So* 07. *Little Sparrow* 08. *How Am I Different* 09. *Only Time Will Tell Me* 10. *Sleep To Dream* Musicians: Bettye LaVette - Vocals Doyle Bramhall II - Guitar (Electric) Chris Bruce - Guitar (Acoustic), Guitar (Electric) Paul Bryan - Bass (Electric), Guitar (Bass) Lisa Coleman - Organ, Piano, Wurlitzer Niki Haris - Vocals (Background) Niki Harris - Vocals (Background) Earl Harvin - Drums David Piltch - Bass (Upright), Double Bass Valerie Watson - Vocals (Background)

What can be said about Bettye LaVette that hasn't already been said? Like James Carr before her, LaVette has toiled behind the smoke and glitz of the limelight for decades. Her last regular recording contract was in the 1980s, and she hasn't cracked the R&B Top 20 in over three decades. The 21st century has seen LaVette's activity increase, but it is this recording, produced by Joe Henry -- who did wonders with Solomon Burke -- that once more unveils to a large audience LaVette's singular gifts as a singer. She's backed here by a wondrous slate of musicians including bassists Dave Pilch (acoustic, stand-up) and Paul Bryan (electric), Lisa Coleman on organ and piano, and guitarists Chris Bruce and Doyle Bramhall II. *I've Got My Own Hell to Raise* begins innocently enough with an a cappella read of Sinéad O'Connor's "I Do Not Want What I Haven't Got," radically reinterpreting the song as a gospel number. It's chilling. But it kicks right into a hard soul version of Lucinda Williams "Joy," and careens into another hard soul, straight-from-the-gut interpretation of Joan Armatrading's "Down to Zero." One will be tempted to take the disc off right here; these three cuts are enough to take the listener into the small, unspeakable spaces in the mind and large terrains of the heart where emotion becomes nearly overwhelming. But there's so much more, like the hard, guitar-drenched, Southern-fried funk roiling boil of Rosanne Cash's "On the Surface"; the dark, edgy groove of Dolly Parton's "Little Sparrow"; the gritty, rusty-edged knife funk of "Only Time Will Tell Me," and the glorious closer, a radically re-imagined take on Fiona Apple's "Sleep to Dream," with its deep tom toms, loose-wristed snare, and wah-wahed guitars. LaVette is fortunate to have found a producer with Henry's guts, vision, and sensitivity. He gets a lot of credit here, not only for presenting LaVette in a stripped down and directly emotive context, but also for his arrangements of these songs that feel almost like cinema in their dynamic and dramatic settings. In each case, the

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constructive reworking of these cuts from the ground up -- everything begins with rhythm here -- finding and embracing the angularity hidden in them and putting them in front of a singer who can roll and shapeshift while remaining true to herself is simply wondrous. Hopefully, the attention this garners will lead to more than a one-off collaboration between Henry and LaVette. ---Thom Jurek, Rovi

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