

Dakota Staton - A Packet of Love Letters (1996)

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01 - *More Than You Know* 02 - *Remember* 03 - *Too Late Now* 04 - *What Now My Love* 05 - *Trav'lin' Light* 06 - *Night Life* 07 - *The Way You Look Tonight* 08 - *Dakota Staton* 09 - *You'd Better Love Me* Dakota Staton – vocals Houston Person – sax tenor Aaron Claves – piano Melvin Sparks – guitar Percy Smith – drums

Now in her mid-sixties, Dakota Staton has never sounded better. Her soulful, hither-come-yon, rich voice and clean inflections sound as graceful and classy as the early days. Backed by a very complementary crew including tenor saxophonist Houston Person and guitarist Melvin Sparks, Staton is able to win long time fans and newcomers over to her soulful way of thinking quite easily. This is not an album of all ballads, which has been the exception rather than the norm. There are plenty of tearjerkers, like "More Than You Know," the Billie Holiday influenced "Too Late Now," the midnight slow "Travelin' Light," and the R&B-based "Guess Who?" "What Now My Love?" gets a mid-tempo treatment with Staton's phrasing reminiscent of Carmen McRae, fortified by Person's happy tenor. Forward moving upbeat numbers "Remember" and "The Way You Look Tonight" find Staton bubbling like a glass of vintage champagne, and the zinger, Willie Nelson's "Night Life" is a down home blues version, Staton animated and nonplussed, with Sparks in a B.B. King mode. Staton remains an expert in her field, and this will be an essential purchase for those devotees who remember "The Late Late Show," her classic. One nit to pick; this effort only cracks a total of some 40 minutes of music. Wish she would have cut a few more tunes. ---Michael G. Nastos, Rovi

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