

Etta James - The Dreamer (2011)

Written by bluesever

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01. Groove Me (4:37) 02. Champagne & Wine (3:54) 03. Dreamer (4:55) 04. Welcome To The Jungle (2:59) [play](#) 05. Misty Blue (4:56) 06. Boondocks (4:09) 07. Cigarettes & Coffee (6:20) 08. In The Evening (4:44) 09. Too Tired (2:30) [play](#) 10. That's The Chance You Take (3:46) 11. Let Me Down Easy (7:03)

Etta James' health has been deteriorating in recent years, so as sad as the announcement is that "The Dreamer" is her final album as she retires from music, it isn't a shock.

The songs on the 73-year-old R&B-blues-jazz singer's first collection in five years have none of the overt swan-song character of the album Glen Campbell turned out earlier this year with the help of producer Julian Raymond. Instead, we get a career-twilight portrait of James and her darker-than-ever voice in a set of moody, bluesy and slow-jam groove numbers. One exception may be the chugging "Too Tired," an up-tempo workout in which she nonetheless embodies the world-weary sentiment of the title. Axl Rose is not a master of funk and blues, but after hearing James' in-the-pocket treatment of Guns N' Roses' signature song, "Welcome to the Jungle," he may be considered one of the genre's noted songwriters.

Experiments aside, she's mostly ruminating on the topic that's been ground zero for most of her long career: love. The album high point may be her seven-minute exploration of Otis Redding's "Cigarettes and Coffee," as she sorts through all the emotional possibilities in this intimate conversation between lovers, taking what seems like all the time in the world. That time on Earth is a finite proposition just makes it resonate that much stronger. ---Randy Lewis, latimesblogs.latimes.com

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Assailed by the double debilitations of leukemia and dementia, and requiring hospital care, Etta James has sensibly decided that *The Dreamer* will constitute the final chapter of her recording career.

And as a swansong, it's as fine as might be expected given the circumstances: there's an aptly valedictory tone to the brooding, brassy covers of Ray Charles's "In the Evening" and Little Milton's "Let Me Down Easy", although the hookline to Johnny Guitar Watson's "Too Tired" – "I'm too tired for anything" – is belied by the loping swing of the groove. And although James's faltering vocals on the itchy Memphis R&B version of "Groove Me" betray her weakening powers, she brings a salty panache to the most surprising cut here, a fatback swamp-funk treatment of Guns N'Roses' "Welcome to the Jungle". ---independent.co.uk

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