

Etta James – Blue Gardenia (2001)

Written by bluesever

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- 1 *This Bitter Earth*
- 2 *He's Funny That Way*
- 3 *In My Solitude*
- 4 *There Is No Greater Love*
- 5 *Don't Let the Sun Catch You Crying*
- 6 *Love Letters*
- 7 *These Foolish Things*
- 8 *Come Rain or Come Shine*
- 9 *Don't Worry 'Bout Me*
- 10 *Cry Me a River*
- 11 *Don't Blame Me*
- 12 *My Man*
- 13 *Blue Gardenia*

Etta James - vocals Rick Baptist – flugelhorn George Bohannon – trombone
Ronnie Buttacavoli – flugelhorn, trumpet Tony Dumas – bass Dorothy Hawkins – vocals
Red Holloway – tenor saxophone

The legendary blues singer indeed lives up to the silly cliché about being able to sing the phone book and make it sound rich, meaningful, and soulful. Still, it's always exciting to hear her tackle materials she's missed before. Here she shifts gears impressively into the intimate jazz club mode, performing beautifully arranged takes on a wide variety of standards (from "Come Rain or Come Shine" to "Cry Me a River") under the direction of producer John Snyder and arranger/pianist Cedar Walton. Those two gathered a handful of great jazz players and recorded the initial tracks without James, who had a touch of the flu. A few months later she had recovered and did the amazing vocal sessions which truly sound live and in synch with the music. Beginning with the redemptive theme of "This Bitter Earth," each song allows her to explore both tenderness and guttural emotions, even a little irony on clever twists like "He's Funny That Way." There are also perfectly placed spotlights for the featured musicians. "This Bitter Earth" and "He's Funny That Way" feature a thoughtful improvisation by Walton, while

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Duke Ellington's "In My Solitude" has a passionate interlude by tenor saxophonist Red Holloway. Most of the vocals are textured over a bed of simmering brass, adding to the old school big band flavor that creates the atmosphere for the project. It's certainly common for great artists to thank their parents for various influences, but James goes one step further on the title track, allowing her mom to sing the tune; mom is no match for her daughter, but it's still a unique touch that adds emotional dimension to an already emotionally rich affair. --- Jonathan Widran, allmusic.com

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