

Esther Phillips - Performance (1974)

Written by bluesever

Monday, 25 June 2018 14:02 -

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1 *I Feel The Same* 8:24 2 *Performance* 1 5:23 3 *Doing Our Thing* 3:34 4 *Disposable Society* 5:15 5 *Living Alone (We're Gonna Make It)* 5:19 6 *Such A Night* 3:20 7 *Can't Trust Your Neighbor With Your Baby* 3:53 + 8 *Mr. Bojangles* 4:04 Esther Phillips - vocal Jerry Dodgion - alto saxophone Mike Brecker - tenor saxophone Pepper Adams - baritone saxophone Jon Faddis - trumpet, flugelhorn John Gatchell - trumpet, flugelhorn Marvin Stamm - trumpet, flugelhorn Urbie Green - trombone Hubert Laws - flute Bob James - electric piano (4), piano (5) Richard Tee - piano (3, 7), organ (5), tack piano (6) Richard Wyands - piano Charlie Brown - guitar Richie Resnicoff - guitar (4, 5) Jon Sholle - guitar (1, 7) Eric Weissberg - steel guitar (2) Gary King - bass Gordon Edwards - bass (3) Bernard Purdie drums Steve Gadd - drums (4, 5) Ralph McDonald - percussion; Pee Wee Ellis - chimes Patti Austin - background vocals (2, 6) Lani Groves - background vocals (2, 6) J. Denise Williams - background vocals (2, 6) Carl Caldwell - Background vocals (3, 5) Robin Clark - background vocals (3, 5) Tasha Thomas - background vocals (3, 5) Max Ellen - violin Paul Gershman - violin Emmanuel Green - violin Charles Libove - violin Harry Lookofsky - violin David Nadien - violin Matthew Raimondi - violin Manny Vardi - violin, viola Al Brown - viola Harold Coletta - viola Charles McCracken - cello George Ricci - cello

The decades-long battle with drug addiction, which ultimately led to her untimely demise, contributed to vocalist Esther Phillips' status as a tragic second-tier figure in the larger annals of popular music history, but her music itself was often a triumph of soul-stirring ecstasy. By the time Phillips arrived at CTI's sister label, Kudu Records, her early career hits—made under the name "Little Esther"—were a distant memory. A string of albums for Atlantic Records in the late '60s helped bring her back into the spotlight, but she truly found her home under the auspices of the venerable Creed Taylor.

Her first album on Kudu, *From A Whisper To A Scream* (1972), contained a semi-autobiographical performance of Gil Scott-Heron's "Home Is Where The Hatred Is," which earned Phillips her second of four Grammy nominations and the respect of her peers, but it also

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signaled the start of her most prolific period of recording. While at Kudu, the singer recorded eight albums, cementing her reputation as a vocalist par excellence and establishing her as the Kudu queen of blues, soul and R&B.

Any one of Phillips' albums would have been a nice addition to CTI Masterworks' fortieth anniversary feast, but the powers-that-be decided to honor her by reissuing her fourth album on the label—1974's underrated *Performance*. While the personnel list presents an imposing roster of jazz heavyweights, the jazz influences themselves are suppressed in favor of a soul-heavy sound. Notable solos still find their way into the mix, including tenor saxophonist Michael Brecker's extended run on "Disposable Society" and guitarist Jon Sholle's solo spot on "I Feel The Same," but they're rare. Instead, the music is used as it should: to showcase Phillips' voice.

Phillips knew how to establish herself when placed in a funky musical environment, whether gritty and urban ("Disposable Society") or friendlier and fun ("Doing Our Thing"), but goes beyond this area on tracks like "Performance," an R&B number with a gospel feel that's augmented by some countrified steel guitar from Eric Weissberg, and "Such A Night," which features some tack piano work from Richard Tee.

While the CTI Masterworks reissue campaign is largely a celebration of albums that have always been celebrated, the final wave—along with *Performance*, including efforts from saxophonist Hank Crawford, and organists Lonnie Smith and Johnny Hammond—is all about admiring the wrongfully overlooked and giving kudos to Kudu. ---Dan Bilawsky, allaboutjazz.com

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