

Mary Stallings - Don't Look Back (2012)

Written by bluesever

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01. *When Lights Are Low* 02. *The Way You Love Me* 03. *Night Mist Blues* 04. *Goodbye Medley* 05. *Is That...? (This Love)* [play](#) 06. *Don't Look Back* 07. *Love Me or Leave Me* 08. *Don't Misunderstand* [play](#) 09. *Key Largo* 10. *Soul Eyes* 11. *Mary's Blues* 12. *People Time (Forever Mine)*

Personnel: Mary Stallings: vocals; Eric Reed: piano and arrangements; Reuben Rogers: bass (except 3,9,10,11); Carl Allen: drums (except 3,9,10,11).

I first got hip to Mary Stallings in late 2010 with the release of *Dream* on the HighNote label. While age is but a number and length of time and competency don't necessarily go hand in hand, *Don't Look Back* is the latest release from an impeccable vocalist that has flown under some folks musical radar for far too long. It is beyond comprehension that Stallings career has spanned fifty years. What was so captivating with *Dream* is actually exceeded with *Don't Look Back*. Stallings is a story teller with warm inviting vocals and phrasing that is second to none. Mary Stallings has found the perfect accompanist at the piano bench in Eric Reed. If Stallings and Reed are not joined at the hip literally there is a musical cohesion of elegance and style that plays to Stallings considerable talents thanks to arrangements by Reed that are on point with each passing track.

Stallings and Reed have been musical partners since 2001 and rounding out the rhythm section we have Reuben Rogers on bass and Carl Allen on drums for a formidable trio whose zen like approach of less is more allows Stallings to shine. "When Lights Are Low" kicks off this deceptively subtle swing and finds Stallings in fine vocal form. Rogers and Allen are key parts of subtle nuances that make this such a treat but Eric Reed's slight blues infusion on this tune pushes the warmth and style that is Mary Stallings. "Love Me Or Leave Me" is turned into a cool blues as Stallings becomes a captivating story teller as though the tune were somewhat autobiographical. The musical chemistry between Stallings and Reed is spot on with Reed playing straight from his wheelhouse while adding depth and flavor to a classic. A true artist can take a standard such as "Love Me Or Leave Me" and place their own indelible mark on the tune

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making it their own and something remembered long after the last note fades. "Mary's Blues" is an Eric Reed original proving blues is indeed good for the soul and when played at this high level is the cure for most ills. A groove you can use finds Stallings slaying this tune as she does with remarkable consistency throughout the release.

Musical frames of reference are inherently unfair to virtually everyone involved. The logical question for the uninitiated may well be who does Mary Stallings sound like? Mary Stallings. Comparisons to the warmth of a Nancy Wilson and the phrasing of a Carmen McRae are certainly more than fair. Stallings first caught attention just over fifty years ago with the release of Cal Tjader Plays, Mary Stallings Sings. Now 72, Stallings is performing at an artistic level other vocalists working a similar catalog could work fifty years and not be close to the style, soul and sophistication Stallings puts out for us now.

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