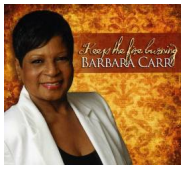
Barbara Carr - Keep The Fire Burning (2012)



1. Hanging By a Thread 2. Come On Home 3. We Have the Key 4. I Got the Blues 5. Keep the Fire Burning 6. Moment of Weakness 7. Back Together Again 8. Hold On to What You Got (feat. Johnny Rawls) 9. You Give Me the Blues 10. What You Gonna Do 11. Sweet Talking Snake Barbara Carr - Vocals Robert Claiborne - Trombone Dan Ferguson - Keyboards Monica Gutierrez - Vocals (Background) Arlen Ivey - Vocals (Background) Jessica Ivey - Vocals (Background) Jillian Ivey - Vocals (Background) Johnny McGhee - Guitar Mike Middleton - Horn Arrangements, Trumpet Richy Puga - Congas, Drums Johnny Rawls - Vocals Candice Reyes - Vocals (Background) Andy Roman - Horn Arrangements, Saxophone Bob Trenchard - Bass

Now, consider the life and career of southern soul and blues singer Barbara Carr, who just released her latest record Keep the Fire Burning. The husky voiced Carr signed her first contract with Chess records in 1966. She released several singles for that label, but felt she never received promotional support from Chess. Carr actually stopped recording to devote time to being a mother. During this time, she performed primarily in her hometown area of St. Louis. She signed with another label in the late 1970s, but again grew frustrated with the lack of support that she received.

Anyone who watches the television series Unsung knows that this is where the story takes on a familiar pattern, as the singer spirals into despair and further away from the spotlight. Carr, however, did not go that route. She and her husband started their own label in 1982, and released a series of southern soul singles. She cut her first full-length album, Good Woman Go Bad, in 1989. Carr built a following with her brand of adult oriented southern soul that allowed her to walk away from her day job at an electronics company and immerse herself full-time into a career as a highly decorated vocalist.

Southern soul music, like its big brother the blues, is “grown folks” music. That is not always the best way to get radio play in this youth oriented market. But it is an ideal genre for performers like Carr, who have the life experience to believably sing about cheating, torch holding, comeuppance and enduring love. Carr is an able storyteller on tracks such as “Come on Home,” “Sweet Talking Snake,” “Moment of Weakness” and “You Give Me the Blues.”

“Sweet Talking Snake” finds Carr giving her returning playboy lover his comeuppance. The tune is the bluesy version of Gloria Gaynor’s disco classic “I Will Survive.” The lyrics show that Carr knows what she’s up against. This guy is smooth! He knows how to use that southern drawl to break down a woman’s resistance and he’s not bad to look at. However, Carr understands that she has to prevent the man from entering the house and she stands her ground. “You’re seductive as the snake in original sin/ You look so sweet/but you can’t come in.”

Carr can play the role as the wrong doer as easily as the aggrieved party, and she begs with the best of them on “Come on Home,” while “Moment of Weakness” finds the vocalist explaining and begging. Meanwhile, “You Give Me the Blues” might be the anthem for hard working women stuck with shiftless men. Carr tells the story of a coach potato mate who drinks, argues and still wants his wife to do her wifely duties in the bedroom.

Carr is a music industry veteran who knows how to play the hand she’s been dealt. For much of her career that hand was pretty bad. Carr’s luck has changed over the past two decades, the result of good fortunes in the finest tradition of southern soul musicians: Her voice is distinct and strong, the lyrics of her songs can withstand the most discriminating scrutiny and the musicianship is first rate. Southern soul fans appreciate those qualities. Guess you can say that the harder Carr works, the luckier she gets. Highly Recommended.--- Howard Dukes, soultracks.com

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