Shemekia Copeland – Wicked (2000)

1. It's 2 A.M. 2. Not Tonight 3. Love Scene 4. The Other Woman 5. Whole Lotta Water 6. Beat Up Guitar 7. Miss Hy Ciditty 8. Up on 1-2-5; Wild 9. Wild Woman 10. The Fool You're Looking For 11. If He Moves His Lips 12. Steamy Windows 13. It's My Own Tears
Personnel: Shemekia Copeland (vocals); Jimmy Vivino, Arthur Nielsen (guitars); Brian Mitchell, Dona Oxford (keyboards); Michael Merritt, Eric King (bass); James Wormworth, Barry Harrison (drums); Ruth Brown (vocals on 1 track) Uptown Horns.

Young blues belter Shemekia Copeland is often compared to Koko Taylor, Etta James and Aretha Franklin. With only two albums in her discography, Copeland has a long row to hoe before she belongs on the same high pedestal as those three legends. Still, the 21-year-old daughter of Johnny Copeland is a fine blues shouter who can also deliver a soul ballad or an R&B rave-up with precocious skill.

Wicked is a good (not great) showcase for Copeland's powerful pipes. Though the album is party-hearty enough to please most blues fans, it contains some mediocre songs. Fortunately Copeland is talented enough to make even second-rate material sound good. And when a superior tune is occasionally tossed her way (such as the soul ballad "The Fool You're Looking For" or her father's slow-blues tune "It's My Own Tears"), Copeland knocks it right out of the park.

Like her widely praised debut Turn the Heat Up, Copeland's sophomore effort is dominated by high-octane, guitar-fueled blues and horn-drenched Memphis soul. (The Uptown Horns play on three tracks.) Copeland also extends her reach to rowdy blues-rock ("It's 2 A.M."), acoustic blues ("Beat Up Guitar"), gospel ("Whole Lotta Water") and swamp blues ("Miss Hy Ciditty").

Shemekia Copeland is one of the most promising blues singers to emerge in years, but she has yet to establish a distinct musical personality. That fact is most evident on the comical tune "If He Move His Lips," sung with one of the strongest blues personalities of all time, Ms. Ruth Brown. Still, Copeland sounds remarkably soulful for such a young singer, and the sky's definitely the limit for the New York native. It's too early to call Shemekia Copeland the new Queen of the Blues, but with that voice she's clearly a contender. ---Ed Kopp. allaboutjazz.com

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