

Tracy Nelson – Mother Earth - The Best of (1996)

Written by bluesever

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01. Down So Low 02. Cry On 03. Goodnight Nelda Greb (The Telephone Company Has Cut Us Off) 04. Mother Earth [play](#) 05. Won't Be Long 06. Need Your Love So Bad 07. Soul of a Man 08. Satisfied 09. Ruler of My Heart 10. Temptation Took Control of Me (And I Fell) [play](#) 11. Soul of Sadness 12. Tonight the Sky's About to Cry 13. I'll Be Long Gone 14. Seven Bridges Road 15. Tennessee Blues 16. Thinking of You 17. I Don't Do That Kind of Thing

Personnel: Tracy Nelson (vocals, piano, background vocals); Bob Cardwell (guitar, acoustic guitar, electric guitar, background vocals); John Andrews (guitar, acoustic guitar, electric guitar); Michael Bloomfield (guitar); Jack Lee (acoustic guitar, electric guitar, background vocals); Ben Keith (dobro); Sammy Dodge, Johnny Gimble (fiddle); Martin Fierro (alto saxophone, tenor saxophone); Link Davis Jr. (alto saxophone); Joe Arnold, Aaron Varnell, Frank Morin (tenor saxophone); Gene "Bowlegs" Miller (trumpet); Gerald Richardson (trombone); Andy McMahon (piano, organ, keyboards, background vocals); Clay Cotton, Mark Naftalin (piano, organ); Barry Goldberg, Hargus "Pig" Robbins (organ); George Rains, Karl Himmel, Lonnie Castille (drums); Farrell Morris (percussion); Losella Funque, Joyce Dunn, Dave Zettner, Richard Kraus, Irma Routen, Sylvia Caldwell, Sadie Cantrell, Shalimar Samuelson, Lady Corder, Dianne Davidson, The Honeycombs (background vocals).

Janis Joplin may have gotten all of the fame and glory, but she was far from the only white female blues shouter to emerge from the San Francisco music scene of the mid-'60s; The Best of Tracy Nelson & Mother Earth is proof positive of that, providing an excellent introduction to one of the more sadly overlooked talents of her time and place. Despite any number of passing similarities to Joplin, Nelson sings with greater finesse; her style is more adaptable as well, capable of fitting comfortably into R&B, psychedelia, and pop ballads, all the while remaining grounded in classic roots music traditions. Highlighted by her perennial "Down So Low" -- subsequently recorded by everyone from Linda Ronstadt to Etta James -- this 17-track compilation also spotlights performances spanning from a wrenching cover of Little Willie John's "Need Your Love So Bad" to contemporary material like Steve Young's "Seven Bridges Road" and John Hiatt's "Thinking of You," offering a comprehensive overview of her earliest and most enduring work. ---Jason Ankeny, AMG

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Life is full of mysteries. Janis Joplin becomes a musical icon. Tracy Nelson has always been something of an unknown. Yet Tracy possessed a far warmer, flexible, and expressive voice than Janis, which, as good as it was, always did pretty much the same thing.

Tracy Nelson fans are often jealous of Janis Joplin's legend. On numerous occasions I have put "Down So Low" on to play to unsuspecting and uninitiated friends. I refuse to tell them who it is, and invariably they will ask by the end of the song, "Is that Janis Joplin?"

This album is marvelous testimony to just how good Tracy Nelson is. I do have a slight bone to pick with it. The title is a bit misleading: Mother Earth had many very, very good songs that featured other people singing lead than Tracy Nelson, and all of those songs were omitted.

I think there are several reasons one can point to for Tracy Nelson's failure to become as large a legend as Janis Joplin. One is pointed to by Al Kooper in the liner notes accompanying the CD: she isn't easy to categorize. Is she rock? Folk? Blues? Country? I bought my copy at Tower Records, and they keep the album in Folk. I would have put it in Rock, but anyone will have to acknowledge that she defies categories.

Another reason that Tracy Nelson has never been as widely acknowledged as she deserves is ironically because she did one song that was so stunning, so overwhelming, that all her other excellent work suffers by comparison. The song is, of course, "Down So Low." In my estimation, this song and Tracy's performance of it is one of the staggering achievements of the rock era. Greil Marcus once wrote that in this song Tracy Nelson goes to places that Janis Joplin only dreamed about. The song is so extraordinary that the album cover reads "The Best of Tracy Nelson/Mother Earth" followed by the words "Featuring Down So Low." And the entire text on the back of the CD does nothing but talk about the song. In a way, this song destroyed her career, because it is such an amazing song and performance, that everything else in anyone's career is going to be a disappointment.

Let me try to get at the point another way. Aretha Franklin, John Lennon, Jagger/Richards, Bob

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Dylan. These folks belong to the highest pinnacle of rock and roll success. They produced an enormous amount of work that is the standard by which everything else in rock is measured. Other performers can be often excellent, but they really don't come up to that standard. Sheryl Crow is great, but she isn't Bob Dylan. Ever. But in "Down So Low," Tracy Nelson did a song that was so great that only occasionally have the greatest figures in the history of rock and roll done as well. Yet her other work is not up to the level of that song.

So, there are two reasons to get this album. One is to get familiar with one of the very greatest singers our country has produced in the last forty years. The other is to get your very own copy of one of the truly transcendent moments in the history of rock: "Down So Low." --- Robert Moore (Chicago, IL USA)

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