

Marcia Ball - Soulful Dress (1983)

Written by bluesever

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1. *Soulful Dress* 3:26 2. *Made Your Move Too Soon* 3:26 3. *I'd Rather Go Blind* 5:23 4. *Jailbird* 3:04 5. *Eugene* 3:54 6. *My Mind's Made Up* 2:38 7. *A Thousand Times* 3:36 8. *That's Why I Love You* 3:52 9. *Soul On Fire* 5:01 10. *Don't Want No Man* 3:09 Musicians: Marcia Ball - piano and vocals Kenny Ray - guitar Mark Kazanoff - tenor and alto saxophones Don Bennett - bass Wes Starr - drums + Nick Connolly - organ David Murray - first guitar solo on tracks 5 and 8 Stevie Ray Vaughan - first guitar solo on track 1 Keith Winking, Keith Winking and Pat Mackrell (The Mighty Big Horns) - horn ensemble on tracks 2, 5, 6, 7 and 9

Pianist and singer/songwriter Marcia Ball is a living example of how East Texas blues meets southwest Louisiana swamp rock. Ball was born March 20, 1949, in Orange, Texas, but grew up across the border in Vinton, Louisiana. That town is squarely in the heart of "the Texas triangle," an area that includes portions of both states and that has produced some of the country's greatest blues talents: Janis Joplin, Johnny and Edgar Winter, Queen Ida Guillory, Lonnie Brooks, Zachary Richard, Clifton Chenier, and Kenny Neal, to name a few. Ball's earliest awareness of blues came over the radio, where she heard people like Irma Thomas, Professor Longhair, and Etta James, all of whom she now credits as influences. She began playing piano at age five, learning from her grandmother and aunt and also taking formal lessons from a teacher.

Ball entered Louisiana State University in the late '60s as an English major. In college, she played in the psychedelic rock & roll band Gum. In 1970, Ball and her first husband were headed West in their car to San Francisco, but the car needed repairs in Austin, where they had stopped off to visit one of their former bandmates. After hearing, seeing, and tasting some of the music, sights, and food in Austin, the two decided to stay there. Ball has been based in Austin ever since.

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Her piano style, which mixes equal parts boogie-woogie with zydeco and Louisiana swamp rock, is best exemplified on her series of excellent recordings for the Rounder label. They include *Soulful Dress* (1983), *Hot Tamale Baby* (1985), *Gatorhythms* (1989), and *Blue House* (1994). Also worthy of checking out is her collaboration with Angela Strehli and Lou Ann Barton on the Antone's label, *Dreams Come True* (1990). Ball, like her peer Strehli, is an educated business woman fully aware of all the realities of the record business. Ball never records until she feels she's got a batch of top-notch, quality songs. Most of the songs on her albums are her own creations, so songwriting is a big part of her job description.

Although Ball is a splendid piano player and a more than adequate vocalist, "the songwriting process is the most fulfilling part of the whole deal for me," she said in a 1994 interview, "so I always keep my ears and eyes open for things I might hear or see....I like my songs to go back to blues in some fashion." As much a student of the music as she is a player, some of Ball's albums include covers of material by O.V. Wright, Dr. John, Joe Ely, Clifton Chenier, and Shirley & Lee.

In the late '90s, Ball released her final discs under the Rounder banner, *Let Me Play with Your Poodle* (1997) and *Sing It!* (1998). The latter featured Ball with Irma Thomas and Tracy Nelson utilizing both solo and combined energy that generated much exposure for all three women, as it was nominated for both a Grammy and a W.C. Handy Blues Award as Best Contemporary Blues Album. Ironically, while both of Ball's final Rounder releases were critically acclaimed, she signed with Alligator Records in 2000 and released her first album for the label, *Presumed Innocent*, in 2001. Ball, fully established as an important player in the club scenes of both New Orleans and Austin, continues to work at festivals and clubs throughout the U.S., Canada, and Europe. She followed up her debut recording for Alligator with the similarly fine *So Many Rivers* in 2003 and a live album, *Down the Road*, in 2005. *Peace, Love & BBQ* appeared in 2008. *Roadside Attractions*, produced by Gary Nicholson, appeared in the spring of 2011, also on Alligator. ---Richard Skelly & Al Campbell, allmusic.com

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