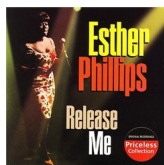


Esther Phillips - Release Me (1963)

Written by bluesever

Monday, 16 December 2013 17:17 - Last Updated Friday, 20 December 2013 21:00

Esther Phillips - Release Me (1963)



01. Release Me 3:19 02. Mojo Hanna 2:30 03. I Really Don't Want To Know 2:02 04. Tomorrow Night 3:31 05. Double Crossin' Blues 2:42 06. Hello Walls 3:25 07. Just Out of Reach 3:08 08. Catch Me, I'm Fallin' 2:38 09. I Can't Help It 3:05 10. I'm in Love 2:22

One of the premiere r&b vocalists of the 1950s through the 1980s, 'Little Esther' Phillips possessed both great talent and even greater demons. When she was an adolescent, her parents divorced, and she was forced to divide her time between her father in Houston and her mother in the Watts area of Los Angeles. Although she was brought up singing in church, she was hesitant to enter a talent contest at a local blues club, but her sister insisted and Esther complied. The young dynamo wowed the club owner, bluesman Johnny Otis, and he immediately signed her to his roster of performers. Esther would record on Otis's record label, and perform in his revue. Otis gave her the moniker 'Little Esther' that would follow her throughout her career.

Esther Phillips' voice had a unique nasal sound that delighted audiences with its distinct phrasing and exacting diction. She scored many r&b hits in the early 1950s, but soon became disillusioned with Johnny Otis, finally walking out when he refused her request for a salary increase. Through the remainder of the decade, Esther recorded for various record companies without success. She returned to Houston to live with her father at this time, and to deal with the greatest challenge in her young life -- her drug dependency. Apparently, the stress of life on the road with hardened blues performers, and her insecurities had led her to indulge in heroin as an escape.

After rebounding from her dark days, Esther worked small nightclubs in the southwest, and was spotted by rising star Kenny Rogers, who loved her sound. He arranged a recording contract for her, and she released a hit country and western album. She dropped the adjective 'Little' from

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her name then. Soon after she signed with Atlantic records and released a series of records with only modest success. They dropped her in 1967, and her drug dependency deepened.

After a stint in a rehab hospital, Atlantic re-signed Esther, and soon released a live album consider to be among her best. The label attempted to squeeze Esther into a pop singer mold, but she wasn't comfortable in the role, so again they cut her free from her contract. In 1971 jazz maestro Creed Taylor signed her to his Kudu label, and this is where Esther's best work can be found. Soon she was singing in high-profile venues along with big-name talent, and international jazz festivals. In 1975, she scored her biggest hit single since her early days with Johnny Otis with the early disco track 'What A Difference A Day Makes,' a remake of a Dinah Washington standard.

Soon restless, Esther left Kudu records for another label in 1977, but was never able to duplicate her success. Depression and insecurity again hounded her and she again turned to heroin, and this time alcohol. She released a few records on small independent labels with little success or notice. The years of addiction had taken a huge toll on 'Little Esther' Phillips and she succumbed to liver and kidney failure in Los Angeles in August of 1984. ---imdb.com

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