

Shakura S'Aida – Brown Sugar (2010)

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1. *Mr. Right* 2. *Walk Out That Door* 3. *Gonna Tell Me Baby* 4. *(Did it) Break Your Heart*
5. *Angels On High* 6. *Chasing The Sun* 7. *Missing The Good And The Bad* 8. *Sweet Spot*
9. *Brown Sugar* 10. *This Is Not A Love Song* 11. *Anti Love Song* 12. *Outskirts Of Memphis*
Bass – Dave Smith Drums – Steve Potts Guitar – Donna Grantis Guitar, Engineer – Brooke
Blackburn Keyboards – Rick Steff Organ [B3] – Lance Anderson Vocals [Background] –
Amyee Bragg, Shannon Maracle, Stan Crouse, Troy Adams, Vickie Atkins Vocals - Shakura
S'aida

Born in Brooklyn, raised in Switzerland, resident of Toronto, and recording in Memphis, singer Shakura S'Aida turns in her second solo album, *Brown Sugar*, for the German Ruf Records label. On her first CD, UMI's *Blueprint*, she sang blues cover songs from the 1940s and '50s, but here she and her guitarist, Donna Grantis, have penned nine of the 11 songs themselves. They have done so in some familiar blues styles, starting with the opening trio of 12-bar blues tunes, "Mr. Right," "Walk Out That Door," and "Gonna Tell My Baby," then going on to less hardcore variations such as the blues-rock found on "(Did It)" *Break Your Heart* and the bluesy piano ballad "Angel on High." "Missing the Good and the Bad" starts like a jump blues number before switching gears -- and tempi -- halfway through to take on the cadence of Muddy Waters' "I'm a Man." Throughout, Grantis plays stinging lead guitar in support of S'Aida, who sings powerfully. The vocalist is also a musical theater performer whose stage efforts include a one-woman show devoted to Nina Simone, and she sings in a similarly edgy contralto. She can be said to be a blues singer in the sense that someone like Simone is, too, which is to say that she is more sophisticated, and less sweaty, than most singers in the style. For her, the blues is a performance, not a lifestyle, and on this album she is playing the part of a blues mama, not being one. That allows her to have some fun with the form, however, as she does notably on the closing track, "Outskirts of Memphis," which finds her tramping around the city's tourist spots in search of a ne'er-do-well companion who owes her money. ---William Ruhlmann, AllMusic Review

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