

## Robin McKelle – Heart Of Memphis (2014)

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1 *About To Be Your Baby* 4:22 2 *Good Time* 2:45 3 *Please Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood* 4:10 4 *Control Yourself* 3:52 5 *Forgetting You* 2:29 6 *Heart Of Memphis* 4:43 7 *Like A River* 4:14 8 *Easier That Way* 4:16 9 *What You Want* 3:32 10 *Good & Plenty* 3:08 11 *Baby You're The Best* 3:07 12 *Down With The Ship* 4:02 13 *It's Over This Time* 3:18  
Yennifer Correia Violin Mark Franklin Flugelhorn, Horn Arrangements, String Arrangements, Trumpet Anthony Gilbert Viola Adrian Harpham Drums, Percussion Danielle Hill Vocals (Background) Jonathan Kirkscey Cello Susan Marshall Vocals (Background) Susanne Marshall Vocals (Background) Robin McKelle Percussion, Primary Artist, Producer, Vocals (Background) Jessica Munson Violin Derek Nievergelt Bass (Electric) Kirk Smothers Flute, Sax (Baritone), Sax (Tenor) Ben Stivers Celeste, Clavinova, Farfisa Organ, Fender Rhodes, Organ, Piano, Wurlitzer Al Street Guitar (Acoustic), Guitar (Electric)

It certainly is rare to read about a soul/blues singer who once finished third in the Thelonious Monk International Jazz Vocal competition. Originally from Rochester, NY, vocalist Robin McKelle migrated to France, where two recordings of big band swing material made her a star. Five years ago she began a transformation that took her through songs from composers like Willie Dixon and Doc Pomus to this latest recording that celebrates the musical legacy of the city of Memphis.

McKelle's band, the Flytones, quickly serve notice that they have an innate understanding of sweet soul music with Al Street on guitar, Ben Stivers on a multitude of keyboards, Derek Nievergelt on bass and Adrian Harpham on drums & percussion. Producer Scott Bomar certainly brings a wealth of experience to the project. He is the bass player for the Bo-Keys and learned how to work a studio alongside the legendary Willie Mitchell, leading to Bomar engineering two Al Green recordings. Two other members of the Bo-Keys add their considerable talents to the mix – Mark Franklin on trumpet & flugelhorn and Kirk Smothers on saxophones & flute.

Sounding like a modern-day version of Dusty Springfield, McKelle possesses a rich, resonant voice that is used to tell stories, minus most of the vocal gyrations that infect many current vocal performances. She is a singer's singer with a voice that can break your heart on "Easier That Way," which borrows a horn riff from Rev. Green, or breathe fire into the dance-floor stomper, "Good Time". On the title track, McKelle offers a reverential tribute to the people and magical sounds of the famed city over an easy-rolling rhythm punctuated by horn accents.

"About To Be Your Baby" sounds like it was borrowed from one of Ann Peebles classic recordings on Hi Records. The full scope of the singer's voice is revealed on "It's Over This Time," which starts out simmering at a slow boil as it builds to the climatic coda. The addition of a string section give tracks like "Control Yourself" and "Down With The Ship" a more contemporary R&B feel. McKelle's powerful voice cuts loose on "What You Want" as she demands some answers from a reluctant lover.

Two covers head in opposite directions. O.B. McClinton's "Forgetting You" adds a soulful country flavor while the Animal's hit, "Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood," gets an updating complete with Stivers on Farfisa organ injecting an eerie feel to the proceedings. The band is hitting on all cylinders on the up-tempo romp "Good & Plenty" while "Like A River" sports a stone-cold, seductive Memphis groove for more of McKelle's forthright testimony on love and happiness.

This project validates McKelle's decision to move on from her jazz roots and embrace a new career course. Her gorgeous voice and spirited delivery combined with an exceptional brew of original material puts this one in the "Highly Recommended" category! ---Mark Thompson, bluesblastmagazine.com

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