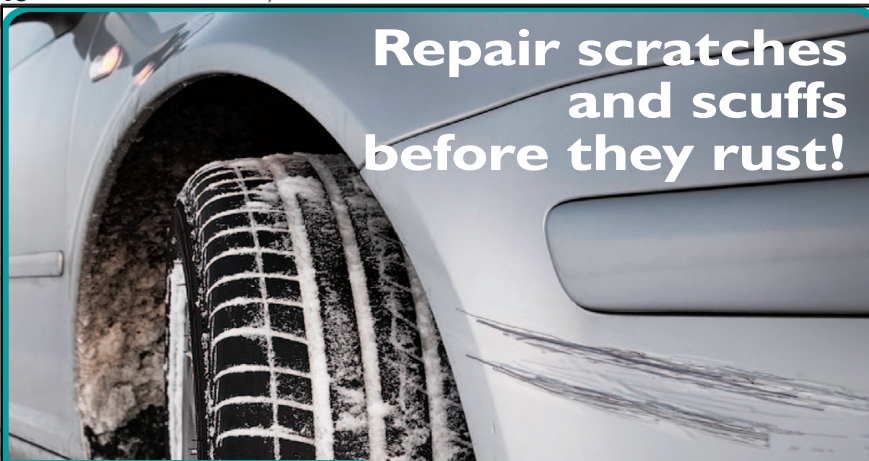


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Music To My Ears

with Paul Nixon

Bettye LaVette - Worthy (Cherry Red Records)

One of soul music's most revered voices returns to the recording studio with a stunning new album that proves this veteran singer, with a career spanning almost 50 years, has lost not a single edge to her captivating vocal ability. Collaborating once more with producer Joe Henry, with whom she recorded 2005's long player 'I've Got My Own Hell To Raise', Bettye works her way through an amazing album of 11 tracks from the pens of Bob Dylan, Mick Jagger and Keith Richards and Lennon and McCartney. The opener, a gutsy rendition of Dylan's 'Unbelievable', shows Bettye at her finest using every little bit of vocal dexterity that she owns (and believe me that's an awful lot). Plotting layer upon layer of textures and shades Miss LaVette puts a terrific spin on the Joseph Lee Hendry penned 'Stop' and Jagger and Richards' 'Complicated'.

Whilst these are not the vocals of a youngster, whose vocals have been honed by the use of auto tune, they carry the depth and tortured sentiments from someone who has lived the pain rather than somebody just singing about it. In much the same way as 'Lady Day' (Billie Holiday) was able to lift your spirits by singing the deepest darkest blues Bettye effortlessly uses power, vocal dexterity and a lifetime of experience to bring home the blues in quite the most fetching of ways.

Gladys Knight - Gladys Knight Expanded (Funky Town Grooves)

I make no excuses for dipping into the realms of more back catalogue and more soul singers for

at this time of the year there is very little else to report on with most of the major record companies having fired off their biggest guns before Christmas.

So it gave me great pleasure to open a package from re-issue specialists Funky Town Grooves and find an expanded album of one of my all-time favourite female artists, Gladys Knight. Minus the Pips and long after her departure from Motown, Gladys had recorded and achieved many hits for a variety of labels including Buddha with whom she ended in dispute leading to her and the Pips not able to record together for a while. Turning up at Columbia this 1979 LP was actually Gladys' second outing for the label, the first being the long player Miss Gladys Knight. While neither contained runaway chart hits the album opener, the powerful Larry Keith - Jim Hurt ballad 'Am I Too Late' was released as a 45 achieving surprisingly very little chart action. While 'You Bring Out The Best In Me' is without doubt a very disco-influenced track and highly 70's influenced, Gladys' cut glass vocals slice through the cheesy floor spinning accompaniment like a knife through butter. But ballads are where Miss Knight cut her teeth and while Motown hits such as 'Friendship Train', 'Nitty Gritty' and 'Grapevine' saw her right in the groove, it was always ballads such as the retro influenced 'I (Who Have Nothing)', the gorgeous 'I Just Want To Be With You' and the Motown throwback 'The Best Thing We Can Do Is Say Goodbye' showcase the evergreen talent that is and will always be Miss Gladys Knight. FTG expanded version contains not just the LP's original 10 tracks but a cornucopia of additional mixes from the album's single releases including 12in versions, extended single mixes and four terrific unheard tracks from the albums sessions. Available for some little while this is well worth searching out and can be ordered from www.funkytowngrooves.com





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Lao Tzu, Chinese philosopher.

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