

VANESSA ... BETTY ... THE REAL THING

Written by Bill Buckley
Sunday, 19 July 2009 06:46



The ever-lovely VANESSA WILLIAMS broke through musically in 1988 with 'The Right Stuff' - a sassy blend of dance grooves and smooth soul. Since then she's not only continued to make quality music, but she's developed a tandem career as an in-demand actress starring in both award-winning movies and acclaimed TV series of which the current smash 'Ugly Betty' is just one. VANESSA'S recently released her latest album on Concord Jazz - 'The Real Thing' - and we here at www.soulandjazzandfunk.com were delighted to be asked to talk with the lady about it. First though, we wanted to know why it took her so long to deliver the album ... bearing in mind that her last was released in 2005

You know I normally take three years between albums but in 2005 I was working in a show called 'South Beach'; then, of course, we started shooting 'Ugly Betty' and now we're getting ready for series four. I just try to do as much as I can and I end up making music between my other commitments.

So when did you start on 'The Real Thing'?

I was signed to Concord a couple of years ago and we started to record right away - in L.A actually, then they moved the show ('Ugly Betty') to New York... then I was down in Nashville working on the 'Hannah Montana' movie. So it's been about two years in the making.

...and what kind of audience did you have in mind whilst recording?

The lovely thing is that I didn't have the pressure of having to worry about an audience. Being on a jazz label, their main concern was for me to make a very musical album - featuring live musicians, to continue the integrity that they'd established as a label. So, for me that was kind

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of liberating.

How did you choose the songs for the set?

The initial idea was to do Latin album... I adore Brazilian music and I always include Brazilian music in my show. Had I had the time I was planning to go down to Brazil to use Brazilian musicians, but we ended up not having that luxury. We ended up with some of the music having a Brazilian feel... and for the rest, well we called in favours from people like BABYFACE ... I'm not too proud to beg!

What's your favourite song on the album?

I'd have to say the title cut -'The Real Thing'. It was the first thing I had in mind to record. It's been a personal favourite of mine since SERGIO MENDES recorded it, and I've always been a huge fan of STEVIE'S too. The whole thing reminds me of growing up in the 70s. It's the kind of thing that makes me feel alive.

So how does VANESSA WILLIAMS see herself... singer or actress?

Well, I'm going to cheat on that one. I'd say that musical theatre is my forte - being able to play a role, create a character AND break out into song ... but I really do enjoy acting and the part of Wilhelmina in 'Ugly Betty' is just delicious... a joy for an actor ... and... some exclusive news... we're doing a musical episode later this year!

Musically, though, what do you consider your greatest achievement?

I would have to say it's 'Save The Best For Last' because it's the song I get the most response from. People say, "it saved our marriage... it's our wedding song... it was playing on our first date..." It seems to be a pivotal song in so many peoples' relationships. It's magical.

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VANESSA WILLIAMS' 'The Real Thing' is out now on Concord Jazz... go to our reviews pages for full review