

SHAYNA STEELE: Rise (Ropeadope)

Written by Bill B

Thursday, 26 March 2015 19:30 - Last Updated Friday, 27 March 2015 16:22



The daughter of a military family, Shayna Steele has led something of an itinerant existence. Born in California, she's lived in (amongst other places) Germany, Oklahoma, Missouri and Mississippi but now resides in New York where she's a valuable and valued member of that city's vibrant music coterie. Her credits include work with Snarky Puppy, Moby and Bette Midler and those experiences along with her varied addresses go a long way to explaining why the music on her new LP, 'Rise' is so varied, eclectic and adventurous.

There are all kinds of everything on the 11 tracker but the unity comes from Ms. Steele's ever expressive vocals and the quality of the material – all the lady's own creations are proper "song-led" tunes – not sketches, skits or simple grooves - while the selected covers offer the same level of quality.

The album begins with a lugubrious and moody ballad, 'I Got You' - a brave choice for an opener and you'd be forgiven for thinking that you were about to be hit with 40 odd minutes worth of introspection. The mood changes quickly though with the jaunty, jazzy 'Sunshine Girl' and that's the measure of the collection – swift changes of mood and direction. Interestingly the piano vamps on 'Sunshine Girl' might recall (for some) the best of Mose Allison and guess what? Shayna covers one of good 'ole Mose's tunes. It's his wonderful 'Everybody's Crying Mercy' and here Ms S gives it a rocky treatment with plenty of choppy guitar from Robin Macatangay.

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Other noteworthy tracks are the cover of Bill Wither's 'Grandma's Hands' and the soulful 'Gone Under' which features rumbling guitar textures in the fashion of the Marvin Gaye version of 'Grapevine'. Standout however is the ultra elegant 'Hyde Park' – a kind of folksy/soul/jazz sound which illustrates perfectly what I mean by song-led material.

Incidentally 'Rise' features some top session players/guests – notably Marcus Miller, Christian McBride and Robert Randolph and you can find out more @ www.shaynasteele.com

(BB) 3/5