

RHONDA THOMAS: Breathe New Life (Label: Rhonovocals LLC)

Written by Bill Buckley

Friday, 19 October 2007 03:58



Rhonda Thomas is an Atlanta-based soulstress and an alumnus of that city's Tabernacle Gospel Choir, where she shared lead with Maysa Leak. Since then she's worked with Incognito, Jiva, Khari Simmons and the Sirius B project and been on the road with Luther and Isaac Hayes. In between all that she recorded this album in 2004 but with a big underground buzz on it, it's being re-promoted. It's easy to hear why the buzzers have been buzzing. Though almost three years old, 'Breathe New Life' is right on the contemporary money. It pairs bright and optimistic cuts with some gorgeous introspective ballads - unified by their thoughtful and mature lyrical profiles. Best of the 'up' cuts is the lithe 'Stand And Know'. It's almost soulful house, enhanced by sweet trombone infills. Biggest ballad is the duet with Alex Latimore that is 'The Matrimony'. Cynics might say the lyrics are cloying, but I say there's nothing wrong with proper commitment and the song is a soulful expression of just that. In between there's lots more to enjoy including the Jiva-esque 'Fly Away' and the jazzy title cut that will recall the best of her old mate Maysa.

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