

BETTY LAVETTE: Scene Of The Crime (Label: Anti)

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In terms of chart success, this 61-year-old raspy-voiced chanteuse hailing from Muskegon, Michigan, hasn't had the best of careers. In fact, her biggest smash came way back in 1962 when she broke into the Top 10 with the Atlantic 45, 'My Man - He's A Lovin' Man.' Success-wise, though, things could have been different for LaVette if Atlantic (during her second stint at the label) hadn't inexplicably shelved a promising 1972 album, 'Child Of The Seventies,' cut in Muscle Shoals (it was only recently issued by Rhino Handmade). But these setbacks seemingly haven't deterred the singer one iota, whose comeback started with the album, 'A Woman Like Me,' in 2004. The album scooped a Grammy and a year later, LaVette signed to Anti- where she recorded the critically lauded 'I've Got My Own Hell To Raise.' The title of this new album refers to the fact that LaVette has gone back to FAME studios in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, where she originally cut the lost 'Child Of The Seventies' some 35 years ago. There's no similarity between the two albums, though, apart from the recording location. 'Scene Of The Crime' is dark, sombre, raw and visceral. And there's nothing half as good as 'Your Turn To Cry' on it. Despite that, LaVette's astringent vocals are magnificently compelling - though Patterson Hood's austere production sound (his band, The Drive-By Truckers, provide the backing) and choice of material leaves something to be desired. This album tends to follow the same route that Solomon Burke adhered to when he cut 'Don't Give Up On Me,' a few years ago. There's more rock than soul, as the presence of material by Elton John ('Talking Old Soldiers') will attest. In fact, it's the kind of record that rock fans will embrace but soul fans (especially in the UK) will probably ignore. The real crime, I think, is that LaVette didn't get to work with more imaginative musicians and better quality material.

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