

Written by Charles Waring

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Hailing from Tuscaloosa - the small Alabama town where the great jazz/blues diva, Dinah Washington was born - Rozetta Johnson must have thought Dame Fortune was on her side when her debut 45, 'A Woman's Way' snuck into the Billboard R&B Top 40 in December 1970. Co-helmed by budding R&B tunesmith Sam Dees, the record - a striking, plaintive mid-tempo ballad - was issued on producer Clinton Moon's Clintone label, then distributed by mighty Atlantic Records. Johnson followed up her debut chart entry with an even stronger Dees-penned song, 'Who Are You Gonna Love (Your Woman Or Your Wife),' a spouse's heartfelt plea to her cheating husband. One of several outstanding tracks on this new 16-track compilation, 'Who Are Gonna Love...' for all its musical merits failed to crack the R&B Top 40 on its release and sadly, all subsequent 45s that Johnson cut for the label in the next few years sank without trace. A cult favourite in the eyes of the UK soul cognoscenti for some time, this gospel-reared singer finally has her small body of work anthologised on CD. It's a fantastic collection, comprising all of the singer's Clintone 45s and their flip sides. There are also two previously unissued cuts, 'For That Man Of Mine' and 'Mama Was A Bad Seed.' The material and Johnson's performances are consistently strong, with her original version of '(I Like Making That) Early Morning Love' - later covered by Gwen McCrae - catching the ear along with uptempo workouts like 'I Can Feel My Love Comin' Down' and the disco-tinged 'You Better Keep What You Got' (recently available as a 45 on Shotgun). This compelling cache of '70s Southern soul is undoubtedly one of the year's best soul compilations. Miss it and weep.

(CW) 4/5