

KEYSHIA COLE: Just Like You (Label: Confidential, Geffen)

Written by Bill Buckley

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California's Keyshia Cole debuted in 2005 with the 'Way It Is' and that album's mix of street R&B tempered with some genuine old school soul immediately drew comparisons with the incomparable Mary J Blige. The fact's not lost on the lady's label who are dubbing her *'the Princess of Hip hop soul*

' and though there's many a mile to go before she ascends to a higher status, the evidence here proves that she does deserve her place in that soul/hip hop/R&B hierarchy. 'Just Like You' is a lengthy 17 tracker and its opening sequence will have real soul boys wondering why they bothered. 'Let It Go' (the first single) is a big, brash, R&B thumper with a hint of Mtume's 'Juicy Fruit' to salvage it. 'Give It To Me' has no such redeeming feature - being more of vehicle for Sean Paul than Keyshia while 'Didn't I Tell You' is one of those skittering R&B efforts that irritate. Then, things pick up with some pleasing pop-soul ballads like 'Fallin' Out', 'Give Me More' and 'I'll Remember' which features some delightful live strings. Strings are also prominent on 'Got To Get My Heart Back' which samples the O'Jays' 'She's Only A Woman'. Good though it is, it's outdone as standout by 'Losing You' - a searing duet with Anthony Hamilton. This one starts with a doctored sample from Natalie Cole's 'Sorry' before developing into one of the year's sweetest cuts on which Ms. Cole (K, that is) justifies the 'soul' tag in her billing. Hamilton's contribution adds more real soul edge, while the China White/ Ron Fair production maintains the tension. Take away some of this album's blatant R&B (like the Diddy collaboration that is 'Last Night') and you really would have a decent soul album, but I guess the lady's management team know where the potential big bucks are. So, for every soul nugget, you'll need to get past a few thumpers... C'est la vie.

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