

Jun 7 2005, 10:50 PM



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Cheatin' Soul and the Southern Dream of Freedom

Trikont US-0337

Our Rating: 83 out of 100

Cheatin' Soul and the Southern Dream of Freedom is an exquisitely packaged collection of 23 Southern Soul numbers from genre luminaries such as Joe Tex, Bobby Blue Bland, and Ann Sexton. As the incisive article on the inlay explains, Southern Soul is conspicuously detached from the hollow, materialistic greed of contemporary Rhythm and Blues, and instead chooses to define itself by its very nature; this is Soul, dealing with matters of the Soul in a warm, considered, and vitally human manner. As such it is a treat to the ears, and the heart.

The contributions here are musically soothing and stimulating in equal measure, and whilst the quality can vary a little from time to time, the heart of the South beats gently and rhythmically throughout. But what unites the songs here is the wonderful story telling enshrined in the lyrics; each piece is like a brief glimpse into the emotional entanglements of its players, and the album moves through the spectrum of perspectives without prejudice. There's the lament of the man in despair (Bobby Blue Bland's moody and bass-driven 'Rockin in the Same Old Boat'), and the righteous demand of the eternally hard-working and long-suffering father (Joe Tex in full-on rousing glory with the energetic 'I Wanna Be Free'). Then there's the exposure of the southern states' dynamics where men can be victims as much as women (Little Archie's up-beat and self-explanatory 'I Am A Carpet' and Bobby Blue Bland in top form again with 'I Wouldn't Treat a Dog', a definite album highlight). Of course, the women still have things pretty bad (Doris Duke's 'If She's Your Wife Who Am I?', and Janet & The Jays' haunting opener 'Without A Reason'), and in objective indifference the perpetrators of the misery are not discriminated against but lent an ear as victims just the same (Ann Peebles' 'Feel Like Breaking Up Somebody's Home'). To grace a shine to the complexities of these relationships, Jerry Washington gives us some good ol' Southern humour with 'Right Here is Where You Belong', a chronicle of a visit to his 'Baby's' home to let her know he has a serious ailment; a terrible case of the blues.

Cheatin' Soul is a truly rewarding selection of Southern Soul. It eschews the modern obsessions of money and possessions, and instead remains faithful to matters of the heart, of the soul of humans. And despite being escorted through the varied and turbulent situations of the protagonists involved, you'll be left with a warm, rich, and satisfying glow.

Mark Lee