

# BLURT

Michelle Malone

Debris

3/30/2009

Whether moanin' at midnight and howling at the delta moon, or serving up a steamy blend of Tom Pettyesque twang-pop and Creedence Clearwater choogle, Michelle Malone's the sexiest, most swaggering-est gal rocker on the goddam planet right now. You can credit part of that to her Deep South roots; in her unvarnished, soulful wail, one hears echoes of the church choirs and the R&B records she undoubtedly heard growing up as a child in Georgia. Later, Malone got weaned on '70s classic rock and eventually bum-rushed the college-rock and alternative scenes of the mid '80s (among her early musical buddies were the Indigo Girls), debuting in '88 in fine style with *New Experience*. Over the years she's put in time as a solo acoustic folkie, as a full-on rock band frontwoman, and as one-half of a hotwired guitar/drums blooze duo (take *that*, Jack White) - in the latter incarnation, she even picked up the nickname "Moanin' Malone." So yeah, with that kind of accumulated musical schooling, Malone's got all the bases covered.

That's what comes through loud and clear on *Debris*, her 10<sup>th</sup> studio release and the followup to 2006's outstanding *Sugarfoot*. In a way, the record acts as a career summation, touching down in multiple territories while offering some of her strongest songwriting to date. The title track is a rich, soulful evocation of sisterhood - or deep, lasting friendships of any stripe, as lines like "If you're thirsty come and drink from my cup/ If you get scared, baby, you know that I'll back you up/ You don't have to stand alone" clearly telegraph - set against an irresistible beat and powered by a memorable Keith Richards-styled riff. There's a bit of low-key Bo Diddley shuffle in the slide guit-fueled "Restraining Order Blues" (you can let your

imagination roam free about *that* song's lyrical concerns), while both the loss-and-loneliness waltz-time reverie "14<sup>th</sup> Street and Mars" and the gently yearning acoustic ballad "Candle for the Lonely" hearken directly from Malone's folk-rock background.

But as noted above, Malone's still one of those ladies who's just gotta rock sometimes, and that she does, in spades, on *Debris*. Opening cut "Feather in a Hurricane" lays down the gauntlet right at the get-go: an overdriven slice of electric guitar boogie, it struts and stomps and churns like vintage George Thorogood (if GT could muster the soulful vocal chops of a young Bonnie Raitt, that is), Malone unleashing down 'n' dirty slide licks as she chronicles how it feels to be out of control, overwhelmed by the vicissitudes of life and beset on every front by loonies and losers. "I feel I'm about to explode," Malone mutters darkly at one point, echoing what pretty much everyone else is feeling these days, essentially making the tune the national anthem for Amerika v.09. The next song is also a visceral rocker, "Yesterday's Make Up," melodically kin to classic John Mellencamp (back when his middle name was still "Cougar") and featuring a meaty riff that's so shamelessly-but-delightfully copped from Free's "All Right Now" that only the most hard-hearted lawyer would be willing to litigate. In the tune, Malone recovers from her "Hurricane" madness and resolves to dig herself out of the shit, strapping on the heels and walking out into the Sunday morning sun still clad in her Saturday night dress: "I look like Cinderella on her way home/ I feel like Wonder Woman, righteous and strong... I feel beautiful/ I been saved by love," sings Malone, in a voice that's utter celebration and release. And even if you don't know that most of the material on *Debris* was penned in the aftermath of a protracted, painful breakup, you sense immediately that this is real-life stuff she's singing about, not abstract character studies.

Which has always been Malone's hallmark: raw, visceral emotions not so much worn on the sleeve as simply put out there for the rest of us so we can identify and commiserate. I've been a fan for two decades now, and she just gets better and better each year, like the proverbial fine wine. She's never bowed to trend or bent to expectations, and if the one thing we should demand of all our artists is that they remain true to themselves no

matter what else, then Malone is up there at the top of the list with the  
greats.

**Standout Tracks: ""Yesterday's Make Up," "Debris," "Marked" FRED MILLS**