

The Daily News

Mckeesport, PA

THURSDAY, APRIL 23, 2009

MICHELLE MALONE, "Debris"

(SBS Records) ☆☆☆☆ — I still remember the late fall night in 1990 when I first heard Michelle Malone at a local watering hole/concert spot in Athens, Ga. With her powerful singing voice and blues guitar wizardry, I was convinced it was a matter of time before she hit the big time. I wore out two cassette copies of her phenomenal "Relentless" record before replacing it on CD a few years later and it still holds a spot in iPod nearly two decades (yikes!) later. Stardom never found Malone, and I've never understood why because she has continued to turn out mostly excellent records over the years. That question remains unanswered after a few spins of the fantastic "Debris," her 11th studio release and one of the high points of her underappreciated career. The 11 songs here are uniformly strong and a testament to Malone's maturity as a songwriter. She opens things with a vulnerable vocal wail throughout "Feather In a Hurricane" and the great tunes keep coming with the title track, "Restraining Order Blues," "Weed and Wine," "Chattahoochee Boogaloo" and emotion-filled set closer "Candle for the Lonely."

At this point, it's unlikely Michelle Malone will catch lightning in a bottle and experience fame on a national level. That's unfortunate, because she's a phenomenally talented artist whose music deserves to be heard by as many folks as possible.