

Metromix Atlanta

CD Review: Michelle Malone

Atlanta singer/songwriter lets her soul shine through on "Debris"

By Matt Amato

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Critic's Rating: 5 Stars

Bang! Just like that, Michelle Malone thumps you with the unexpected shot, a sudden thunder crack from clear skies, an unguarded uppercut bamboozling the senses. Recovering from opening track "Feather in a Hurricane," evoking populist sentiment of being routinely shafted in these tough times, is advisable. The rest of the songwriting veteran's new album, "Debris," her sixth to date, is equally engrossing.

The bluesy element, loaded with swaggering guitar and witty lyrics to match, would alone command praise. Yet it's Malone's soulful sensitivity, her aptitude for introspection beyond rebellious riposte that underlines "Debris" as the finest achievement of a critically acclaimed musical career.

She has the self-respect of Sheryl Crow and more, as learned from "Undertow" and "Restraining Order Blues," in which an errant ex is told where to go. Then there's her other side, as we learn from "Marked," a Stones-like groove, circa 1970s, in which she willfully and humorously confesses a penchant for inviting misery despite all the telltale signs of disaster.

And while no guy would have the balls to get on Malone's wrong side, life—both in the love game and battles with the stuff artists often have a fondness for—hasn't always been roses. The album's last three tracks, "Sunburn," "14th Street and Mars" and "Candle for the Lonely" offer hope and salvation while admitting hurt and failure along the way.

These tracks also differ, sound-wise, from the album's blues standards, which platform Malone's excellent slide-guitar craft. In this respect, comparisons to Bonnie Raitt, which many critics have made, are in order.

And evidence that Malone is a fully fledged member of the pantheon of greats is

seen in her production team. Nick DiDia has worked with the likes of Pearl Jam and Bruce Springsteen, and his touches are fingerprinted throughout. "Debris" is simply an excellent piece of work.