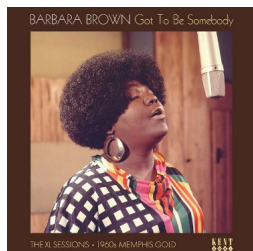


BARBARA BROWN: 'Got To Be Somebody' (Ace/Kent)

Written by Charles Waring

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The history of soul music and rhythm and blues is littered with forgotten singers that possessed real talent, made some great singles but never got the breaks they deserved and subsequently faded into obscurity. Cult soul heroine Memphis-born **Barbara Brown** falls into this category. In the 1960s and early '70s she recorded a clutch of fine, mostly indie label, 45s both as a solo artist and with her siblings (as Barbara & The Browns) but she never made an LP and after a few years trying to make it, her once promising recording career petered out. Now, though, we get an idea of how a Brown album from 1968 might have sounded, thanks to compiler, Dean Rudland, who brings together thirteen sides from different labels to create Brown's first ever vinyl LP, 'Got To Be Somebody.'

For connoisseurs of southern soul, this album is mandatory listening. It omits Brown's early '60s singles for Wil-mo and Stax and focuses on the Charles Chalmers-helmed recordings she made for Gene Lucchesi's XL label, some of which ended up on the Cadet, Atco, and Tower imprints (a number of other songs were left in the can, but were exhumed for the 2007 Kent collection, 'Can't Find Happiness' and several of them also appear here).

Blessed with a declamatory but richly expressive voice, Brown was raised on gospel hymns and unsurprisingly, the DNA of African-America church music can be felt in everything she recorded. Many of her songs tackle the classic southern soul themes of heartbreak, being cheated on, and facing loss. Highlights include the strident, brassy, Stax-like 'Plenty Of Room' (one of four Barbara & The Browns' tracks on the LP); the funereal and haunting 'Can't Find Happiness' (an Atco single from '68); and a plaintive paean of desire called 'I Don't Want To Have To Wait,' where Brown's passionate but nuanced delivery is framed by sweetly-harmonised background vocals and euphonious horns. Though slow songs were her undoubted forte, on the sassy 'I'm Gonna Start A War,' Aretha-esque 'Man About The House,' and stomping 'You Don't Love Me,' Brown shows that she can handle uptempo material just as well as aching, storytelling ballads.

Sadly, Barbara Brown died in 2010 but the release of superlative, respectfully-compiled collections like this mean that her music will never be forgotten. On this evidence, she certainly was somebody.

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