

PATRICE RUSHEN: 'Remind Me: The Classic Elektra Recordings 1978-1984' (Strut)

Written by Charles Waring

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When **Patrice Rushen** stopped recording, the world became a poorer place. That's just pure hyperbole, you'll probably declare, but for this writer, she really was a beacon of jazz-funk goodness illuminating the darkness of the human condition. Okay, so the last bit might be a tad over-egged but in truth, Patrice Rushen's music was like healing balm to me back in the early 80s. Though she released three fine albums for the Prestige label between 1974 to 1976 - including the excellent 'Shout It Out' - it was the California singer/pianist's work at Elektra Records that really got her noticed. She was signed to the label by Don Mizell in 1978 when the label was branching out into jazz and soul territory and immediately made an impression with her debut LP, 'Patrice,' which yielded her debut R&B hit single, 'Hang It Up.' She went on to record five very good albums for the label, the biggest of which was 1982's 'Straight To The Heart.' It included Patrice's biggest hit single, 'Forget Me Nots': boasting a killer bass line and infectious chorus, the song became her signature tune and was later sampled by George Michael ('Fast Love'), Will Smith ('Men In Black') and several others. Patrice moved to Arista in 1987 but after one album for the company - the disappointing 'Watch Out!' - she gradually faded from the R&B scene.

Though not blessed with the strongest of voices, there was something beguiling about Patrice Rushen's delicate, almost ethereal but supremely soulful voice and of course, given her keyboard prowess (she could play guitar as well) made her a very formidable musician indeed. Collaborating with producer Charles Mims Jr, she made some elegantly-arranged music that blurred the boundaries between soul, jazz, gospel, disco and funk. Her unique sound is immediately evident on 'Music Of The Earth,' the first track of the new Strut compilation, and reaches its apotheosis on the brilliant 'Haven't You Heard' and anthemic 'Forget Me Nots,' both of which appear in all their 12-inch glory. Other dance floor highlights include 'Look Up!', 'Never Gonna Give You Up (Won't Let You Be)' and 'Number One,' the latter a breezy piano-led instrumental that blew British jazz-funk pretenders like Shakatak away. Patrice could also serve up some achingly delicate ballads, too, as the gorgeous 'Settle For My Love,' and 'When I Found You' attest. And as for mid-tempo groove ballads, this collection's exquisite title tune has no equal.

Although she continues to play and teach, Patrice hasn't made a solo album since 1997 but with any luck, this new 15-track retrospective will stimulate interest in her music and give her career a much-needed jolt - or at the very least bring some fresh royalty payments in. Overall, 'Remind

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'Me' is a great listen though some of Patrice's fans will lament, perhaps, the absence of the Elektra singles 'Hang It Up,' 'Breakout!' and 'Get Off (You Fascinate Me),' though the latter two are not really essential. There are some good album cuts missing too ('Keepin' Faith In Love,' and 'Don't Blame Me' come to mind) but even so, 'Remind Me' is a tasty overview of Patrice's unique blend of jazz, soul and funk flavours. All in all, a great reminder of an underrated talent.

'Remind Me' is out on CD and triple vinyl on July 19th.

(4/5)