

ANGIE STONE: Unexpected (Label: Stax, Universal)

Written by Bill Buckley

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The pre-release PR hype would have us believe that the new Angie Stone collection is set to be the first big soul album of 2010. Well, I've been playing the 12 tracker on and off over the last month and - blow me - I have to admit that those oft-maligned marketeers have got it just about right. 'Unexpected' is a belter of a soul album that will still be being hammered at the backend of the year. There are a number of reasons why - chief amongst them is the lady's incredible voice. Even on what I consider the album's weakest track, the techno churner that is 'Tell Me', she still sounds good despite working against a vocoder and guest rapper. Soul diehards will, I'm sure, be reaching for the skip button. But that aberration is more than compensated for with some beautiful ballads and one really great, tight dancer. That dancer, 'I Ain't Hearing You' has already been selected as the first single and you can hear why. It has an instant and insistent appeal. The other tune that might appeal to the floor is the aptly named 'Hey Mr. DJ'. Beginning with that tasty little drum roll from 'Rock With You', it's not full on but may well find favour with more sedate steppers. The real beauty of this album though is in the ballads. 'Maybe' is simply superb. It's a "proper" romantic song. Honest in its emotion and never sentimental, the sweet strings act as a perfect counterpoint to Angie's revealing vocal. 'Why Is It' is just as good and destined to be a classic simply because of its universality. Anyone (I'd like to think that means all of us) who has suffered the predicament of the song will understand. 'Think Sometimes' is another sweetie while 'Kiss Me All Over' is, as you'd guess, a pleading lurve song... and no one can plead quite as sweetly as Angie Stone. That leaves the chugging 'Free', the rolling 'I Don't Care' and the understated 'I Found A Keeper'. The lot is topped and tailed with two versions of the album's title cut - built on a bubbling, crunchy backing track that owes a lot to Sly's 'Family Affair' they add a clever completeness to what is - yes - the first big soul album of 2010.

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