



Savoy's vocal versatility has seen her take on songs by both Aretha Franklin and Diana Ross

## SOUL CONNECTIONS

Tammi Savoy's template extends beyond classic R&B to soul. Working in the variety shows that Lance Lipinsky, who played Jerry Lee Lewis in the Tony Award-winning stage production *Million Dollar Quartet*, puts on, brought her into contact with Jackie Wilson's son Bobby, and she got to work with him as a backing singer. "I don't think he's quite as crazy as his dad, but he is very entertaining to be around," she says. Meanwhile, as a member of the Windy City group Soul Spectacular, who specialise in 60s and 70s-style revue shows, Savoy has revisited her own church roots by performing an Aretha Franklin tribute show and another in which she was called upon to sing a few Diana Ross numbers. If you're thinking you couldn't have two more contrasting voices than gutsy Savoy and the featherlight sound of Diana Ross, then you're right. "The notes are a little higher for me because I'm an alto," she says. "So sometimes it was kind of crazy hitting those high notes."

strident. Priscilla Bowman and Annie Laurie are two others whose work Savoy has introduced to her shows. "A lot of people don't know much about Annie Laurie, but I love her songs," she says.

Hooking up with the Chris Casello Trio has enabled Savoy to bring these names back to the attention of record buyers, as well as people who attend her shows, with songs by Allen and Bowman featuring on her debut album, released in October 2020.

"Chris was someone else I met through Lance, when he was a substitute guitarist on one of the shows," she explains of the chance encounter. "I was out with my husband and we went to one of Chris's shows. It was my husband's birthday and Chris asked me to come on stage. We just did one song that I'd been doing in my solo shows, LaVern Baker's *Jim Dandy*. At the end, everybody was yelling 'Encore! Encore!' and we said, 'We don't have anything else, sorry!' But I'd mentioned to Chris some time before that I wanted to come out with a 45, and Chris

said he could help me with that."

The single, released on Swelltune Records in 2018, featured *Big Baby*, a monster shuffle that

sounds like a period piece but was actually written by Casello. On its B-side is an

infectious Priscilla

Bowman oldie from the pens of Brook Benton and Clyde Otis, *I Ain't Giving Up Nothin'*, which alternates attractively between rumba and shuffle rhythms. The Chris Casello Trio comprises Casello himself, with Jesse Woelfel on electric and upright bass, and Russ Deluca on drums. Casello is an experienced and versatile guitarist who's played everywhere from the Lincoln Centre to the Grand Ole Opry, adept at a variety of styles. He's worked with everyone from Jack Scott and Crystal Gayle, to Rosie Flores and Wayne Hancock. "What's amazing is the way he's able to transpose the

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songs that I give him," says Savoy, "some of which were larger band songs, and yet just with the guitar make it sound like so many instruments, the horn parts and all the other stuff."

The new LP is a mix of old and new material.

The two tracks from the single make a reappearance, and there's one from the pen

of Savoy herself, a stop-time blues called *I Want Your Good Lovin'*. "I was watching a documentary about Amy Winehouse on TV and afterwards just wanted to write a song. It took just 30 minutes," she says. She cites *When Your Lover Don't Love You* – another Casello original – as her personal favourite to perform, "because you can really get into the dynamics of it, and it always goes over well live."

Savoy clearly relishes delivering the killer line, "You've got big broad shoulders, built like a trailer truck," in her revival of Ruth Brown's *As Long As I'm Moving*. Esther Phillips' *If It's News To You* gets a run-out, as does Allen's *G'wan About Your Business*, while Casello's *In My Blue World*, with its atmospheric steel guitar, offers Savoy the chance to shine on a slowie.

Although Tammi Savoy and the Chris Casello Combo have been unable to go out and promote the album, having built up a reputation at festivals in the US and Europe, any loss of momentum for this talented ensemble is surely only temporary. ★

***That Rock 'N' Roll Rhythm!* is out now via Swelltune Records**



Tammi Savoy was raised in Minnesota and is now based in Chicago

