

SHEMEKIA COPELAND TAKES HER MUSIC TO A NEW PLACE ON TELARC DEBUT

***Never Going Back* due at retail on February 24, 2009
Guest players include John Medeski, Marc Ribot and Chris Wood**

For more than a decade, Shemekia Copeland has been paving a road that will inevitably lead to her reign as Queen of the Blues. By some standards – numerous blues awards in the U.S. and elsewhere, a Grammy nomination, a resume that includes work with musical titans like Dr. John and Steve Cropper and film giants like Martin Scorsese and Wim Wenders – she may already be there.

For as appealing as that regal title may sound, though, and for as much as she respects the rich legacy of artists like Bessie Smith, Etta James or Koko Taylor, Copeland insists that there's more to who she is and what she does than a twelve-bar ballad or a Chicago shuffle could ever convey.

Never Going Back, her debut on Telarc set for release on February 24, 2009, captures Copeland at a crossroads on that artistic path – a place where numerous new avenues are open to her. While Copeland will always remain loyal to her blues roots, *Never Going Back* takes a more forward view of the blues, and in so doing points her music and her career in a new direction.

“I’ve had success in my career, and I’m happy with that,” she says. “But that doesn’t mean I don’t want to continue to grow. In order for an artist to grow – and for a genre to grow – you have to do new things. I’m extremely proud to say I’m a blues singer, but doesn’t mean that’s the only thing I’m capable of singing, or that’s the only style of music I’m capable of making.”

That pursuit of a new and different sound led to producer Oliver Wood, a member of the acoustic and highly organic collective known as the Wood Brothers – a combo whose ranks also include bassist Chris Wood, co-founder and ongoing member of Medeski, Martin & Wood. “Oliver’s ideas were creative and innovative and different, and he was able to bring a different Shemekia out of me. I’m just so excited about that. I know what I’m capable of, but sometimes you just need the right person to bring that out of you, and I think he did a fantastic job of that.”

In addition to handling production duties, Oliver Wood also lays down guitar tracks on every one of the album’s dozen tracks and even contributes backing vocals in a couple places. The sizable crew of guest musicians also includes Chris Wood, keyboardist John Medeski and guitarist Marc Ribot.

The swampy opening track, “Sounds Like the Devil,” co-written by Copeland and executive producer John Hahn, addresses the dual hot buttons of religion and politics, two topics that Copeland has generally tried to stay away from in the past. However, the times being what they are, that kind of avoidance is no longer possible, she says.

“The truth is being twisted to a point where our faith – in the political system and just about everything else we believe in – has been completely busted,” she says. “We don’t trust anybody, we don’t know what to do, and a lot of the time, we’re politically handicapped

because we're kept in the dark. I can be brutal when I talk about this stuff, but I love the way John helps me get the frustration out of my system in the form of a good song."

This same socially conscious sentiment reemerges a couple tracks later in "Broken World," a poignant piece wherein the singer expresses a wish to repair just one small corner of a world that is profoundly out of order. The track is infused with a catchy soul/gospel groove, thanks in large part to John Medeski's expertise on Hammond B3.

Further into the set, Copeland veers away from traditional blues with a smoky, introspective rendition of Joni Mitchell's "Black Crow." Newly arranged by Oliver Wood, the song was admittedly a leap for Copeland, but one that she was ready to take. "I wasn't used to doing anything like that," she admits. "I'd been listening to Joni Mitchell all my life, and I think she's a great songwriter. I was content just to keep listening, but to attempt to record one of her songs was intimidating. But Oliver came up with a very cool arrangement, and as a result, I wasn't afraid to jump in and do it. That's the kind of thing that makes Oliver such an incredible producer."

Other highlights include the defiant "Born a Penny," a song that Copeland considers to be the most autobiographical track on the record, and "River's Invitation," a grinding Percy Mayfield song that speaks to the spiritual pull of the currents – real and metaphorical – that steer us through the world.

For all of her accomplishments to date, and for all of the potential she has yet to realize, Copeland maintains a sense of humility about it all – a virtue that only makes her story all the more appealing.

"Once upon a time, my main goal was to change the shape and the direction of the blues, all by myself," she says. "But eventually, I realized that I wasn't driving the bus, that I wasn't really in charge. I've come to realize that I'm not in control of what people buy, or the nature of the market, or any of the things that happen after the music is recorded. Now I just look at it a different way. I'm just going to do my part, and my part is to do what I can do, in the best way I know how."

If past is prologue, and if *Never Going Back* is any indication, all Shemekia Copeland can do will be more than enough.

Shemekia Copeland's *Never Going Back* (CD-83692) is due at retail on February 24, 2009.

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