



WILL DOWNING *AFTER TONIGHT*

Suffice it to say that after nearly two decades of remarkable recordings and performances around the globe, **Will Downing** is recognized as the premier male vocalist for the embodiment of his singular, sensuous blend of R&B, jazz and pop. Yet 2007 marks the release of what is unquestionably the most crucial album of his career. It's not necessarily in reference to the content of the album, which is more of the masterful songs of sensual romance that have become his signature. The crux of *After Tonight*, Will's 13th album and first for the Peak Records label, is the commitment in the face of adversity he summoned to complete it - the sheer "force of Will" that inspired the man to see it through to its fruition. When you listen to *After Tonight*, you are listening to music created and recorded by a man coming to terms with and battling a rare and severely debilitating condition known as Polymyositis.

Polymyositis is a chronic muscle disease - an inflammation of the muscle fibers - the cause of which is not known. It results in weakness that can be severe with equally maddening, random and inexplicable periods of flares and remissions. For an artist of Downing's stature to make an album under normal circumstances comes with an already grueling set of challenges to make the best music possible. Factor in the frustration of discovering you have suddenly come down with this disease and all of its creativity sapping symptoms and one realizes that only a man of Downing's spiritual fortitude could pull himself up against all odds to make his latest statement heard. *After Tonight* is more than just another album for Downing. It became a monumental reason for him to wake up on many a morning - a purpose that only his attention could bring to life. And Downing is determined for it to be far from his last.

In an intimate letter enclosed within the liner notes of *After Tonight*, Will humbly discloses to his fans that the disorder "basically took away my ability to function on my own, including the use of my limbs or even walking. The majority of my vocals were cut from my wheelchair at home." Where the average man would have crumbled in self-pity, Will fortified his faith, leaned on trusted friends and tapped into a reservoir of strength he didn't even know he had...for he had never had to reach for it until now. In his letter, Will continues, "After a period of depression and 'why me's,' I rekindled a relationship with God and family like never before. His love for me is getting me through these interesting times. I've come to deal with these circumstances but not accept them as I know I will overcome this illness."

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Reflecting on what was most different about making this album from the twelve he's done in the past, Will continued, "One thing I've really learned about myself is my ability to utilize alternative routes. Singing while sitting was ridiculously hard, so I found myself doing things in increments. Lines 1 thru 4 on a song may have been sung from the wheelchair, while lines 5 thru 9 may have been sung from the hospital bed. However, every line was only done when I was in the emotional mood to sing."

Crucial to the seamless completion of *After Tonight* was the return of Will's longtime co-producer and friend **Rex Rideout**, in whom Downing placed his complete trust above and beyond the normal call of duty. Rideout has been working with Downing since his fourth album, *Love's the Place to Be*, introduced during a **Roy Ayers** gig Rex was playing on by singer **Audrey Wheeler**, who is now Will's wife. So the work on *After Tonight* was very much a family affair. "Family and familiarity played a major role," Downing continues. "Being immobile made me put a lot of my trust in my producers and musician friends. We used technology to its highest heights. We swapped tracks over computer lines when - under normal circumstances - I would sit with each musician going over line by line. But because our musical tastes are so completely in line, I trust Rex Rideout implicitly."

"I am deeply touched by the trust that Will placed in me," Rideout shares. "My job was to help make *After Tonight* the best possible representation of Will's artistry during this challenging space and time. It was an honor and a heavy responsibility - one that I took very seriously. Will was really counting on me. He couldn't be with me during all phases, so we did a lot over the internet - me in my west coast studio and he back east in his wheelchair at home or his hospital bed. At one point, I even flew to his house to set up a little studio for him in his room. Knowing how difficult this process was becoming for him, I kept asking 'Are you sure you can do this?' He always responded, 'Man, I got it!' The most nerve-racking part for me was sending him mixes then waiting for his response. Everybody from Will and I to mixing engineer **Ray Bardani** was looking at this under a magnifying glass. I did everything in my power to make *After Tonight* the Will Downing experience that his fans expect. And I am so proud of the job done my man, Will."

After Tonight opens with the soulful introduction of "Will's Groove," a mood piece that smoothly sets the scene for all that follows. And what you hear in the beginning of it is exactly how the song was conceived. Rideout shares, "Will called me up and said, 'I have a bass line I want to use to open the album. Do you have your computer on?' I booted up and that's the groove he gave me."

Immediately following is a string of seriously sexy tunes as only Downing can deliver them. "Fantasy (Spending Time With You)" sports a Corvette cool West Coast love man groove featuring **Randy Bowland** on guitar while "Satisfy You" finds Will playfully interpolating a line from the film *Dreamgirls* as he croons, "The first time that I saw your face / All I said was oh, my...oh, my..." The reassuring "All I Need Is You" is the

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album's jazziest piece musically and most romantically vulnerable lyrically as Will sings about a couple at a moment of insecurity. **Kirk Whalum** contributes some tastily multi-tracked tenor lines. Meanwhile, **Roy Ayers** lays down some delicious vibes solos on a second mood piece, "Lover's Melody," a classy club jam for cupids who like to move.

The album's first single and title track, "After Tonight," captures Will on par with the sound of today's younger male soul singers, but with the sentiments of a grown man with long term love on his mind. "My mission tonight is to please you / Baby, we're gonna take this love and make it do what it do / `Cuz after tonight I'm gonna show you how to make love / After tonight I'll be the only love you're thinking of." This particular track was so strong that it is reprised at album's end with a dreamy remix.

The first of *After Tonight's* two covers, "No One Can Love You More," is from the pen of the incomparable **Skip Scarborough**, a man also responsible for Quiet Storm classics such as "Can't Hide Love" by **Earth, Wind & Fire**," "Don't Ask My Neighbors" by the **Emotions** and "Love Ballad" by LTD. The song was originally recorded on the self-titled 1977 debut album of dearly departed vocal legend **Phyllis Hyman**, a woman that Will shared stages with on many a night in the later years of her life. "We had some amazing shows together and shared some great laughs...most of which I can't share with you," Will teases. "But the song 'No One Can Love You More' was suggested to me by a friend. Honestly, I barely remembered the song but that's what made it easy for me to interpret in my own way. It's such a great lyric." Updating the unforgettable sax work done by **Gary Bartz** on Phyllis' original version is **Gerald Albright**, another old friend of Will's with whom he cut an entire album in 1998 titled *Pleasures of the Night*.

The second cover of *After Tonight* is far more personal and profound for Downing. "You Just Can't Smile It Away" is a relatively obscure yet no less galvanizing composition from the peerless **Bill Withers** who recorded it on his last album to date, *Watching You, Watching Me* (1985). It is the second Withers song that Will has recorded, followed by "Grandma's Hands" from his CD *All The Man You Need* (2000). It speaks plainly yet poetically about problems that demand to be faced, something very much top-of-mind with Will as he struggled to complete his latest work. Downing reflects, "When Bill writes, he paints...and I enjoy a good painting. Bill tells a story of America - sometimes in an urban way, sometimes in a classic way, but always from the heart. Bill tells it like it is and that has always drawn me to record his songs." Downing's deep connection to this song did not go unnoticed by co-producer Rideout who found himself quite moved as he watched Will chisel his take into perfection. "In the Withers song - more than any other - I detected a vulnerability from Will that I've never heard before," Rideout states. "He told me he tried different takes during daylight hours with other folks around him. But around midnight, it hit him to sing the song while he was all alone lying in bed. That take is pretty much that you hear on the record. My eyes welled-up the first time I heard it."

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Will Downing has been wowing sophisticated soul fans with his soothing, sensual baritone voice for two decades now. After behind the scenes work ranging from '80s club production king **Arthur Baker** to vocal diva **Jennifer Holiday**, the Brooklyn-born singer/songwriter made his solo debut in 1988 with the self-titled album, *Will Downing*. It was highlighted by a dance cover of **John Coltrane's** "A Love Supreme" and **Deniece Williams'** "Free." These numbers set Downing up as a sensitive interpreter of classics. Covers became a staple of his CDs and eclectically include **Paul Davis'** "I Go Crazy," **Angela Bofill's** "I Try," **Thom Bell & Linda Creed's** "Stop, Look, Listen (To Your Heart)," **Janet Jackson's** "Anything," **Ephraim Lewis'** "Drowning In Your Eyes" and **Luther Vandross'** arrangement of **Leon Russell and Bonnie Bramlett's** "Superstar."

Will Downing's winning musical blend has landed him on radio stations across the R&B, smooth jazz and adult contemporary dial. His hits include "Sorry, I," "Do You Still Love Me," "Nothing Has Ever Felt Like This" (a duet with **Rachelle Ferrell**), "When You Need Me" (a duet with **Chante' Moore**), "Don't Talk To Me Like That" and "A Million Ways." His engaging live shows have made him a familiar touring presence, performing in Europe and stateside at venues ranging from nightclubs to outdoor festivals and, particularly, all-star packages. Downing has graced stages with cross-pollinating peers such as **Gerald Albright, George Duke, Regina Belle, Jonathan Butler, Art Porter, Lee Ritenour** and **Vesta**, just to name a few.

Beyond the music, Will Downing has proven himself to be an outstanding photographer. His lens work was showcased in a 2004 calendar featuring portraits of singer/musician friends. And in 2006, he self-published (through Will Downing Productions) a coffee table book titled *Unveiled*, filled with his work as well as that of several other African American graphic artists from Philadelphia's ArtJaz Gallery scene.

Will Downing was the official 2005 spokesperson for the American Stroke Association and continues to lend his name and efforts on its behalf. He also supports the Myositis Association.

The Herculean and purposeful approach that Will Downing undertook to complete *After Tonight* - for himself, his wife, three children, extended family and fans - cannot be overstated. It is a reflection of determination, faith and character comparable in contemporary soul music to the strength that the great **Curtis Mayfield** - who was permanently paralyzed at the end of his life - mustered to make his final album, *New World Order* (1996). But unlike Mayfield's, Will's condition will hopefully only be temporary.

The very source of the fortitude that Downing is leaning upon is addressed in a moving song of faith that Will composed with his wife **Audrey Wheeler-Downing** (who also harmonizes with her husband on the background vocals) and **Noel Goring** titled "God

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is So Amazing.” Touching on what is perhaps the greatest gift that has come from his challenges with Polymyositis, Will Downing witnesses, “I’ve learned that God plays a bigger role in my existence than I ever realized. This was a difficult project to record, but every time I felt down - mentally or physically - I looked to Him for inspiration.”

AFTER TONIGHT [PKD-30221] in stores October 30th on CD.

For more information, contact:

J'ai St. Laurent-Smyth, Inque Public Relations - 732.254.0607

inquepr@comcast.net

www.peakrecords.com