



Will Downing

Classique

(noun: An author, artist or work of art, of the highest excellence.)

Classic...or as the French say..."*Classique*". A crown too heavy and unfit for most modern day works of art. But when the artist is **Will Downing** and the work in question is a vintage 2009 edition from one of the most enduring entertainment brands in the business...the Classic crown fits just fine. *Classique...The Man...The Music*. The crowned "*Prince of Sophisticated Soul*" is back!

Fast forward two years from the improbable and awe inspiring delivery of **After Tonight**, (Downing's 2007 release and musical monument of *triumph over adversity*, as he fought through the debilitating effects of the muscle disorder Polymyositis), and you'll find both man and artist with a renewed spirit for life and a tremendous gratitude to continue a soulful journey that started over two decades ago. Station stop and CD #14 on that journey, *Classique*, is where *timeless* meets *modern-day* with a mutual respect that gives birth to a sound that somehow manages to feel both familiar *and* brand new.

Will Downing arrives at this station in time with complete command of his craft, a full grasp of who he is as an artist and uniquely positioned on the R&B road connecting the past to the present. That connection is made with a production prowess as silky smooth as the trademark vocals to which we've grown accustomed. *Classique*, effortlessly lives up to its moniker with a delicious fusion of B3 organs, flutes, vibes and crushed velvet harmonies, seasoned with a dash of Motown and a pinch of Philly International. Its retro flavor is an unforced natural blend of old school savvy and modern technical wizardry served up by Downing and longtime production collaborator, Rex Rideout.

To be clear, there's no need for studio trickery to fill any vocal voids here. As if Will Downing's own considerable gifts were not enough, *Classique* enlists the veteran talents of **Phil Perry**, who not only brings his 80's and 90's solo success to the mix, but his 70's soul group expertise as well from the **Montclairs**. 2009 finds Perry in fine form and lending an undeniably authentic pedigree to the finished product. The resulting contribution, is a stirring remake of **The Originals'** classic "*Baby I'm for Real*", where Perry offers the perfect high flying contrast to Downing's signature baritone notations. The two form what many a female fan might consider the ultimate Dynamic Duo of romantic crooners, each with his own unique sound.

Ultimately, it's Will Downing himself that makes *Classique*... classic. Besides the union with Perry, this volume is noticeably absent of the trendy *parade-of-all-stars* list of guest

performers so common on many of today's new releases. Intended or not, there's no mistaking the fact that this is a Will Downing showcase from start to finish...beginning to end. It's a quiet but emphatic statement on the kind of strength and confidence this Brooklyn native has amassed in an amazingly durable two decade long career that's been recognized for excellence by the NARAS and the NAACP Image Awards.

Classique kicks-off appropriately with "**Ride**", which serves as both an intro and invitation to its listener to embark on a 10 track sonic excursion. To those accepting the invite, hang on tight for a trip that gets going in a hurry and takes a nice scenic turn down memory lane. It moves swiftly to the catchy *tic-toc* of "**More Time**", which combines the mellow smoothness we've come to expect from Will Downing with a refreshingly playful undertone that hints of a loose and fun production atmosphere. The resulting mid-tempo ballad is easily one of the most repeatable cuts on the project and reflects on the brokenhearted erosion of trust created in a relationship when too much *business* causes one party's well intended promises to their significant other to be repeatedly broken. The subject in this case, faced with a possible "last straw" situation, finally recognizes the need to devote more time and makes a very passionate simultaneous plea for *second-chance time* and wishfully, *more time in the day*. "**More Time**" is quite possibly an unconscious adaptation of the artist's own revelation and recommitment to the more important things in life. The follow-up track, "**Something Special**", is such an instant feel-good summer groove you can almost smell the barbeque through some very MFSB-esque horn and string arrangements. Further down the road, Downing works both sides of the microphone with some very tasteful turns as both artist and producer on the CD's most lush ballad "**I Won't Stop**" and the painfully self-reflective **David Ruffin** jewel "**Statue of a Fool**", which he has long desired to cover. Both tunes are distinguished by an excellent use of the simple but often overlooked beauty of four-part harmony in some carefully layered background vocal arrangements. A great change of pace comes in the form of the slightly up-tempo and openly flirty "**Love Suggestions**" and the tongue-in-cheek double entendre hidden in the refrain of "**Just Think About It**". Rounding out the fare is Downing's lyrical love letter "**Let's Make It Now**" and a tribute to the "Maestro of Love" himself, **Barry White**, in the form of "**I'm Gonna Love You**", making full use of the unique gift of a natural deep baritone-to-falsetto first tenor vocal range.

Most importantly, *Classique* deserves to be listened to...really listened to. It serves up a sweet redemption for every music fan that has ever had that empty "something's missing" experience after listening to a new CD. The more you play it, the more you'll hear, the more classic *Classique* becomes.

Downing is also being recognized as a humanitarian through his role as a spokesperson for the *American Stroke Association*, which has become even more important to him in the wake of prominent victims such as **Luther Vandross**, **Ron Isley** and **Coretta Scott King**. Whenever possible as he tours, Downing conducts a charity bowling event called "**Strike Against Stroke**", to raise funds towards greater stroke awareness and education in the African American community, which is disproportionately affected. The **American Heart Association** has awarded Mr. Downing for his efforts and honored him as a Celebrity Ambassador in their *Power To End Stroke* national campaign.

Off the road, Will Downing retreats to the most important roles in his life as a loving husband and father to his family. Singer, Songwriter, Humanitarian, Family Man...Another Classic!

Classique in stores June 16th.

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