

Soundcheck



By Ken Wibecan

AVIS HARRELL - SELF CONTAINED

A California friend of mine put me in touch with singer Avis Harrell, I called her and she sent me her new CD: *Self Contained*. All you have to do is talk to Avis on the phone and you can feel her energy, a quality that shows up in her music.

First of all, I should mention that *Self Contained* is entirely written, composed, performed and produced by Avis. That means that all of the voices on the album are hers, all of the instrumentation is done by her on piano, synthesizers and drum machines; and she composed each of the 13 tunes on the album.

This might have been the first time for her, and it certainly is the first time I have heard such an album—and, frankly, I'm impressed! In addition to her remarkable energy, this lady has loads of talent. Her performance credits are superb. She worked as a backup singer for Ray Charles (one of the Rayettes), sang backup for Wayne Newton and is a good friend and protégé of Stevie Wonder. She also appears in her own solo gigs in California and as far a field as Tahiti.

As for the music—it's good, solid, contemporary, fast-paced R&B. As regular readers know, I'm a jazz buff, so this is a little out or my realm of expertise. But it is clear that



Avis has an excellent range, good control and can belt out a tune with the best of them. I can just tell that she would make an excellent jazz singer. Not only that, but she is good to look at, having formerly been "Miss Black America DC"

Like many musicians, Avis learned her trade in church, singing with her mother in the choir at Emanuel Baptist Church in Los Angeles. The marketing skills she learned while pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Business Management at the University of Phoenix have been put to good use: Avis is pursuing her performance goals with all of her energy. "The dream producer I'd like to work with is Clive Davis," she says. (He is only one of the biggest in the business!)

If you would like to hear Avis, check out her website at www.avisharrell.com. If you like what you hear, the instructions for ordering a CD are there. Let me know what you think of her at BigKensOffice@aol.com.

A BENEFIT FOR THE MUSICIANS OF NEW ORLEANS

From Burlington to Bourbon Street is a benefit for the New Orleans Musicians Hurricane Relief Fund that has been organized by Vermont jazz and blues musicians. Benefit performances will take place on Tuesday, October 18 at the Flynn Center MainStage at 7 PM, and Nectar's at 11 pm.

Featured at the Flynn, beginning at 7 pm, are the Ellen Powell Quartet with Tommy Fletcher and Little Joyce; Unknown Blues Band with Dave Grippo; Sandra Wright Band; Onion River Jazz Band; Tom Cleary and Friends; and straight from

New Orleans: ReBirth Brass Band and Chip Wilson.

The ReBirth Brass Band will also perform at Nectar's at 11 pm. Tickets are \$20, and can be obtained at 802-86-Flynn or at www.flynncenter.org. The performances will be hosted by George Thomas, from Vermont Public Radio's *Jazz in the Evening* & The Point-FM's *Global Jam*. The Flynn Center is located at 153 Main Street, Burlington, VT 05401.