

New Releases

Macy Gray
"On How Life Is"
Epic Records
Grade: A

The raspy voice of Macy Gray goes from downright gritty to soulfully seductive.

Listening to her debut album, "On How Life Is," one might mistake Gray's voice for Billie Holiday. But it is the diverse sounds and styles of hip hop, soul, R&B, funk and rock that distin-

guish Gray and her impressive debut. Raised in Ohio and fed the music of Aretha Franklin, Marvin-Gaye and Stevie Wonder, Gray was actually a self-conscious child. She was ridiculed for her "real funny" voice, so Gray kept quiet and rarely talked.

Instead, Gray found her strengths in writing. She moved to Los Angeles to study screen writing at the University of Southern California and eventually began writing lyrics for some of her music buddies.

During a recording, Gray was asked

to fill in for some vocals. Overcoming the fears of her childhood, Gray discovered that she could not only sing but that she had a rare and beautiful voice.

Gray soon managed to make a name for herself alongside her musicians, who include DJ Killa, Arik Marshall (formerly a Red Hot Chili Pepper) and Funkadelic's Blackbird McKnight.

Gray's style is difficult to define or categorize. The album, "On How Life Is," transcends a single classification. One thing is for sure: Her album is filled with a groove that takes listeners

through varying emotions while staying true to her roots.

Gray's song range includes the instrumental and poetic, as in "I Try" (released last week), as well as harsh hip-hop grooves, as in "Sex-O-Matic Venus Freak." Her gritty ballad "Still" is quite similar to the sounds of the early Aretha. Gray successfully manages to pull off these styles and sounds naturally and effortlessly.

Perhaps the natural feel of the songs comes from her personal lyrics. Gray writes all of her lyrics from stories of her

life - both the playful and profound.

The track "I've Committed Murder" is filled with lyrics reminiscent of "I Shot the Sheriff." But lyrics such as those in "The Letter" are more personal: "All I've ever wanted was some love, peace and harmony."

Gray states she is not trying to speak for the whole world or make some kind of universal commentary. So listeners can just enjoy her music for exactly what it is - great music.

-Emily Pyeatt

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