

Stephie James

With each passing year, the city of Detroit's once wearily languid posture manages to right itself. The forgotten neighborhoods, once filled with the promise of the American Dream, are now beginning to bustle with an energy not seen in decades. And just like the city itself, built on the hard work and resilience of the working class, its music lives on.

In walks **Stephie James** - like a smoky, dimly lit back-alley bar, the one that's the best kept secret in town, her music stands as a sultry embodiment of the past, but also as a bracing reflection of the current culture. Embracing the grittiness of yesteryear's garage rock productions and also the bittersweet timelessness of Roy Orbison, this is unmistakably the music of countless romantic fantasies and of widescreen Lynchian sensibility. Without compromising an ounce of style, **Stephie James** has managed to not only craft an EP of beautiful, heart-on-its-sleeve classic melodies, but also imbue her music with the same sense of mystery and intrigue that makes the best Henry Mancini score somehow elevated and torrid.

While **James's** has yet to become a household name, her credits leading up to this release would make even the most seasoned musicians gulp dryly in jealousy: touring with Anita Baker and Nikki Lane, engineering for Dan Auerbach and Buddy Miller, sessions with John Bettis (songwriter for Whitney Houston, Michael Jackson, and The Carpenters, amongst others) and landing sync in Michael Bolton's new film, to name a few.

Of course, all of this goes without even mentioning her ambition, which first reared its head at the age of 15, when she and her younger brother established a DIY coffee shop which doubled as a music venue. The business not only helped bolster the emerging music scene in the Detroit burbs, but has grown into a prosperous chain of shops in the specialty coffee market.

After a career zigzagging in between the crevices of others' careers, all the while building a body of work and experience of her own, **Stephie James** finally decided to step into the spotlight with a solo project by working with Andrija Tokic, who earned acclaim for producing Alabama Shakes groundbreaking first album.

The EP itself is a perfect distillation of the best elements Detroit rock has had to offer over the last two decades: timeless leather-cool, thanks to the resurgence of Iggy Pop and the omnipresence of Jack White - and, above all else, great songwriting. From the Americana rock churn of EP opener, "These Days," the album puts your expectations on the backfoot immediately: one part Phil Spector crooner and one part howling-for-blood rock as James snidely intones "The tide is turning, but some things never change." Only three songs later, the album closes its five-track suite with "West of Juarez," a lush, string-filled, western ballad, reminiscent of a bygone era, and the fearlessness of youth.

James' credits ultimately stand as a dizzying fever dream, the type of opportunities only the luckiest are afforded and only the most capable and talented can maintain. A culmination of her life up until this point and undoubtedly the beginning of a rewarding career, **James** is not content to let this EP be the last redolent audiences will hear from her. For now though, **Stephie James** paradoxically gives us exactly what we want: enough to leave us yearning for more.

Stephie James' "These Days" will be out **July 10**.



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