

# Blues Bytes

## Surprise

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**Candice Ivory**  
*When The Levee Breaks - The Music of Memphis Minnie*  
Little Village Foundation

It's been 50 years since Memphis Minnie (born Lizzie Douglas) passed away. She was a towering figure in the blues, recording 180 sides between 1929 and 1953, and serving as session guitarist on nearly 30 more. She was a masterful singer, guitarist, songwriter, and entertainer, and several of her sides have become blues standards, covered by many artists in other musical genres. She transitioned from acoustic to electric blues, working solo or with a partner and even leading her own band, handling each change and remaining a vital force in the music as it changed.



I think Memphis Minnie would be well-pleased with **Candice Ivory's** impressive tribute to her music, *When The Levee Breaks – The Music of Memphis Minnie* (Little Village Foundation). Ms. Ivory was born near Memphis into a family with musical connections, including members of the gospel group, the Salem Harmonizers. Her great-uncle Will Roy Sanders was a member of the wonderful Memphis blues band, The Fieldstones. She had a residency in Betty Carter's Jazz Ahead at 18, and recorded her first album at 21, composing all the music. She is equally skilled in blues and jazz, and this release captures both genres, as well as a few others.

Ms. Ivory's vocal talents are formidable, and she serves as an ideal interpreter of Memphis Minnie's music, effectively recreating the feeling and mood of the original songs but bringing a definite modern approach to the proceedings. She is assisted in this endeavor by Charlie Hunter, who produced the album and plays guitar and bass, along with pedal steel guitarist DaShawn Hickman, and an incredible rhythm team which includes drummer George Sluppick and percussionists Brevan Hampden and Atiba Rorie. The percussion team adds a world flavor to the music while retaining the blues feel of the tracks.

Nowhere is that more evident than the terrific opener, "Me and My Chauffeur." The percussion drives the tune, and Ms. Ivory's playful vocal is a lot of fun. The dynamite title track follows in the same vein at a slightly slower pace, but with less instrumentation – just singer and percussion.

"You Can't Rule Me" rocks things considerably, with hard-driving percussion and lead guitar, punctuated by Hickman's pedal steel swooping in and out. "When You Love Me" takes a more traditional approach, with Ms. Ivory and Hunter teaming up for a pleasant foray into country blues, while "Blues Everywhere" starts in the same direction, gradually adding percussion to the mix.

Hickman contributes to the moody "Crazy Crying Blues," which serves as a real vocal showcase for Ms. Ivory, and the funky "World of Trouble." "Pile Driving Blues" is a mid-tempo blues rocker and "Hole In The Wall" is a slow burner, dripping with Memphis grease and funk.

Hickman and Ms. Ivory make a fine team on "Hard Down Lie," another slower tune where the pedal steel almost serves as a second vocalist...maybe my favorite tune on the disc. "HooDoo Lady" is another superb country blues, this time with the rest of the band joining in. The closer is a reggae-fied version of "New Bumble Bee," one of Memphis Minnie's most popular tunes.

Candice Ivory is one of a handful of younger musicians who are taking a modern and refreshing approach to the blues, incorporating other styles to revitalize the classic sound. Purists may wrinkle their nose at this approach, but they don't fully understand that blues artists have been doing this even before the recording of the music began. E

Efforts like *When The Levee Breaks – The Music of Memphis Minnie* will play a major part in helping to keep these blues alive, and will introduce a whole new generation to the music of one of the genre's greats.

--- *Graham Clarke*

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