

Sound Check: Hilda Lamas proudly embraces the blues

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For Hilda Lamas, having a serious case of the blues is not necessarily a bad thing.

The Aransas Pass-born musician has always had a special place in her heart for the uniquely American musical genre, but it wasn't until she shared the stage with fellow Texan Rocky Benton that she began what was to become a lifelong love affair with the blues.

"Back in 2005 I had the chance to perform with Rocky, and that experience allowed me to feel a very powerful connection to this music that always evokes such a deep feeling, and that is what drew me into it," Lamas says. "Personally, I am just myself when I sing the blues, but from the audience's perspective, seeing a Latina performing this kind of music, it allows me to incorporate some South Texas rhythms into my music. Here I am, take it or leave it, and that's really what the blues is... people either feel it with you or they don't."

Audiences have definitely been feeling it as evidenced by the success of Lamas first two albums. In 2009 she released her debut, "Latina Soul" that showcased her unbridled musical versatility. Interestingly, the whole project was not a full blues album, but instead was a way for Lamas to put all of her numerous musical influences together in one place.

"We did songs in Spanish and English, and they were a mix of rock, rhythm and blues and even Latin rock," Lamas said.

While Lamas felt confident incorporating other styles into her music, the blues would eventually become a central part of her musical identity. Her full-throated vocals soon began to recall her idols like early Aretha Franklin, Etta James and Koko Taylor.

That tradition continued on her second album "Love Me Alone," released in 2013. Despite her authentic and highly convincing homage to the music she loves, Lamas was surprised at some of the initial reactions the project received.

"Even though the second album got airplay and charted, it was viewed as a contemporary blues album, and it was perceived as being too slick, too pretty," Lamas recalled. "So with the next album, we are consciously going from pretty to dirty!" she said with laugh.

With that in mind, Lamas and husband and producer Rick Garcia have chosen to forgo the painstaking production of her previous efforts and instead focus on a rougher, more improvisational performance style. To get that edgier sound, guitarist Robert Ybarra and harmonica player Tim Gonzales contribute to the as-yet untitled collection. Lamas welcomes their input as a way of shaking things up and creating the right "feel" for her very successful brand of blues.

While fans will have to wait until May for the full disc, Lamas has already released the single "Last Thing on Your Mind," and she and her band are preparing to do several live shows to promote it.

Whether she is on stage or in the studio, Hilda Lamas' musicianship continues to create an indescribable kind of energy and enthusiasm that totally infuses her work. It is something that both longtime fans and new followers will feel the moment they begin to embrace every nuance of her own brand of blues, rough edges and all.

If You Go

Who: Hilda Lamas opening for Ian Moore

When: 7 p.m. March 12

Where: House of Rock

Cost: \$12

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