

This is Ryan Shaw
By Nancy Dunham

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Perhaps there is hope that the beloved Motown sound won't die out with the last of the era's original performers.

Although many performers believe that the classic sound will be relegated to the vintage record bin as soon as the last of the great Motown artists pass on, Ryan Shaw, a 26-year old from Decatur, Georgia, proves that may not be true.

"This is Ryan Shaw," a 12-tune mix of classic tunes by songwriters including Ashford and Simpson (I'm Your Man) and Holland, Dozier, Holland (Working on a Building of Love), and some originals, is almost like a musical trip to the 1960s era Motor City.

What's interesting is that Shaw grew up in an extremely religious household and hadn't heard any Rhythm and Blues growing up. Suffice to say, once he heard them and turned his strong, emotional voice to them, angels sang in R&B heaven.

Not only does Shaw have the vocal range to pull off such classics as "I Found a Love" (Wilson Pickett) but his originals, including "Nobody" and "We Got Love," sound as if they came right from the Motown hit writing machine. The backing band and vocalists are more than capable in providing the support Shaw seeks, yet they don't overwhelm.

But don't think that Shaw is some trip through yesteryear. His firm, clear vocals can also echo some top performers in all their sexy Stax Records glory.

Some have quibbled that Shaw doesn't have the "old soul" quality of classic Motown and Stax performers.

I beg to differ. It's refreshing to hear a such a strong singer pay homage to the Motown and Stax sounds by updating re-interpreting their music while keeping its integrity rather than taking the tired road of mimicking their sounds.

Shaw's strong, clear voice is just what is needed to move the Motown sound into the modern playlists.