



kelley hunt . mercy . biography

On a chilly afternoon in Nashville at Brian Harrison's Rendering Plant studio Kelley Hunt took a minute to consider her surroundings. From her spot at the piano she saw some old friends and new collaborators - brilliant young guitarist Rob McNelley; the old-school master and original Motown funk brother bassist Bob Babbitt; the ultimate "glue" man guitarist Colin Linden; superb Hammond B3 master Mark Jordan; and wickedly rootsy and versatile drummer Bryan Owings. It was just what she had imagined - the right collection of musical skills and personalities to give up her vision for this new record - a combination of old and new, lots of heart and lots to say.

On the notebook sitting on her piano was a handwritten quote from Muddy Waters - "The Blues is my religion".

While Hunt's own artistic identity casts a broad net stylistically --- the quote was a perfect reminder of where she started as an artist and a writer.

Moreso than at any time in her career or in any previous recording situation she felt peaceful and energized, surrounded by brothers who were totally together with her intention on this new material. She was feeling the upcoming sessions more like a relaxed but intense "family discussion" than an urgent, "meter's running" recording experience. In anticipation of a joyful noise about to be made she simply said, "OK, y'all, here we go..."

What happened next was "**MERCY**", a new generation of Kelley Hunt's music - an intense, intentional collision between Hunt's righteous roots influences and contemporary overlays with rich veins of political and social commentary threading throughout.

"In many ways I feel like this is a project I've been waiting to make for a long time, but that I needed to make right now. Kind of like purposeful, timely reckless abandon," said Hunt.

"MERCY" is a compelling next step in her artistic evolution and one that incorporates what has come before with stark departures and a sharper focus. In taking the reins as co-producer on this project Hunt wanted to make sure certain points came across. She was boiling over in frustration and impatience with some of the politics and social positioning in American and world society and had some definite concepts of how she wanted her ideas expressed musically.

"Like a lot of people, I'm riled up now," said Hunt. More on that later.

The career process that has led Hunt to this place is a story of fierce independence, incredible will, unassailable cred as a blistering live performer and hard-won accomplishment - all on her own terms.

There are her roots back in Kansas City and the sound of her mother singing Jazz and Blues - her first musical memories - and the influence of her New Orleans Gospel singer grandmother. There

are three previous releases in her discography all of which have included collaborations with incredibly talented and accomplished musicians and producers resulting in almost 90,000 independent units sold. There are over 1500 live performances, appearances on over 150 North American and international festival stages including some of the most competitive pan-genre situations anywhere - Austin City Limits Music Festival, Seattle's huge Bumbershoot Festival and a long list of important Blues/Jazz/Roots music festivals, 6 live appearances on American Public Media's "A Prairie Home Companion" and a bushelful of other PBS TV, network and satellite radio appearances and A3, noncom and blues radio spins and some global airplay.

There is her current work co-scoring and acting in indie filmmaker Kevin Willmott's (Ninth Street, CSA: Confederate States of America) upcoming independent release "Bunker Hill" for which she also co-wrote the closing credits title track "Mountain to Move" - also the final track on "MERCY". And there is the continuous, ongoing quest to add to her already considerable skills as a writer, singer, keyboardist and guitarist - just part of her nature. And, then, there is that frustration which has crystalized Hunt's decision to throw away boundaries and get to the point on "MERCY" - but from some unexpected angles and in ways not always intended to be very pretty.

On "MERCY" there are songs from Hunt's solo pen and intriguing collaborations with writers Gary Nicholson, Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Jim Ritchey and Dwight Liles. The collection of themes represented all contribute to an overarching statement: "stop and really look, take personal responsibility for your world, don't make harsh judgments about what you can't understand, do take action to correct injustice, it's time for Mercy - for ourselves and in general."

Heavy-handed? Tedious? Self-righteous? Hardly. In Hunt's calls to restore a more truthful, honest, compassionate balance she never preaches, preferring instead to persuade by example - both subtle and direct. There are funk grooves, rootsy neo-rock anthems, intense ballads, mournful blues plaints, latin-influenced introspections, alt-boogie and even New Orleans feels all channeled with rock-solid validity through Hunt's identity to make her various points on "MERCY".

Six tracks are signature:

"You Got To Be The Vessel" is a Gospel homage nested in funky psycho-roots R&B textures - a mile-wide groove that talks about taking personal responsibility for doing right and making change.

"Lone Star Road" is a funk-groove, spoken-word journey into self-doubt and redemption. Listen closely and you can hear those "little voices" that torture us all, particularly in times of crisis.

"Love" speaks to attitudes and -- worse -- attempts at public policy that seek to validate or repudiate definitions of love or judge relationships. On this track Hunt and co-writer Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg make their point through the stories of four very different relationships but, as Hunt says in the end - "it's just love...that's all."

"Emerald City" is a raw, uncomfortable, growling, scathing political observation that calls out the war policy makers and all of us for allowing them to get their way. The tale is told through a "Wizard Of Oz" premise using "Emerald City" as a metaphor for both the United States at home and the Green Zone in Baghdad. She notes the courage and sacrifice of the men and women in uniform and their families and speaks from personal experience - three close family members have served multiple tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. Complacency, gullibility and complicity indeed have a high cost Hunt says in "Emerald City". A merciless solo statement by guitarist Rob McNelley helps drive the point home.

The title track “**MERCY**” is another political statement but goes beyond the political to relate to all the unmerciful things we visit upon ourselves and each other. It’s a simple, powerful piano/vocal track that emotionally cuts directly into bone.

And to be sure, the project has its lighter moments like “**Wig Chalet**”, a Gary Nicholson collaboration, New Orleans-style humorous take on how we get hung up on convention and living according to everyone else’s expectations.

Kelley Hunt will be on tour in North America and Europe in support of **MERCY** throughout 2008.

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Produced by Kelley Hunt and Al Berman

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