

VANESE THOMAS ~ STORIES IN BLUE

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FCC CLEAN

Vaneese Thomas' *Stories In Blue*, filled with powerful music and gorgeous vocals, is proudly presented by Overton Music, new label out of Memphis, TN

Vaneese (Van-EESE) Thomas is not only blessed with a deeply soulful singing style, but she also has the unerring ability to turn her thoughts and feelings into emotional statements expressed in song – in this case, in her latest album, very appropriately titled *Stories In Blue*. Thomas has created a musical odyssey on her ninth album that tracks the essence of her music. It's also a tribute to her multi-talented approach: Thomas's name is on every song, she co-produced the session, plays piano on the pensive "Wandering," and, of course, graces us with her marvelous voice. The seven-song set of original stories in blue is filled with powerful music and gorgeous vocals, all of which reflect a lyrical journey from the origins of the blues to the final bars of a joyful gospel song. The tracks also serve as a sampler of the multiple musical talents of Thomas – she's very much at home working in styles from blues to R&B to jazz to gospel.

The opening track and first step in this journey asks the question: "Do Y'all (know where the blues comes from?)" It's a funky history lesson on blues origins in the human spirit: "Do y'all know where the blues comes from do y'all / Well it comes from faces dark as night / Bodies worn from toil and strife." A pair of songs follows that illustrate traditional blues themes of lost love. "When You Were My Man" is a vocal treat, rhythmically at odds with its lonely message – "Every day I had peace of mind / But darkness did come, our love was undone." That's followed by the gorgeously sung ballad "Wandering," an album centerpiece with its aching refrain: "Wandering on the street / Head in my hands / Shuffling my feet / What will I do without him / Ain't nothing left for me." A sensuous sax solo adds a melancholy refrain.

A rollicking stride piano with its foot-stomping tempo, Dixieland-flavored horns and Thomas scatting along, highlight the smartly sassy "1917." The song was written by Vaneese as a joyous tribute to her multi-talented entertainer father, Rufus Thomas, the legendary patriarch of Memphis soul, who was born in 1917: "His colorful attire could take you higher / And leave you wanting more / His voice was a jewel and his blues gave you fuel / And shook you to the core."

"The Last Thing On My Mind" is steady-rolling, hypnotic ode tuned to the troubles of a woman wronged on this journey: "But I found you done me wrong / To my surprise you up and gone / I had a love but now I moan / That was the last thing on my mind." This blue story nears its end with the plaintive "7 Miles From Home" – "Seven miles from home / No more to roam / Oh, my soul longs for home." The closer and blues stories' end in spirit and fact is an uplifting a cappella gospel track, "End Of The Road," with only handclaps for its rousing rhythms, and a solid chorus behind Thomas's exuberant vocal statement: "I see the end of the road Lord, I'm on my way / On my way to Jordan's shores maybe it'll be today."

Vaneese Thomas shines on her album debut for the brand-new, Memphis-based Overton Music label. This session is a tribute to her all-around skills as a marvelous story-telling songwriter and joyous, full-throated singer of those songs. Thomas not only embraces her musical roots, but she also refreshes them with her passionate *Stories In Blue*.

Jim White (a former music writer for the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* & now writes the *Blues Roadhouse*)

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Born in Memphis Tennessee, Vaneese is the daughter of Rufus Thomas, whose legendary career as a musician and entertainer began in Vaudeville and spanned more than half a century in R&B recording and radio. Her older siblings are the hit recording artist "Memphis Queen" Carla Thomas and the highly respected keyboardist Marvell Thomas (R.I.P.). Embracing this remarkable musical legacy, Vaneese carries forward the rich heritage of Memphis soul and R&B; music that has touched generations and crossed many divides. At the same time, she has combined all the influences of her background and experience – R&B, gospel, blues, and jazz – to cultivate a soul-stirring style that's all her own.

Highly regarded within the music industry, Vaneese's talents as a singer, songwriter, producer, and actor have made her a sought-after solo performer as well as a first-call vocalist for projects by other top-name artists. She has worked with the renowned recording producer Phil Ramone and has sung with an astonishing array of internationally known performers including Luciano Pavarotti, Sting, Stevie Wonder, Michael Jackson, Celine Dion, Eric Clapton, Bruce Springsteen to name a few. Vaneese has sung with the Baltimore and Colorado Symphonies in "Too Hot to Handel" under the baton of Marin Alsop and at Several Pavarotti & Friends concerts in Modena, Italy; The Montreux Jazz Festival in

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Switzerland; The Michael Jackson & Friends concerts with Luther Vandross in Seoul, Korea, and Munich, Germany, and soul music festivals in Porretta, Narni, and Perugia, Italy.

Geffen Records released Vaneese's first major recording in 1987. The self-titled album included the Top Ten R & B hit "Let's Talk it Over." In 1999 Vaneese used her own Peaceful Waters Music label to release, *When My Back's Against The Wall*. A few years later came *A Woman's Love* (2004), which combined R&B and silky, smooth-jazz vocals and in 2009 Vaneese released *Soul Sister Vol. One*, a collection of seminal soul classics. The CD, and the live show Vaneese has created from it, both pay tribute to some of the original soul sisters and honor the historical value of this irrepressible music. Since 2014 Vaneese has released five albums dedicated to her father and the music she was born into – *Blues For My Father*, (2014 Segue Records), *The Long Journey Home* (2016 Segue Records), *Down Yonder* (2019 Segue Records), *Fight The Good Fight* (2022 Blue Heart Records) and now *Stories In Blue* (2024 Overton Music).

In addition to concerts and recordings, Vaneese has worked extensively in film and television. She was the voice of Grace the Bass on the PBS series "Shining Time Station" and Clio the Muse, Goddess of History, in Disney's "Hercules." She has sung on numerous film soundtracks including "Anastasia," "Mighty Aphrodite" and "The First Wives Club." TV appearances include "The Late Show with David Letterman," "Late Night with Conan O'Brien," and "NBC's Today." Vaneese has also produced recordings, created vocal arrangements, and written songs for Patti Austin, Freddie Jackson, Bob James, Larry Coryell, Melba Moore, and Diana Ross. She helped found the Swarthmore College Gospel Choir and continues to direct the Alumni Gospel Choir. Vaneese is a six-time Blues Music Award nominee for Soul Blues Female Artist and "Blues For My Father" garnered two BMA nominations for Best Soul Blues Album & Best New Artist Debut. Vaneese recently appeared as a featured guest at Black Opry concerts in Memphis & NYC.

TRACK NOTES PROVIDED BY THOMAS

1. **Do Y'all**-This song was written with my ancestors in mind. I was hearing and feeling the laments of enslaved Africans who gave the soul and sound to the Blues. Let's not forget!

2. **When You Were My Man**-Al and I wrote this song about someone musing over their broken relationship. She's thinking about the obvious differences in her life then and now. The man "didn't play nice" and respect their relationship. Much too common!

3. **Wandering**-the lyrics to this song are reminiscent of the lyrics to "Have You Seen Her" by The Chi-Lites. This is a person feeling so low and feeling unrelenting pain. "Ain't nothing left for me" could reflect any kind of loss.

4. **1917**-This year in the history of the world was tumultuous. War World War 1 was raging, and jazz was being played in clubs and juke joints worldwide. Something else noteworthy happened that year; Rufus Thomas, Jr. was born in Cayce, MS

to Rufus, Sr. and Rachel Thomas and was to become a symbol of that era and the future of Black music.

5. **The Last Thing On My Mind**-another sad story of love lost. This was a surprise to him/her so it's even sadder. The lover says, "you broke my trust and shook my faith." That's some deep hurt!

6. **7 Miles From Home**-this song was inspired by a poem written by my friend, Berneta Miles. Her parents' home was 7 miles from downtown Humboldt, TN. So that phrase was something that her family quoted often. Also, you could say it's about folks who've left home and later returned after times of uplift and defeat. The theme is being welcomed back where you came from.

7. **End of the Road**-This song wasn't written with any particular idea of impending death but rather the joy of knowing I'll someday be relieved of all the stress and pain of life here on Earth.

WEBLINKS

OS: www.vaneesethomas.com

FB: www.facebook.com/vaneesethomasmusic

IG: www.instagram.com/vaneesethomasmusic

YT www.youtube.com/channel/@vaneesethomas3275

PURCHASE & STREAMING LINKS

Amazon: no link at time of writing

Spotify: <https://spoti.fi/3WAqg4A> (artist)

iTunes: <https://music.apple.com/us/artist/vaneese-thomas/4417904> (artist)

IMAGES

Album cover and artist: <http://blindraccoon.com/clients/vaneese-thomas/>

NOTE TO RADIO ~ FOCUS TRACKS

1. **Do Y'all**, 4. **1917**, 7. **The End Of The Road**

VERTON MUSIC www.overtonmusic.com

Betsie Brown established Overton Music in 2024 initially to support artists, with whom Blind Raccoon has worked over the years. Supported by Select-O-Hits, also based in Memphis, it's no surprise the label's name is in recognition of all things Overton – Overton Park Shell where Elvis performed his first concert 70 years ago last month, the legendary O.V. Wright, and Overton Park Avenue that runs by the end of her street. Future releases include new projects by Mike Bourne, Tomislav Goluban and Jennifer Porter.

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