

Mp3 Sandra St. Victor - Gemini: Both Sides



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A rich array of songs about life colored by outside reality and inner optimism, drawing on her Ella Fitzgerald/Sarah Vaughan meets the Ohio Players/Sly Stone persona. 14 MP3 Songs URBAN/R&B: Soul, URBAN/R&B: R&B Pop Crossover Details: She is the Mack Diva but she is so much more. A powerhouse vocalist whose soulful tones and earthy intensity mark her as an extraordinary artist, she is an urban storyteller with the innate ability to evoke a myriad of emotions. Her name is Sandra St. Victor and there is no one quite like her. Recognized for her multi-faceted artistry and vocal prowess by industry insiders and discerning music buyers alike, the Dallas-born singer-songwriter has been captivating audiences with her special blend of R&B, pop, rock, gospel and jazz for over a decade now, first as a member of the innovative trio known as The Family Stand from 1988 to 1993 and then as a soulstress in her own right via her much-treasured 1996 Warner Brothers set, "Mack Diva Saves The World." Five years on, expressing a whole new level of creativity and confidence comes "Gemini: Both Sides," the much-anticipated follow-up album. Once again filled with songs that reflect the everyday realities of life, love and relationships, the record is a remarkable tour-de-force for this one-of-a-kind artist: "The album is based on the two sides of my Gemini nature: one side, with reality staring in my face which can sometimes be very bleak and hard; the other, which is the optimistic, upbeat, sacred part of me." "Gemini: Both Sides" indeed has its own "natural breathing order," says the ever-genial SSV. "It starts out with 'darkness' with the song "Slipping Into Darkness" and ends with 'lightness' with "Forgiving Light." In the center, everything is cool. There's a natural flow to the record and since it is on my own label, I was able to create it just the way I wanted." The artistic freedom and creative spirit embodied throughout "Gemini: Both Sides" is evident on every one of the album's superlative thirteen tracks. Whether Sandra is expressing the universal yearning for finding a soulmate in the haunting "Holding Out," co-produced with

longtime musical associate Tom Hammer or fusing funk and jazz on the psychedelic soul groove "Dizzy" (co-produced with Ty Macklin, also known for his work with Erykah Badu) which features special guests, legendary performers Roy Ayers and Donald Byrd, each song speaks to some element of the human condition. In her own inimitable way, SSV tackles everything from spirituality ("Conversation With G") and sex (with "Act Of Beauty") to self-esteem ("If You Loved Yourself More," produced by Family Stand alumni Peter Lord and Jeffrey Smith, whom Sandra describes as "my musical soulmates") and current social concerns ("Child's Gotta Gun," a biting response to the spate of school-related shootings of recent years). "I actually started writing songs for a new album in 1998," says Sandra. "The first one that eventually ended up on this record was "Conversation With 'G'" which was inspired by a trio of books entitled "Conversations With God." I thought about what it might be like to have a verbal conversation like that and what I would say." The track was co-produced by Mark Batson, who has most recently worked with India.Arie and was also responsible for working with Sandra on the standout track "Knocked Up And Locked Down" from the "Mack Diva" album. Originally planned for a second Warners album, the song "Keep Playin' Me" features The Roots. Sandra explains, "When I was at Warners, my A&R person asked me who I wanted to work with. I mentioned The Roots and when we did hook up, it was a different experience for me in terms of how I write. I had to step outside of myself: they asked me what I wanted to sing about and then they started creating a track. It was more organic, real old school. Lyrically, it's the logical follow-up to the character who's the central figure in the song "MPH!" on the "Mack Diva" album. I mean, whatever the lyric says, finding Trojans in the sheets is not cool!" Sandra's decision to add her own touch to the '70s War classic "Slipping Into Darkness" was "inspired by what I was seeing at the time. I wrote new verses, we had lost Tupac, Biggie Smalls, Betty Shabazz and it was like a needless end of these lives." On the more personal tip, Sandra explains that "Act Of Beauty" is designed to reflect "the ethereal experience of intimate partnership, with sex as a sacred act. It's so special when love is involved." Be it tender or tough love, love for her fellow human travelers or love for Self, the lyrical themes on Sandra St. Victor's latest work capture her essence as an African-American woman dealing with the realities of 21st century everyday life. That mission for truth-telling was certainly abundantly evident on "Mack Diva Saves The World" and has earmarked Sandra's work throughout a career filled with accomplishments and achievements. That music would become her chosen career was evident from an early age when, growing up in Dallas, Sandra began singing in church. Inspired and influenced by a

diversity of music - from the jazz stylings of Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan and Nancy Wilson to the out-and-out funk of Rufus Wainwright, Chaka Khan, The Ohio Players and Sly and the Family Stone along with the pop and rock of Elton John and Jimi Hendrix - Sandra's natural penchant for creativity found expression first at Arts Magnet School and then at the University of Kansas where she toyed with the idea of pursuing a career in opera: "like Miss Leontyne Price. But I realized that I would get bored because I couldn't create [with opera] I didn't see enough potential for growth or development for myself creatively in that arena." Opera's loss was a gain for other musical genres: back in Dallas, Sandra began performing with a local jazz group known as Laissez Faire whose line-up included late guitarist Zachary Breaux. A gig with vibist Roy Ayers led to a move to New York City in the early '80s. "Roy said 'come up to New York, give us a call!' So I did and two weeks after I got to the city, I was on the road with Roy Ayers!" As a member of Ayers' Ubiquity, Sandra traveled throughout the U.S., Europe and Africa and in 1984, after witnessing a gig in New York, Chaka Khan asked Sandra to come work with her not only as a background vocalist but as a contractor which meant auditioning and hiring other background singers to work with the legendary performer. Over the next three years, Sandra worked with Chaka as well as developing a deep friendship with her: "She brought a lot out of me, just about expressing what I really felt and thought and not being afraid of the consequences. Musically speaking, she taught me a lot about using my range to the best of my ability." In the mid-'80s, Sandra's vocal skills led to a slew of work on recording sessions with everyone from Glenn Jones and Freddie Jackson to Smokey Robinson and Kashif. When vocalist Lisa Fisher (whom Sandra had previously hired to sing with Chaka) called to say she was going on the road with Luther Vandross, she asked Sandra if she could work with two producers on demos they were doing. The two men in question were Peter Lord and V. Jeffrey Smith: "I ended up hanging out with them, singing with them and we really just clicked, so that was it. We loved each other so much, we became a group." The Family Stand was born, incarnated first as Evon Geffries The Stand and signed to Atlantic Records in 1988. Much-loved by critics and those who did get a chance to hear it, the trio's debut set "Chapters" contained the scorching R&B charted single "Stand And Deliver" but failed to achieve any degree of sales success. The follow-up album with the now-renamed Family Stand was a different proposition: a 1990 release, "Chain" included the Top 3 R&B hit "Ghetto Heaven," which also achieved success in the U.K. (and was revived in 2000 by rap artist Common on his best-selling "Like Water For Chocolate" album as a duet with D'Angelo with Macy Gray featured as the female vocalist in the

European remix video for the song). The response to "Chain" (which also included the songs "In Summer I Fall" and "Sweet Liberation") led to U.S. touring with Ziggy Marley The Melody Makers and trips to Japan and Europe. In 1992, The Family Stand began working on what would be its swansong set as an original unit: "Moon In Scorpio" was an ambitious project that covered a wide musical range, with an emphasis on rock, designed to push the boundaries of what a 'black' group was expected to do musically. Without the kind of across-the-board support it needed, the project received little exposure and the group began turning its attention to production work. The trio worked with Paula Abdul on her Virgin album "Spellbound" (which contained the gold single, "Rush, Rush"), with the New York duo Aftershock and with Daryl Hall (of Hall Oates) on his 1993 solo album for Epic. In 1993, Sandra began working on what she expected would be her first solo album for Elektra Records but executive changes meant that the proposed record never surfaced. Free of her contract with the label, Sandra moved to Warner Brothers and in 1996, Sandra's brilliant "Mack Diva Saves The World" was released. The album was filled with soulful highlights from the infectious first single "Rise", to the emotion-packed opus "Since You've Been Gone." Tracks like "MPH!" and "Knocked Up And Locked Down" were a testament to Sandra's willingness to step to the cutting edge, lyrically and musically and it was no surprise that the album quickly became a critical favorite. An obvious lack of promotion meant the album received far less exposure than it clearly deserved: a second single, "Chocolate" (used in the soundtrack for the popular sitcom "Living Single", also featured female rappers Yo Yo and Nonchalant) was belatedly released and before she could complete a second Warners album, the label underwent its own share of management changes. Undaunted, Sandra continued to rack up further career achievements, duetting with the late legendary Curtis Mayfield on the song "I Believe In You" on what would be his final album, "New World Order," an event she describes as "the pinnacle in my career at this point"; and having Prince record her song "Soul Sanctuary" for his "Emancipation" album. Longtime friend Chaka Khan cut Sandra's "I'll Never Be Another Fool" for her 1998 set "Come 2 My House." In 1998, Sandra helped secure a record deal for the group Profyle at Motown Records and the team cut her song "Lady" for their 1999 debut "Whispers In The Dark." In addition to consistent performances in and around New York at venues like Joe's Pub and S.O.B.'s, Sandra worked with good friend Pru on a promotional tour in 2000. She was also featured on a 2000 "Tribute To Jimi Hendrix" at The Brooklyn Academy Of Music, performing four songs ("Fire," "Are You Experienced," "Hey Joe" and "Burning The Midnight Lamp") in another Hendrix tribute, the

"Experience Music Project" in Seattle to rave reviews. In mid-2000, Sandra began work on "Gemini: Both Sides" in earnest: "I was disillusioned, disheartened and hurt that my 'baby' (the "Mack Diva" album) had been in a sense thrown out of the window. At one point, I thought of doing something else, maybe being a truck driver because I love to drive! But my friends woke me up - folks like my web mistress M, Felicia Collins (who plays guitar on "The David Letterman Show"), Lace (a disc jockey on New York's WBAI-FM station) and Paulette McWilliams. Even Curtis Mayfield, lying on his back while I'm able to walk, he told me, 'don't let them get to you.' With all of that and the motivation of my beautiful daughter Maanami, I had to keep going." The result of such encouragement and support and the enlightenment that M provided in having Sandra see new possibilities in working on music that could be marketed through her own website (sandrastvictor.com) is "Gemini: Both Sides," a soul-filled artistic and musical triumph for the singer, songwriter and producer. "It's been a very liberating experience for me as an artist to have all kinds of control in my hands, from deciding what to put on the record to choosing the artwork. It's been very freeing. Now I can't wait to get the album out to the people!" The focus on Sandra's work continues: her song "Like Wow!" is the first single from teen pop star Leslie Carter's Dreamworks debut album; while "Ghetto Heaven" (a St. Victor collaboration with Peter Lord and V. Jeffrey Smith) is getting a new life with another version by guitarist Hiram Bullock and singer Lalah Hathaway. With "Gemini: Both Sides" making its Internet debut on June 1, Sandra St. Victor is poised to create an even bigger impact. After much dues-paying, she's ready to reap her rewards as a barrier-breaking musical trendsetter whose unique artistry puts her in a category of her very own. Because, when all's said and done, there is only one Mack Diva! David Nathan A/k/a "British Ambassador Of Soul" Author, "The Soulful Divas" (Billboard Books, 1999) Website: soulmusicstore.com; davidnathan.com E-mail: davidnathan@davidnathan.com May 2001

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