

An independent voice



BackBeat

with Cornelius Thomas

Barry Despatch
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"THERE are no accidents and no mistakes. It really just depends on the choices you choose to make," said singer Rachelle Ferrell in a recent interview with *Soul Train* magazine.

Ferrell, a funky vocalist from the streets of Philadelphia was speaking about her latest album *Individuality (Can I Be Me)*, which was released late last year.

After her debut self-titled 1992 album, her career plunged in the tumult of recording industry politics, with the recording company not promoting her *Rachelle Ferrell* to full advantage.

Some considered the album not commercial enough, while to others it sounded either "not black enough" or "not white enough".

Ferrell receded from the charts, but not from the limelight.

Following in the footsteps of South Africa's New York exile Sathima Bea Benjamin, who started her own record company, and Dee Dee Bridgewater, who told the recording industry: "Ik hoef niemands kont te kussen" and then went her own way, Ferrell too declared her independence.

She financed her own band and took to the road.

Proceeding towards one of her early "independence" concerts she observed: "Boy, a lot of people are going to the Central Park Zoo today."

But the zoo people actually came to her Central Park concert.

For the next seven years Ferrell sang in concerts, clubs and festivals.

She said of her 'exile': "This whole time period was about owning oneself, discovering oneself and owning that ... and in coming fully into who I am, and being courageous enough to express that."

Visually Ferrell emerged with a kinky-haired ethnic image; and musically with her own voice — neither black nor white, nor even commercial.

That does not bother Ferrell, as the tracks *Individuality* and *Satisfied* on *Individuality* indicate.

Thematically too Ferrell dug deeper. Listen to her engaging in a call and response on her dedication to the New Mexico part of Mother Earth, *Gaia*. Keep the volume down and the fine glassware out of the way when listening to her six-octave voice reaching out primaevally to love on *Run to Me*.

South Africa's Jonathan Butler appears on the album as guest vocalist, and Ferrell's mentor



RACHELLE FERRELL

George Duke collaborates on several tracks.

Asked by *Soul Train* what her hopes were for the album, Ferrell reckoned:

"My hopes for this CD have already been realised (in its production). And so I take and live each moment with such a depth of gratitude that it just bubbles out everywhere."

About her career, particularly her thematic choices, Ferrell now says

"If it does not resonate with who I am, then it doesn't matter.

"Because my ultimate goal is not album sales, but to touch people. And in order to touch someone else, you have to be true to yourself."

I highly recommend this album, which is now available at local jazz outlets.

● For R&B, jazz and funk, the Lighthouse Café on the Orient Beach is the place to be this weekend.

● Those who are into mainstream jazz can catch the Alan Webster Quartet at Smokey Swallows on Sunday.