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VISITING ACT | Mississippi Mama From Good Ol' Georgia

Michelle Malone brings 20 years of soul, grit, and damn fine music

BY SHAWNTÉ SALABERT



Atlanta-based songwriter Michelle Malone

There aren't too many musicians as true to their craft as Michelle Malone. If you close your eyes and listen to her music, it's easy to imagine the Georgia firecracker slowly rocking in a swing on the back porch, chawin' on some fried chicken and casually wiping the grease off on her dusty blue jeans right before she stops to pick up her guitar.

But you can't close your eyes when she slings on that slide and goes to work, coaxing the sweet sound of rock 'n' roll-doused Delta blues right out of those six strings and into the humid air. It's just the girl, her gee-tar, and that raspy voice; the vocals of Emmylou Harris and Janis Joplin's imagined little sister bringing to life timeless, unmistakably Southern songs about back roads and broken hearts.

Malone's last record, 2003's *Stompin' Ground* (SBS/Daemon), was a perfect showcase for her hybrid of fiery-heart, South-of-the-Mason-Dixon rock 'n' soul. Songs like the Louisiani tribute "Lafayette" proved that over nearly two

decades, Malone definitely learned to perfect an intoxicating blend of a little bit country and a whole lotta sass.

So it's about damn time someone took stock of Malone's impressive catalogue, even if it is Malone herself on her own SBS Records. It's the eve of the release of *20/20: The Best of Michelle Malone 1986-2006*, and the lady has one helluva discography to review. It's hard to believe that Clive Davis ever thought she could be his next Whitney — Michelle Malone belongs in a class far above.

Michelle Malone shares the bill with Mississippi singer/songwriter Garrison Starr at the Village Tavern on Fri. Feb. 17. Cover is \$8.