

listen up!

by sharon macdonell | photo provided by elizabeth fladung

Better Late Than Never

WHY AT 62, DETROIT-BORN SOUL SINGER BETTYE LAVETTE IS JUST GETTING STARTED

In 1972, Bettye LaVette was home in Detroit, packed and ready to tour for her just-completed record with Atlantic.

LaVette had an R&B hit single (*My Man – He’s a Lovin’ Man*) at 16, but this was her first album and a new beginning. Then the phone rang.

“They said, ‘Would you please send the plane tickets back? We’ve decided not to go forward with the project,’” says LaVette, now a resident of West Orange, New Jersey. “Those are the exact words they said.”

The album, *Child of the Seventies*, was shelved, the tour canceled. LaVette was devastated.

Over the next three decades, the raspy-voiced soul singer sang where she could, but it was tough. LaVette says she “gave up, gave out, but never gave in.” She relied on a group of supportive friends who did everything from giving pep talks to picking up checks. She also learned a lot about having to win an audience and entertaining.

When her next big break hit 28 years later, LaVette was ready. A French music collector discovered her shelved album and released it in 2000, renaming it *Souvenirs*. Two new CDs quickly followed, and the bookings and awards started rolling in.

Now 62, the energetic performer is known for her heartbreakingly raw blues interpretations of songs from all genres. She’s on a world tour for her latest CD, *Scene of the Crime*, which earned LaVette her first Grammy nomination.

“I begged and told people, ‘Listen, listen, listen!’ for so long,” LaVette says. “I guess I feel more vindicated than anything else.”

feature appearances by Dave Matthews Band, Snoop Dog, Modest Mouse and John Mayer, among other performers.

With more than three decades of experience, LaVette knows a great entertainer appeals to all ages.

“When I’m standing onstage and looking at faces my age and faces my granddaughter’s age all looking up cheering and applauding, I find that an honor,” she says. 

