

Soul Survivor Walters Stays Cool on 'King'

[Joel Selvin, Neva Chonin](#)

Sunday, December 3, 2000

[©2000 San Francisco Chronicle](#)

URL: <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2000/12/03/PK43834.DTL>



GLENN WALTERS

The King of Retro Cool Strokeland, \$15

They don't make records like this anymore. But they don't make musicians like Glenn Walters and Steve "Doc" Kupka anymore, either. Both are definitely discontinued models and they know it, hence the title of this album.

Soul music, authentic, actual soul music, has pretty much shuffled off the face of the earth. But Kupka and Walters were there when it was in full flower.

Walters was lead vocalist of the Bay Area's greatly beloved but little-known Hoodoo Rhythm Devils, and Kupka was the co-leader of Tower of Power, bands that 30 years ago worked alongside each other in the same dives.

While Kupka's Tower of Power work has come to be regarded as some of the most original of the golden era of soul, Walters has continued his career pretty much uninterrupted by fame or fortune, playing an endless succession of clubs, casuals and weddings. On "The King of Retro Cool," they pool their talents to great effect.

Kupka, who used to write songs from previously devised titles like "Don't Change Horses (In the Middle of a Stream)" and "Only So Much Oil in the Ground," has produced and written an album for Walters. Walters, who started in the music business as a child in a band with his parents, has developed a richly nuanced style, chiseling fine detail into his vocals with the subtlety and wisdom that comes only after half a lifetime of singing.

The fabulous opening track, "I Do My Best Work After Dark," starts with a shimmering blast of brass, trademark Tower of Power riffs featuring a bunch of TOP kingpins. Trumpeter Mic Gillette played on the sessions and worked on the horn arrangements. At the bottom end is the peerless Tower rhythm section, bassist Francis Prestia and drummer Dave Garibaldi.

Kupka provided Walters with a raft of great material: From the silken Philly-style soul ballad "After the Fact" to the sassy "Animal Walk," the songs all give Walters something to bite down on. He slides into these songs as if they were tailor-made for him. Come to think of it, they probably were.

This is not a homage to '70s soul music; this is the real deal. The smart money would say there is no place for music like this on today's contemporary scene. Radio won't play it. MTV wouldn't touch it. Only people would like it.

Kupka and Walters are masters of their craft. There was a time when American rhythm and blues mattered all over the world. Now it's just another arcane musicological enterprise, but Glenn Walters and "Doc" Kupka still care.

-- Joel Selvin

SPICE GIRLS' LATEST NOT SO APPETIZING



SPICE GIRLS

Forever Virgin, \$18.97

Let us mourn. The Spice Girls, founders of the current teen-pop craze, are in their dotage. Their pugnacious Girl Power has become teen titillation in the hands of Christina Aguilera and Britney Spears; boy bands rule the airwaves.

The appeal of Sporty, Posh, Scary, Baby and the departed Ginger Spice was never musical. It was all attitude, and lyrics that warned potential beaux, "If you wanna get with me/ You better get with my friends." Fluffy? Vapid? Only for those old enough to have discovered the more enlightened politics of Bikini Kill and Sleater-Kinney. For the kids, Spicedom was all about pride in girlhood.

With drained spirit, "Forever" is neither more nor less derivative and premeditated than the quintet-turned-quartet's first two albums, but it is a less inspirational confection. Newly minted solo artist Melanie "Sporty" C. and her crew squander their feisty spirit on imitations of the successful R&B- lite formula plied by a post-Spice generation of teen idols. It's a low aspiration and has predictable results: Ballads such as "Oxygen" and "Time Goes By" are rife with lovelorn pining and woefully short on funk and passion.

When they're not indulging in soppy romanticism, the Girls do cut loose songs such as "Get Down With Me" and "Weekend Love." A shining light is the feisty "Holler," a manifesto of desire that finds the girls belting out lines like "I wanna make you holler/ And have you scream my name/ I'll give you rules to follow/ So you can play my game."

But what's the game? One suspects that the Spice Girls no longer know. Alas,

alas. The queens have no clothes.

-- Neva Chonin

ALSO IN STORES THIS WEEK

Roger Waters: "In the Flesh" (Columbia)

Eve: "Scorpion" (Interscope)

Alice in Chains: "Live" (Columbia)

Lil' Wayne: ""Lights Out" (Universal)

E-mail Joel Selvin at jselvin@sfchronicle.com. E-mail Neva Chonin at nchonin@sfchronicle.com.