

ROUNDER RECORDS ARTIST BIO

Irma Thomas

After The Rain

Street Date: April 25, 2006

Following Hurricane Katrina, Fox News began circulating the story that Irma Thomas, along with other New Orleans music notables such as Fats Domino, had gone missing in the ensuing flood. The story spread through the media, and the phones at Rounder Records began to ring as concerned fans, friends and musical associates called to ask about her safety. As it turned out, the news report was false. She'd been gigging in Austin, Texas, and hadn't even been in New Orleans when the storm hit. What was clear was that the press was acknowledging Thomas as a treasured cultural icon who embodies the very soul of New Orleans.



Known for her 1960's hits such as "Time Is On My Side," "It's Raining" and "Wish Someone Would Care," Irma later won Grammy nominations for her live album, *Simply the Best!*, and her collaboration with Marcia Ball and Tracy Nelson, *Sing It!*, both on Rounder. Over the years, Thomas became a beloved favorite at the annual New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival.

Thomas told the *Boston Herald*, "Well, I guess people thought I was dead. When I became somebody who was no longer around, I became somebody worth looking at." With her home, her nightclub and her other properties flooded and the mementos, photos and awards from her 40-year career lost, Irma still managed to find more than a few bright spots in her post-Katrina life. She and her husband, Emile Jackson, found a temporary home in Gonzales, Louisiana, near Baton Rouge. Since Katrina, she's appeared at September's Big Easy Benefit Concert at Madison Square Garden, on Jools Holland's *BBC New Year's Eve* telecast, at Switzerland's prestigious Davos Festival, on the *Today* show and on the recent Grammy awards.

Now, Thomas has returned to the studio for her first new album in six years, completed just a few days before her 65th birthday. With *After the Rain*, Thomas and producer Scott Billington celebrate their 20th anniversary of collaboration with an adventurous project that will both surprise and delight Thomas' fans. Said Billington, "Irma has one of the richest and most beautiful voices in contemporary music. It seemed confining at this stage of her career to make a straight R&B record, so we broke the mold." The result is a recording that frames Thomas' vocals with spare arrangements and many acoustic instruments, and with a repertoire that spans 75 years of great American songwriting.

Logistics for making the album were complicated by Katrina, which destroyed Ultrasonic Studio in New Orleans. The sessions finally came together at Dockside Studio in rural Maurice, Louisiana, with Ultrasonic engineers David Farrell and Steve Reynolds at the recording console. Billington assembled a dream team of Louisiana musicians, including keyboardists David Torkanowsky and David Egan; guitarists Corey Harris and Sonny Landreth; fiddler/fretless banjo player/guitarist Dirk Powell; acoustic bassist James Singleton; drummer Stanton Moore; and vocalists Juanita Brooks, Marc Broussard and Charles "Chucky C" Elam.

The album opens with a deeply soulful version of Arthur Alexander's "In the Middle of It All," before breaking into the fiddle-driven funk of the minor key "Flowers," from Nashville writers Kevin Gordon and Gwil Owen.

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The David Egan-penned ballad, “If You Know How Much,” may have inspired Thomas’ most powerful and emotional vocal performance on record in many years. Other highlights are a version of the traditional “Another Man Done Gone,” with new lyrics from Thomas and Billington that explore the plight of those not able to return home, and the country song “Another Lonely Heart,” by Los Angeles songwriter Eleni Mandell.

Perhaps what is most impressive about this recording is that Irma Thomas is now at the very peak of her powers, delivering every song with resonating feeling, honesty and that amazing voice, 46 years after her first recording. We don’t need a hurricane, thank you, to remind us that this is one cultural icon who is sounding better than ever.

