

Sugarfoot

Michelle Malone

Valley

By Al Kaufman

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Imagine Bonnie Raitt; not the adult contemporary Bonnie Raitt of today, but a young, beer drinking Raitt who didn't care where her next meal came from as long as she could wail on her blues guitar in some smoky club.

'Moanin' Michelle Malone is better than that.

For years, Malone has consistently been putting out devil-may-care music overflowing with southern spirit and roots. *Sugarfoot* is no exception. While experience has only sharpened her songwriting skills, Malone understands that it is her "just a bunch of friends making music in the garage" sound that makes her so special. There are no studio tricks here. This is just a rollicking good time. It feels so true and gritty that you can almost picture the creek in the background, complete with a tire swing hanging off a tree.

The slide guitar and blues harp set the stage for the sexually charged, good time opener, 'Tighten Up the Springs.' Then it's off to the races. The single 'Where Is the Love' is a slight misstep and sounds too much like an overblown Melissa Etheridge power ballad, but everything else goes down like a Jim Beam on a hot, steamy night. Her Joan Jett influences shine through on the punk fueled 'Traveling and Unravelling' and 'Black Motorcycle Boots,' and the Allman Brothers could do worse than cover 'Winter Muscadine' on a future CD. It's better than anything they've done in years.

This is a woman who enjoys her work, and it shows. She can play the guitar like Stevie Ray and growl like Janis Joplin. Too bad she's from Georgia; Texas would love to call her its own.