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SURFING THE WAVES OF POPULAR CULTURE  
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## Smokey Sings The Standards

[My friends at NYCD](#) urged me to give a listen to "Timeless Love," a new album of standards by Smokey Robinson. After the Rod Stewart nightmare, it's hard to approach any aging pop star who unexpectedly tackles the Great American Songbook. But this one is good, they insisted. So I listened. I always try just to watch a movie or read a book or listen to a CD or watch a show as simply as possible. I don't spend my time listening for lines to quote, I never take notes -- I'm not a critic. Just a fan who hopes what I'm experiencing is good. On the other hand, I'm not an automaton, and music more than most art let's you make song-by-song snap judgments. I had an insight, I thought, during the first tune, "You Go To My Head." Smokey sang a phrase or two -- "You go to my head/ My head/ My head" -- in a way that sounded to me like a pop song. He wasn't going for jazz phrasing, I imagined, but just treating these tunes as great pop songs, which they obviously were before being enshrined as standards. And of course, Smokey is attentive to the lyrics (like most great singers) so it wasn't a dumbing down of the songs, just an approach that fitted his style. That thought faded from my mind as the album went along. The arrangements were tasteful, acoustic and jazz-y with some strings. The songs were well sung, though in the middle I grew a tad impatient with one too many ballads. Things picked up again with (ironically) a very slowed down take on Cyndi Lauper's "Time After Time" that helped me hear the lyrics again, followed by a finger-snapping "I Can't Give You Anything But Love (Baby)." So just as I accepted the album for a pleasing, jazz-y take on the standards with happily unembellished vocals, Smokey began "I've Got You Under My Skin" with a wicked bassline. Then came some nifty keyboards that created a distinctive early 70s soul vibe. Here was a jazz standard recast as a soul tune so effectively I was thrilled. Now it wasn't just the vocal approach of that first tune, it was the arrangement, the instrumentation, EVERYTHING combining to turn this standard into a classic soul number. That was followed by the finale -- a Slow Jam take on "Tea For Two" that was similarly daring in

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