

Throwback: Esther Phillips - Home Is Where The Hatred Is

Esther Mae Jones was discovered by the legendary [Johnny Otis](#) in 1949 after she won a talent competition at his Barrelhouse Club in Watts when the Texas native was thirteen. She joined his stage show as Little Esther and she started recording for Savoy where she cultivated five R&B hits "[Double Crossing Blues](#)," "Mistrustin' Blues" "[Misery](#)," "Cupid Boogie" and "Deceiving Blues." She left Savoy and recorded some singles for the Federal, Decca and Warwick labels until the end of the decade. An unknown Kenny Rogers found her performing in a Houston nightclub in 1962 and got her a deal on his brother's Lenox record label. At this point in her career she changed her name to Esther Phillips taking her last name from a local gas station. This time period is when she recorded the country R&B song "[Release Me](#)" which was so successful that Atlantic Records signed her soon after Lenox went bankrupt. The Atlantic years produced the Beatles cover of "And I Love Her" changed to "[And I Love Him](#)" earning their recognition and inspiring them to fly her to the UK for her first performances abroad. Phillips made four albums for the company with [Burnin'](#) being one of her biggest critical successes. When Atlantic failed to make her a big star they let her go and she signed with [Creed Taylor's](#) Kudu label. [From A Whisper To A Scream](#) was her first album with Taylor's imprint and this is where her version of Gil Scott Heron's "Home Is Where The Hatred Is" was laid down with an intro he wrote for her. The album earned her a Grammy nomination and when she lost to Aretha Franklin the Queen of Soul gave it to her telling her that she really earned it. The song was just as personal for Phillips as it was for Heron because she too had a very bad drug addiction. Her biggest song was a disco remake of her idol Dinah Washington's "[What A Difference A Day Makes](#)" in 1975 and it was her biggest commercial success. Phillip's voice is unique because of a bluesy soulful vibrato that recalls Washington but quickly identifies her within seconds of hearing of her sing. Phillips' last chart presence was in 1983 with "Turn Me Out." Years of drug abuse took a toll and claimed her life the following year.