

Throwback: Tracy Chapman-Fast Car



[youtube id="DwrHwZyFN7M"] Tracy Chapman's "Fast Car" was an anomaly when it debuted on American radio in 1988. Chapman's acoustic Afro-folk and baby locs had never been heard or seen by a mainstream audience before. The song about a woman's desire to leave poverty behind was magnetizing because of Chapman's charisma and ability to make the serious topic non-preachy and unintentionally ambiguous. The fetching guitar melody and her blistering contralto made listeners stop and fall under her spell. She was compared to British singer-songwriter Joan Armatrading, Joni Mitchell and Phoebe Snow. Mitchell and Snow did play guitar but women with guitars, especially Black women with guitars in the world of pop music is rare. Chapman had something in common with the late Black woman folk singer Odetta who was called the Queen Of American Folk Music by Martin Luther King Jr. They both played the same instrument and sang protest songs but Chapman's style is all her own. Her performance at Nelson Mandela's 70th birthday celebration sent "Fast Car" up the charts and announced her voice to the world. In an unscripted moment in time, the music industry awarded her first album with three Grammy wins after six nominations. "Fast Car" was sampled by Nice & Smooth and in 19 other songs and there are over 40 covers of "Fast Car." On April 5, 2018, it will be the 30th anniversary of Chapman's debut album.