

Keke Wyatt Is Still Certified



Credit: Nathan Percy

Keke Wyatt's *Certified* is her first album in seven years and she ends her long player absence with a playlist of mostly original songs. Wyatt's role as Avant's duet partner on a cover of Rene & Angela's "My First Love" two decades ago introduced her as a precocious vocalist with mighty pipes far beyond her 15 years. *Certified* is her fifth album and her honest co-writing and the production guidance of Blac Elvis who is known for his work with Usher and Beyoncé, reveal that Wyatt's voice is still pure and full. The relationship tales on *Certified* come through with the wisdom of an experienced romantic. "Water Into Wine" uses a biblical reference to accept a relationship stalemate as Wyatt sings with the stance of a weary lover. She owns up to not having miracle power but the smooth ridges in her vocals are embedded with the gospel.

Wyatt acknowledges another iconic vocalist with the Sade tribute "She." The riffs on "Smooth Operator" are transformed into a different kind of late-night allure emphasizing soul instead of jazz like the UK singer's version. Wyatt's mastery of the cover song is well-known and "Unchained Melody" is completely renewed under the weight of an epic interpretation that holds heartstrings captive. *Certified* refuses to get into a sonic rut and "Scared" is a bubbly reggae surprise featuring Mix Master David. The Insecurity that can come from conflicts in love is a sensual twirl with a rocking rhythm guitar and Wyatt's calm confession. The church roots and magnificent runs she's famous for are heard throughout *Certified* but go harder when she ends the album with choral fanfare on the autobiographical prayer "Deliver Me." *Certified* is a worthy return for one of the best vocalists of her generation who is still wowing audiences after more than two decades.

