

Throwback: Etta James-All The Way Down



Etta James was a well-established R&B singer by the time of her 1973 solo album. She started having hits at 16 after she was discovered by Johnny Otis in 1954. When the '70s arrived she worked with famous rock producer Gabriel Mekler and took a different musical direction. "All The Way Down" was on this album and Mekler was one of the three co-writers of the song. James's struggles with heroin and alcohol addictions were heard in her brassy tone and the autobiographical lyrics. The story about shiny cars, seeking stardom and drugs was something her audience already knew was part of her life.

The strings and funk elements supplemented the groove within an arrangement reminiscent of Curtis Mayfield's *Superfly* soundtrack that came out the previous year. Etta James had successfully traveled into a new sound and the album received

a Grammy nomination for Best R&B Vocal Performance Female. She did not get to enjoy the accolades because of her addiction which eventually sent her to a hospital for treatment in 1974. "All The Way Down" was one of James's most difficult truths in song and the recording proved to be an artistic triumph that still gets people excited in 2023. Etta James is one of the artists currently in the [Country Music Hall of Fame's](#) exhibition examining the influence of R&B on Nashville.