

REVIEWS

MACY GRAY

***The Sellout***

[Concord Records]

More than 10 years have passed since Macy Gray struck gold with her smash hit, "I Try." That old-school soul song and the debut album from which it sprang (*On How Life Is*) served as a kind of gateway drug for the likes of Amy Winehouse and Joss Stone. Gray has since floundered, releasing albums that either lacked direction (2001's *The Id*) or were over-polished (2007's *Big*). Happily, *The Sellout* marks a return to form. Even when painting outside the lines, Gray makes certain that every song is tethered to a classic R&B foundation. High points include "Beauty in the World," fueled by strummed acoustic guitar and handclaps; "Let You Win," a sexy, groove-driven ballad that evokes Sly Stone and Al Green; and "That Man," a sublime slice of soul-pop. Guests include Slash, who supplies straight-up rock guitar on "Kissed It," but Gray's trademark rasp is the main attraction.

—Russell Hall

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