



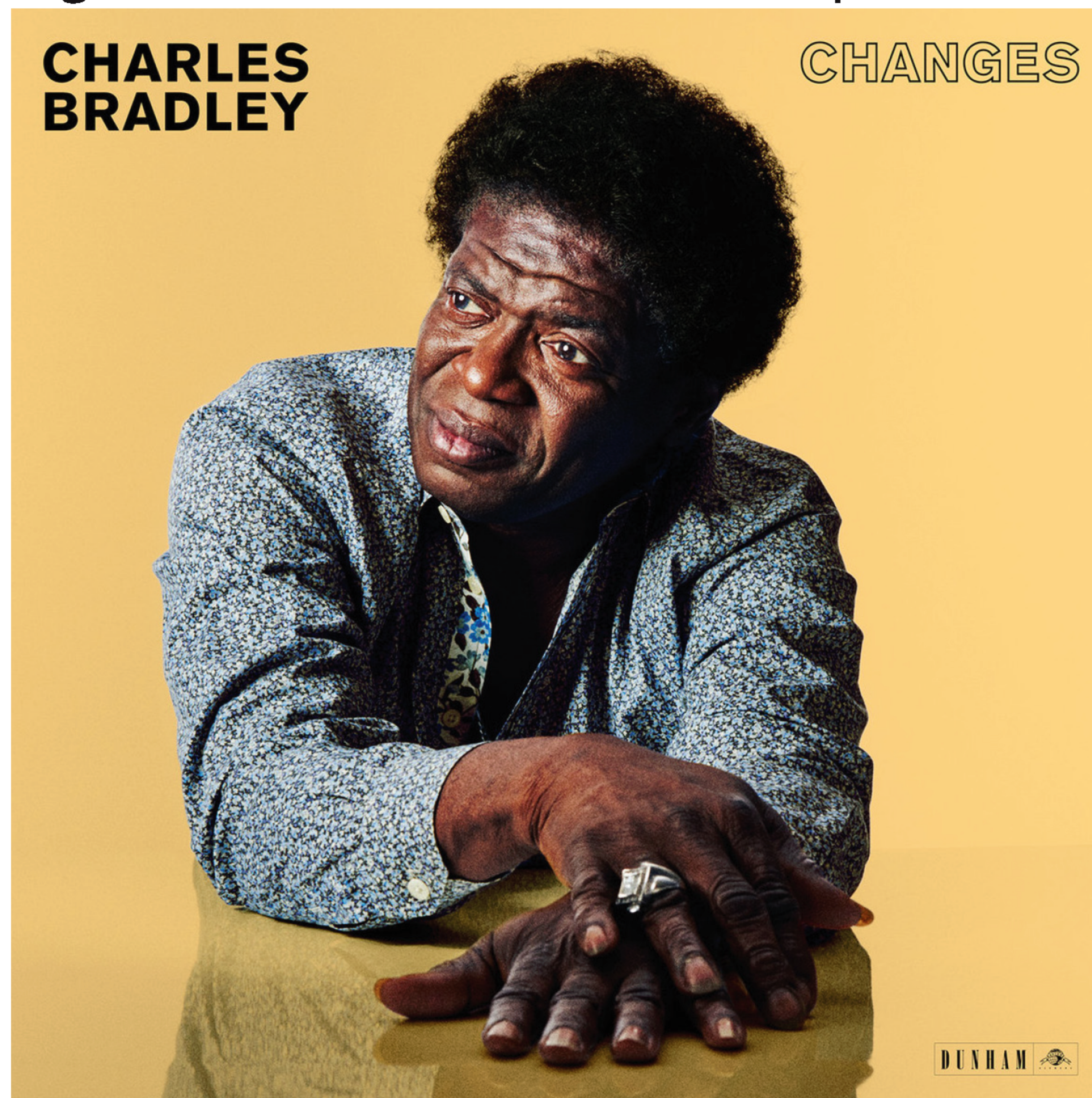
## Reviews:

# Charles Bradley's "Changes" is true to its title, but keeps traditional soul sound intact

**Soren Spicknall**  
WIIT STATION MANAGER

Charles Bradley is an unlikely figure to be making the rounds on today's music festival circuit, drawing crowds at annual destinations as diverse as Eau Claire, Hang-out Fest, and Coachella. His truly traditional blend of turn-of-the-70s soul and funk seems somewhat out of place even in a world that's currently busy embracing modern interpretations of those genres performed by the likes of Alabama Shakes, Leon Bridges, and more. His rise to prominence is made even more unlikely by his recent past: struggles with homelessness and personal tragedy kept the 67-year-old singer from pursuing a full-time musical career until his discovery by Daptone Records co-founder and Dap-Kings bandleader Bosco Mann in the last decade. Bradley's 2011 debut *No Time For Dreaming* catapulted him to soul stardom, and 2013's *Victim Of Love* cemented his place in the history of the genre. Now, with a legacy established, Bradley is branching out on his newest album, appropriately titled *Changes*. Scheduled to be put out by Daptone in April, the album features collaborations with the Dap-Kings, Budos Band, and his own touring group *The Extraordinaires*. While its roots are still pure soul, these new voices in the recording process have widened the scope of the singer's music, a change that is perhaps necessary to maintain the throne of today's most visible throwback soul singer.

Bradley's voice, when expressed at full volume, has the potential to be both rough and exultant. However, as attendees at his live performances can attest, sometime that roughness lends itself to scattershot accuracy with



pitch, something that isn't entirely reigned in on this recording. The first track on *Changes*, an unapologetically patriotic rendition of "God Bless America" prefaced by a spoken introduction, is perhaps the worst offender, belted out

with little regard to vocal musicianship.

Luckily, things improve drastically following that first misstep. Songs like "Good To Be Back Home" and "Ain't Gonna Give It Up" exemplify Bradley's showman style, while

adding new elements to backing instrumentation that give this new collection a markedly different feel than previous albums. Title track "Changes" is remarkable in itself just by virtue of its existence: it's a cover of one of the most boring Black Sabbath songs of all time, reinvigorated with a level of passion that was entirely missing from the original. After hearing the cover, it actually makes perfect sense for this to be the title track for Bradley's latest album. More than any other song present, it shows an eagerness to innovate and make something new from a fairly traditional soul, funk, and R&B toolkit.

Like his previous work, most of the pieces on *Changes* are romantic (or occasionally religious) in some manner. Songs titles like "Things You Do For Love," "Crazy For Your Love," and "Slow Love" are all lyrically exactly what they sound like, with thematic repetition that may be a turn-off for some contemporary listeners. However, the musical style of each of these pieces is varied, and the album continues to be rewarding on each subsequent listening after the first. "You Think I Don't Know (But I Know)," "Change For The World," and others each contain some hidden hints of the 21st century, like subtle synthesizers or echo effects, integrated into the 70s soundscape in unobtrusive ways. Though some will miss Bradley's older composition style when collaborating with the Menahan Street Band, this new album is almost certainly his most varied work to date, and proves that Bradley continues to be a force to reckon with in the world of soul.

7.8/10

Image courtesy of Charles Bradley



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