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## Do You Wana Funk?

Review by Roland Palmer

“There’s a new breed of children who don’t even know who you are... the one who revealed the way simply by walking without any shame... when it’s over, baby, when it’s said and done, they’ll write your name across the sky. You will be the one.”

The one is legendary disco diva Sylvester. The CD is *Mighty Real: A Tribute to Sylvester*. This is a musical experience not to be missed, so get out the polyester and join me on the floor under the mirrored ball as we flash back to the nightclub scene that was the ‘70s.

Sylvester was publicly, flamboyantly out as a gay black entertainer who died in 1988 at the age of 41 from complications related to AIDS. He once told Joan Rivers “Honey, I am not a drag queen. I am Sylvester!” He paved the way for future gender-bender pop stars such as Boy George and RuPaul, and introduced the world to the “It’s Raining Men” Weather Girls, who had once been back-up singers for him.

*“Now a few of us feel your voice was a gift from above; you were an angel who opened your mouth to serve up the gospel of love.”*

## Gayity

Of course, Sylvester the man may or may not be remembered outside the gay community, but anyone who remembers disco will easily recognize the music.

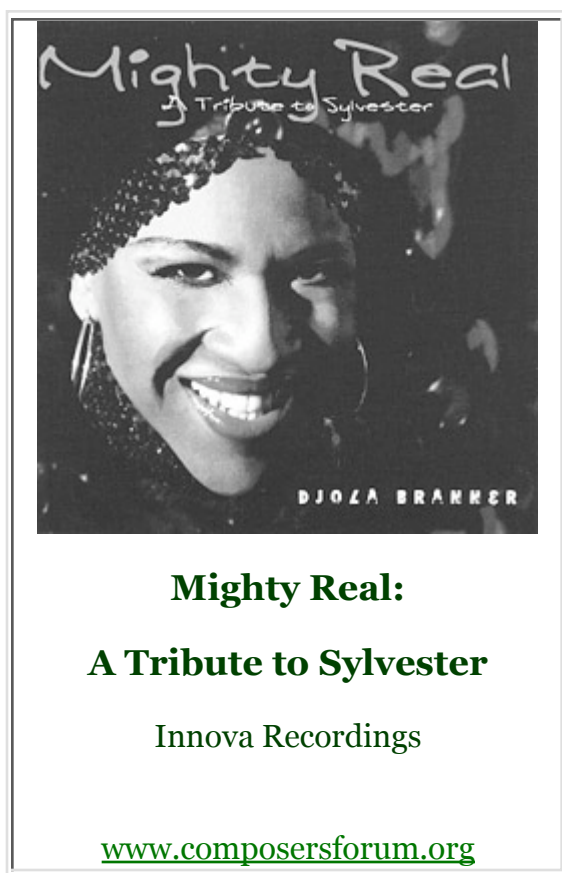
Djola Branner's "You Will Be The One," at the end of this CD, is actually the song that defines the whole project. Both the musical style and lyrics of Branner's song help summarize what this historical musical experience is all about. Branner can still remember the person who gave him his first Sylvester album and recalls, "I had waited all my life to hear a man rock like Aretha, shriek like Chaka, and testify like Patti."

*Mighty Real* is Branner's way of celebrating a life he felt needed to be witnessed and remembered; his outstanding falsetto recreates and redefines 10 of Sylvester's greatest hits

The songs Branner chose to highlight on this CD really show the range of musical background and influences Sylvester drew upon. From the tambourine-infused gospel feel of "Changes" and "You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)," which will have you clapping and stomping your feet (can I have a witness?), to the jazzy torch songs "I Tried To Forget You" and "You Are My Friend," this compilation displays amazing diversity on the parts of both Sylvester and Branner. However, it was disco that brought Sylvester into the mainstream with songs such as "Stars" and "Do You Wanna Funk" (you do, I know you do).

*Mighty Real* is actually a multimedia theater production that Branner opened in Minneapolis in June 2000. I enjoyed the CD so much, I may just try to catch the show when it pulls into Boston at the "Out on the Edge" 2000 Festival. But if you can't catch the show live, definitely pick up the CD—and don't be afraid to Funk!

*Roland Palmer lives in Hinesburg.*



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