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## Ledisi thrives with soulful 'Pieces of Me'

By JONATHAN LANDRUM JR.  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Ledisi's jazzy style earned her Grammy nominations for her breakthrough album "Lost & Found" and the follow-up, "Turn Me Loose." Now, the soulful singer is back with

another stellar piece of work, "Pieces of Me," an album filled with engaging love songs and enjoyable high-tempo jams.

Ledisi thrives with passionate ballads that lyrically touch the soul as she sings about hope, love and self-assurance. For 12 tracks, the singer shows that she's fully content with her identity and being her own woman -- no matter what critics might say. She's clearly confident in herself, and it's certainly evident on the title track and the song "Shut Up."

Her vocals are powerful on the piano-driven "Bravo," encouraging listeners to celebrate when overcoming life's trials. She also sings about self-empowerment on "Shine" and "Raise Up."

On "Stay Together," she glows alongside Jaheim. The two exchange verses on working through relationship drama, and how their love has reached its full potential after the two put in the work to understand each other.

But while Ledisi sings about love at its highest, there's also gloom on the album with the lovesick "I Miss You Now," written by John Legend. She attempts to fix a broken relationship following a heated argument, pleading for her mate to return.

In all, Ledisi wows from beginning to the end and doesn't miss a beat with "Pieces of Me." She's already carved out her niche in the world of R&B, and it should not only continue to grow, but surge.

**CHECK THIS TRACK OUT:** "I Gotta Get to You" is a slow-paced, soulful ballad where Ledisi yearns to reach her lover face-to-face.

Follow Jonathan Landrum Jr. on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/MrLandrum31>



A view of the Manhattan skyline in the morning. It was taken on Miss New York, which was going from the Statue of Liberty back to New York City.

Kaci Wade/Daily Republic photos

## Two years of fundraising pays off in trip to Boston and New York

By KACI WADE  
SPECIAL TO THE DAILY REPUBLIC

At the end of May my classmates and I at Solano Christian Academy took a 10-day trip to the eastern United States.

We went to Boston and New York to discover some of the unique learning experiences there.

We'd been fundraising for our trip for two years. The fundraisers included serving food for tips at functions such as Breakfast with Santa, selling raffle tickets and asking for donations. Those two years of fundraising were absolutely worth it. It was hard to believe we were actually in Boston until we were driving through the city on our tour bus.

Now, I pretty much expected to like New York better than Boston, and truthfully, I did -- but Boston has its own unique flavor.

I really enjoyed the Witch History Museum in Salem because the presentation was interesting and flowed well.

While we were in Salem we also went on a tour of the New England Pirate Museum, which was both interesting and entertaining. The Pirate Museum included many life-sized scenes of the region's pirate history. The tour guide for the museum was one of my favorites.

John Quincy Adams' retirement home was another site I enjoyed. The house seemed like a maze because of the many rooms, hallways, and staircases. It contrasted greatly with Adams' birthplace, a two-story wooden structure with low ceilings.

The other big highlight in Boston was the Duck Tour, which was a 45- to 60-minute driving tour of the city in the old WWI 'Ducks.' The 'Ducks' are amphibious vehicles, able to go on both land and water, and the tour ended with a short ride on the Charles River.

New York exceeded my expectations. I loved the city. Even walking for blocks through the



Plymouth Plantations' Mayflower II, left, is a full-scale replica of the original ship that landed in Plymouth in 1620. It is located in Boston, about 5 minutes away from Plymouth Rock. Bottom left, The Zodiac Heads Fountain in New York displays all the Chinese Zodiac signs. It was designed by Ai Weiwei.



### If you go . . .

- **Empire State Building:** <http://www.esbnyc.com>
- **Radio City Music Hall:** <http://music-hall-ny.com/index.php>
- **Boston Duck Tours:** <http://www.bostonducktours.com>
- **Witch History Museum:** <http://www.witchhistorymuseum.com/witchhistory.html>
- **New England Pirate Museum:** <http://www.piratemuseum.com/pirate.html>

couple of times they looked as though they were prepared to run someone over. The only time I felt in immediate danger was when a couple of people from our class started yelling "Go Red Sox!" at our trip to the Yankees game. I witnessed firsthand that the infamous Yankees-Red Sox rivalry was not exaggerated in the least.

Our trip is something that I'll remember and cherish for the rest of my life, and I'm very thankful I had the opportunity to go. I definitely hope to go back someday.

heat was bearable simply because of how interesting the city itself was, with all the vendors, stores and pedestrians.

My favorite part of our trip was when we went to the Empire State building, even though it took about an hour total getting up to and back down from the observation deck. The view was worth the wait.

The Radio City Music Hall tour

was also a favorite of mine because of the highly entertaining tour guide. That added to how interesting the building itself was, with its enormous seating capacity, giant stage and interesting architecture.

The city could also be scary, though. I constantly feared straying away from my group and becoming lost. The taxi drivers mostly just honked loudly but a

distortion of her dismal life in Victorian London. See, the rest of her family was killed in a fire when she was a child. In the first game, the girl was trying to piece together her sanity; 10 years later, she's out of the asylum but trying to find out what caused her initial trauma.

The clues are scattered throughout Wonderland -- but it's being destroyed by the runaway Infernal Train and consumed by Ruin Spawn, creatures made of oil, machinery and disembodied doll heads. This isn't the cartoon version of Wonderland.

Alice herself is a raven-haired beauty, closer to the goth girls hanging around your local Hot Topic than the angelic blondes who usually play the role. She is armed with an assortment of colorful weapons:

a "vorpil blade" and a hobby-horse for melee combat, a pepper grinder and a grenade-launching teapot for ranged attacks.

The action is wonderfully smooth, whether Alice is battling monsters or leaping between floating platforms. She can also shrink herself, which allows her to find hidden fragments of her memory or read the warnings of an insane child who visited Wonderland before her.

The environments include a sprawling steampunk factory, an expanse of undersea shipwrecks and a colossal dollhouse, and they're all beautiful in their decrepitude.

While individual levels are gorgeous, they also drag on a bit too long. "Madness Returns" would have benefited from

tighter level design with broader variety.

It's also beset by glitches. Several times I saw poor Alice plummet to her death through supposedly solid platforms, and I got trapped in one scenario when an essential item didn't materialize when it was supposed to. The game's flow is also broken up by oddly timed, too-frequent loading screens that spoil the sense of immersion in this dark fantasy.

There's much to love about "Alice: Madness Returns." It lets you explore a fantastic world that's unlike any you've seen before. It delivers a kind of action -- running, jumping, exploration -- that has sadly gone out of fashion.

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## 'Alice' returns to a dark, twisted Wonderland

By LOU KESTEN  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

If Lewis Carroll were alive today, I suspect he would enjoy playing video games. After all, he was a devotee of puzzles and board games.

Carroll's creations are no strangers to the video-game universe. They have popped up in games ranging from the whimsical "Kingdom Hearts" to the grisly "Silent Hill." Alice herself has starred in several releases, most notably 2000's "American McGee's Alice."

After more than a decade, McGee has revisited Wonderland with "Alice: Madness Returns." It's a fascinating project that's undermined by some sloppy programming.

McGee's Wonderland is all inside Alice's head, a fun house

### MUSIC Review

"Alice: Madness Returns"

Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, \$59.99; PC, \$49.99

Electronic Arts

★★★ (OUT OF FOUR)