

Gretchen Parlato - In a Dream (2009)

Written by bluesever

Thursday, 23 May 2019 12:54 -

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1 *I Can't Help It* 4:49 2 *Within Me* 5:34 3 *Butterfly* 5:02 4 *In A Dream* 5:30 5 *Doralice* 3:22 6 *Turning Into Blue* 5:13 7 *E.S.P.* 4:05 8 *Azure* 4:17 9 *On The Other Side* 3:58 10 *Weak* 5:10 Bass – Derrick Hodge (tracks: 2-4,6-10) Drums – Kendrick Scott (tracks: 2,4,6,9,10) Electric Piano – Aaron Parks (tracks: 4,7,9,10) Glockenspiel – Aaron Parks (tracks: 6) Guitar – Lionel Loueke (tracks: 1-5,7-9) Organ – Aaron Parks (tracks: 4,6) Percussion – Gretchen Parlato (tracks: 7,9), Kendrick Scott (tracks: 2) Piano – Aaron Parks (tracks: 2,6,8) Producer – Michele Locatelli Synthesizer – Aaron Parks (tracks: 10) Vocals – Gretchen Parlato, Lionel Loueke (tracks: 1,3,5,8,9)

Gretchen Parlato is a rising star in vocal jazz circles of the 2000s who everyone should pay attention to and enjoy. Her singing is pure sterling silver, accented with just a hint of ethnic shadings and a big helping of modern style that goes well beyond standard fare. As alluring, distinct, and mature as her youthful instrument is, she deserves extra credit for choosing some of the most interesting young players who also are ascending to major-league status. Guitarist/vocalist Lionel Loueke, keyboardist Aaron Parks, bassist Derrick Hodge, and drummer Kendrick Scott are all leaders in their own right, but add bright and inventive accompaniment that perfectly matches the pristinely hopeful sounds Parlato expresses. The music taps from many sources, including a cute vocal variation of Herbie Hancock's funky "Butterfly," Wayne Shorter's "E.S.P." with rain forest imagery, scat, and quirky 6/8 beats, or Duke Ellington's "Azure" in adapted 5/4 time with Loueke's guitar and Hodge in late. Stevie Wonder's "I Can't Help It" is a pining, crossover, Latin-tinged love song as Parlato sings and Loueke scats and add mouth pops, while Dori Caymmi's skittering "Doralice" is easily representative of expanded tropicalia sensuality. Parks, much like his peer Robert Glasper, has the modern spirit song, loose-repeat-phrased-and-deep-harmonic piano style down pat. As you listen to the Glasper/Parlato joint composition "In a Dream," or the 7/8 meter of "Turning into Blue," you are enveloped in this thin veneer of cloudy, dream sequence sound that identifies the heart and soul of these unique musicians. "Weak" turns this concept into a rock/funk beat emphasized by Fender Rhodes electric piano juxtaposing choppy rhythms versus Parlato's sweet voice, whereas "On the Other Side" flips the script in a shuffle with percussion in shades of renewal and retrieval. A muffled, taped recording of Parlato singing at age two is tacked on two tracks,

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emphasizing the growth curve she has experienced, but more so how she appreciates the child-like wonder that her music clearly retains. Gretchen Parlato is going to be a major player on the contemporary vocal music scene, jazz or not. *In a Dream* already shows vast potential realized, and is easily recommended to those who appreciate vocal music with an instrumentalist's concept. ---Michael G. Nastos, AllMusic Review

Gretchen Parlato grew up in a musical household, the daughter of bassist/guitarist Dave Parlato (who worked with Don Ellis, Warne Marsh, Gil Melle and Frank Zappa, among others). She won the 2004 Thelonious Monk Jazz Vocal Competition and released her debut CD on her own label the following year; *In a Dream* is her long awaited follow-up and it does not disappoint. Like many jazz musicians of her generation, Parlato casts a wide net in choosing her repertoire, drawing from pop, jazz standards and her own originals, with a sympathetic band including African guitarist/singer Lionel Loueke, pianist Aaron Parks, bassist Derrick Hodge and drummer Kendrick Scott, all of whom have recorded as leaders.

Parlato kicks off by engaging in a playful Latin setting of Stevie Wonder's "I Can't Help It," with Loueke as her sole partner. Her first original, the album's title track, is set to a tune by pianist Robert Glasper, a breathy ballad that shimmers like sunlight on the water. "Turning Into Blue," with music by Alan Hampton, is a breezy affair that successfully blends elements of jazz and pop.

Parlato's magical rendition of Duke Ellington's infrequently performed "Azure" finds her musicians very reserved yet taking the music down a different path, while the singer overdubs extra lines at times. She bubbles with energy in the electric setting of Wayne Shorter's "E.S.P.," scatting a solo with occasional overdubbed excerpts of her singing at the age of two. A vintage home recording is also added to her interpretation of Herbie Hancock's "Butterfly," with her sweet voice complemented by Loueke's inventive acoustic guitar and offbeat mouth clicking. Parlato resists preset boundaries and follows her own muse, rewarding listeners with her spirit of adventure. ---Ken Dryden, allaboutjazz.com

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