

Gerald Wilson - Detroit (2009)

Written by bluesever

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1 *Blues On Belle Isle* 5:30 2 *Cass Tech* 8:47 3 *Detroit* 6:39 4 *Miss Gretchen* 7:06 5 *Before Motown* 7:12 6 *The Detroit River* 8:48 7 *Everywhere* 6:07 8 *Aram* 6:13 Rick Baptist Trumpet Ron Barrows Trumpet Les Benedict Trombone Luis Bonilla Trombone Winston Byrd Trumpet Todd Coolman Bass Ronnie Cuber Sax (Baritone) Yvette Devereaux Violin Jon Faddis Flugelhorn, Trumpet Frank Greene Flugelhorn, Trumpet Antonio Hart Flute, Sax (Alto), Sax (Soprano) Trey Henry Bass Sean Jones Flugelhorn, Guest Artist, Trumpet Eric Jorgensen Trombone Jeff Kaye Trumpet Jackie Kelso Sax (Alto), Sax (Soprano) Terry Landry Sax (Baritone) Hubert Laws Flute, Guest Artist Lewis Nash Drums Jimmy Owens Flugelhorn, Trumpet Douglas Purviance Trombone (Bass) Bobby Rodriguez Trumpet Renee Rosnes Piano Terell Stafford Flugelhorn, Trumpet Louis Jr. VanTaylor Sax (Baritone), Sax (Tenor) Kamasi Washington Sax (Tenor) Peter Washington Bass Randall Willis Flute, Sax (Alto) Anthony Wilson Guest Artist, Guitar Gerald Wilson Orchestra Primary Artist Mike Wimberly Trombone

Detroit comprises a six-composition suite commissioned for the 2009 thirtieth anniversary Detroit International Jazz Festival, played in the studio with musicians from composer/arranger Gerald Wilson's Los Angeles home or New York City area. Curiously, there are no Motor City-based players on the disc, but the themes are based in certain locales from the industrial Midwestern City that has fallen on hard economic times but played a pivotal role in the development of Wilson's highly developed skills as a composer, arranger, and bandleader. A quite spirited and energetic music is heard here from the 90-year-old Wilson, whose charm and wit would rival anyone many decades his junior. It's a swinging affair molded in the traditional big-band visage of Count Basie, Ernie Wilkins, or early Quincy Jones, with Wilson's deft touch for embellishing the blues. Players like trumpeter Sean Jones, son/guitarist Anthony Wilson, violinist Yvette Devereaux, the fine pianist Brian O'Rourke, and particularly L.A. alto saxophonist and flutist Randall Willis or Kamasi Washington on tenor sax, spice up the band's ensemble and solo contributions. The suite begins with "Blues on Belle Isle," a bopping tribute to the riverside playground and picnic area Detroiters depend on to relax and escape from their troubles. The vaunted school for many jazz legends over the years, a dedication to "Cass Tech" is based on the changes of Benny Golson's "Along Came Betty," and swings along quite nicely

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with a reharmonized melody. The title track is a ballad for the sprawling metropolis that reflects both its jewels and rundown buildings, while "Before Motown" is a regal and tough Spanish-flavored piece, and the finale "The Detroit River" goes from hard bop right into solos, with Jones as the strongman. In the middle is "Miss Gretchen" for Mack Avenue founder and festival financial supporter Gretchen Valade; it's a midtempo swinger reflecting Charles Mingus' start-stop, pedal-point slow downs and speed ups paired with Duke Ellington's elegance. The two pieces not a part of the suite are the near-13-minute "Everywhere," a unified, powerful, and modal retro-jazz piece reflective of the '70s à la Frank Foster's Loud Minority. The held tension and release of the sprightly waltz "Aram" differentiates from the other selections in that the band cuts loose a bit more, features brief solos from trumpeter Terrell Stafford or alto saxophonist Antonio Hart, and more accurately reflects the personality of the author rather than the city he loves and owes respect to. Making this joyous music, and getting paid well for it, must be extremely gratifying to Wilson and his bandmates, but what it really does show off is Detroit in a positive light, something it desperately needs considering all of the negative press it receives for non-cultural stories. Detroit, in fact, remains a great American city, persevering and enduring through ignorance and abandonment, and those who live and work there will be pleased that Wilson's music perfectly represents their shining spirit and swinging souls. ---Michael G. Nastos, AllMusic Review

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