Marilyn Scott - Walking With Strangers (2001)

1. Loving You 2. I Always Think Of You 3. Give In 4. All Of The Above 5. Beginning With You 6. You Don't Know What Love Is 7. Walking With Strangers 8. Don't Let Love Get Away 9. Who's Looking For Me? 10. No Room For Hate 11. A Call For Peace Marilyn Scott (vocals); Ray Fuller, James Hara (guitar); Patrice Rushen (piano, keyboards); Renato Russell Ferante (keyboards); Jimmy Haslip (electric bass, fretless bass, keyboards, percussion); Vinny Coliauta, Terry Lynn Carrington, Michael White (drums); Darlene Perry, Lori Perry, Carolyn Perry, Leslie Smith (background vocals).

The well-known adult contemporary singer debuted her powerful, poetic, and anthemic closing track, "No Room for Hate," in April of 2000 in front of 80,000 people at Equality Rocks, an all-star concert to benefit the Human Rights Campaign. The song and its message of compassion seem even more timely coming out just a few months after September 11. The rest of the time here, Scott's appealing voice tackles her usual spread of romantic lyrics and stylistic excursions to Brazil (the balmy, soundscape-enhanced samba-lite "I Always Think of You," co-written with and featuring guitarist Ricardo Silveira). She's been part of the Los Angeles studio scene for many years and always works with the cream of the crop. The inspirational, semi-gospel-flavored "Give In" features producer Russell Ferrante on keyboards, while Ferrante's fellow Yellowjacket, bassist Jimmy Haslip, plays on various cuts, including the dark-chorded, bluesy retro-soul meditation "All of the Above" (written by Brenda Russell and Michael Ruff) and an elegant cover of "You Don't Know What Love Is." This last cut was produced by drummer Terri Lyne Carrington and features a seductive percussion line and Patrice Rushen's restrained piano behind one of Scott's more emotional vocals (in a duet with Frank McComb). Most of the disc features live drumming, so the programmed groove of the otherwise appealing title track comes as a little bit of a letdown. "Don't Let Love Get Away" is a more overt gospel-flavored rumination on love lost, while "Who's Looking for Me" brings Scott together once again with keyboardist George Duke. With the exception of a few tracks, this disc is pretty much typical middle-of-the-road Scott; she could be the poster girl for adult contemporary singers but she should also take a cue from Randy Crawford and try some more up-tempo material. --- Jonathan Widran, Rovi

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