

Charlie Mariano - Helen 12 Trees (1976)

Written by bluesever

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01. *Helen 12 Trees (Mariano)* - 4:46 02. *Parvati's Dance (Mariano)* - 7:35 03. *Sleep, My Love (Mariano)* - 2:54 04. *Thorn of a White Rose (Hammer)* - 4:31 05. *Neverglades Pixie (Mariano)* - 7:12 06. *Charlotte (Mariano)* - 6:35 07. *Avoid the Year of the Monkey (Mariano)* - 5:30
Charlie Mariano - soprano saxophone, alto saxophone, flute, nagaswaram Zbigniew Seifert - violin Jan Hammer - acoustic piano, electric piano, Moog synthesizer Jack Bruce - bass guitar John Marshall - drums Nippy Noya - percussion

Saxophonist, flutist, and composer Charlie Mariano was 26 years into his recording career as a leader when he popped this wild bit of hardcore jazz-rock fusion out in 1976. He'd been playing with musicians from all over the world for most of his tenure, and *Helen 12 Trees* was no exception. The musicians Mariano was capable of recruiting had always been astonishing; in fact, it was his norm, but this group, despite being together for a very short time, was one of his finest. Mariano is aided by Jan Hammer from the Mahavishnu Orchestra on keyboards, former Graham Bond Organization and Cream bassist Jack Bruce, Soft Machine drummer John Marshall, Polish violin wizard Zbigniew Seifert, and Asian percussionist Nippy Noya. Just under 40 minutes in length, this is one of the great, under-heard records to ever come from the fusion years. Tracks like "Parvati's Dance," where Mariano plays the Indian nagaswaram, a reed instrument that has a very unusual tonality, is gorgeous when juxtaposed against the droning violin of Seifert or the high-pitched wandering keys of Hammer. Bruce and Marshall are playing a near dub rhythm of pulse and bubble. "Thorn of a White Rose" is by Hammer, the only non-Mariano cut here. It carries within it dueling winding lines of violin and saxophone, and Hammer becomes the funky part of the rhythm section where Bruce carries a straight series of four-note lines very forcefully as Marshall plays his kit in knotty, military style with heavy snare. Mariano's solo hits the skronk a bit before Hammer comes right back to post-bop jazz on the Rhodes. "Neverglades Pixie" is a ballad gone to wonky funk, where the hand percussion on bells, vibes, metal rods, and other more standard instruments adds another layer to Marshall's rimshots as Seifert takes a solo right out of Cajun fiddling and the blues -- until he gets to meet Hammer's big, cluttered chords and winds it out to the Gypsy jazz side of things. The bottom line is that over seven tracks, this set never runs out of surprises, grooves, kinetic energy, or astonishing improvisational ideas. But more than this, because of the great sensitivity Mariano

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has as a leader, it never runs out of soul either. There is pure poetry in this music, albeit of a very strident nature, and is certainly one of the finest under Mariano's name as a leader -- it's a stone classic and one of the best examples of post-Miles jazz-rock fusion ever recorded! MPS was a visionary label, and kept putting out quality jazz, rock, and big band records until it closed its doors in the late '70s, and this title is prime evidence of label boss Joachim Ernst Berendt's vision. ---Thom Jurek, Rovi

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