

Gerri Allen - Flying Toward The Sound (2010)

Written by bluesever

Tuesday, 30 April 2019 15:00 -

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Refractions: Flying Toward The Sound (A Solo Piano Suite In Eight Pictures) 1 *Refraction I - Flying Toward The Sound* 6:02 2 *Refraction II - Red Velvet In Winter* 5:56 3 *Refraction III - Dancing Mystic Poets At Midnight* 4:20 4 *Refraction IV - God's Ancient Sky* 16:03 5 *Refraction V - Dancing Mystic Poets At Twilight* 3:22 6 *Refraction VI - Faith Carriers Of Life* 6:58 7 *Refraction VII - Dancing Mystic Poets At Dawn* 5:43 8 *Refraction VIII - Flying Toward The Sound (Reprise)* 6:53 9 *Your Pure Self (Mother To Son)* 5:07 Gerri Allen - piano

Pianist and composer Gerri Allen is an artist who has never been complacent or self-deceiving. She has always listened deeply, and in the process has pushed her own envelope of expression and creativity, looking toward a horizon as eternally on the move as she is. *Flying Toward the Sound*, subtitled “A Solo Piano Excursion Inspired by Cecil Taylor, McCoy Tyner and Herbie Hancock,” features an eight-part suite called “*Refractions: Flying Toward the Sound*.” Allen doesn’t play the music of her muses. Rather, she invokes their very spirits in her own utterly unique compositional method. On the opening title track it’s Tyner, with his open-ended lyricism, extended chord voicings, and use of space. But Allen builds on his use of modes by adding her masterful large chord rumblings with the left hand in the deep registers of the piano while using the middle ones for a series of elegantly voiced melodic statements. On “*Red Velvet in Winter*,” for Hancock, she employs her inspiration’s method of composition as orchestration. Themes are inviting; she blends left-handed constructions, soulful lyric notions, and right-hand technique to evoke the timbral voices of many other instruments. But it is on “*Dancing Mystic Poets at Midnight*,” for Taylor, where the work really begins to sing. She reads through not only Taylor’s use of rhythm and harmonics but his declared debt to Duke Ellington as a cornerstone. Playing two-handed melodies in high and middle registers that create a pulsing palette, she begins to improvise by alternating melodies and creating a third that, while percussive, is fluid and evocative of the space and distance a dancer must travel in a leap. The 16-minute centerpiece of the album is “*God’s Ancient Sky*.” It denotes the spiritual nature of this recording. Allen arrives in new territory after her muses, in order to create a set of sonic wings with which to fly from them toward the unknown. Its use of density and space, elegance and force, and its conscious engagement with the elliptical, both harmonically and rhythmically, is literally breathtaking. It walks a labyrinthine path between jazz and classical music in the

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musical world, and between earth, sky, and underworld in the spiritual realm. "Dancing Midnight Poets at Twilight" (sic) employs Taylor's interpretation of Ellingtonian swing dramatically. The pulse here dances between rhythm and harmony with her signature lyricism ever at the forefront. The work reprises its opening theme in summary, but with noted harmonic extensions from a new musical terrain. She closes with "Your Pure Self (Mother to Son)," a gorgeous personal ballad outside this suite. Flying Toward the Sound is a major work for solo piano: courageous, vulnerable, poetically articulated, and technically awe-inspiring in form and execution. ---Thom Jurek, AllMusic Review

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