

Mariana Semkina - Sleepwalking (2020)

Written by bluelover (Bogdan Marszałkowski)

Sunday, 27 September 2020 09:03 -

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1 *Dark Matter* 2 *Am I Sleeping Or Am I Dead* 3 *Turn Back Time* 4 *Ars Longa Vita Brevis* 5 *Invisible* 6 *Lost At Sea* 7 *Skin* 8 *How To Be Alone* 9 *Everything Burns* 10 *Mermaid Song* 11 *Still Life* Bass Guitar – Grigoriy Losenkov (tracks: 5, 8), Nick Beggs (tracks: 3, 7) Drums – Craig Blundell (tracks: 3, 7), Svetlana Shumkova (tracks: 8, 9) Guitar – Vlad Avy Keyboards – Grigoriy Losenkov (tracks: 2, 4) Piano – Grigoriy Losenkov (tracks: 1, 5, 6, 7, 10), Jordan Rudess (tracks: 11) St. Petersburg Orchestra "1703"

Mariana Semkina swaps her 'j' for an 'i' as she slips away from the highly acclaimed duo iamthemorning to fly her solo flag with a typically ethereal set in *Sleepwalking*.

Of course, this isn't the first iamthemorning solo outing; keyboard player Gleb Kolyadin has already used the solo route as an outlet for his remarkable playing. To be fair, neither fall too far from the tree.

As she's confessed to *PROG* magazine, there are no concessions to "unicorns or cupcakes," – heaven forbid – and there's a comforting sense that we're on reasonably familiar ground from the pre-Raphaelite flavoured sleeve.

She's talked of *Sleepwalking* as being "an important personal achievement because this means I managed to get over a lot of doubts and insecurities." That fragility which we're familiar with from iamthemorning spills over into the songs that see Grigoriy Losenkov provide the bulk of the musical support. His piano and keys and general arranging skills being the bedrock of the album while Mariana casts her magic dust on top. Not without a hint of the Amos/Bush comparisons with which she seems destined to suffer.

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Of the guest musicians, Nick Beggs and Craig Blundell come on board on Turn Back Time and Skin, providing a deep groove on the former which is as strong and bold (and frankly rollicking) a piece of music you'd expect from this combination while the latter builds on a skittering percussive pattern; the likes of which you're likely to find on Beggs' solo work.

However, the standout piece is perhaps where Dream Theater's Jordan Rudess channels a deft classical touch on Still Life. Rarely given a chance in the bluster of Dream Theater's work, as much as anything, it's interesting to hear the contrast between his accompaniment and that of the more familiar Gleb Kolyadin.

Soft guitar and deep strings characterise Ars Longa Vita Brevis, Lost At Sea and Invisible and provide a contrast to the delicacy of the lyric. The latter rumbles slowly, the sense of impending maelstrom building until the threat of the storm passes. It's not always the case as she sings "I will teach you how to be alone," and finds solace in solitude yet the massive injection of bravado imparts an unexpected confidence mirrored by the overwhelming strings on Mermaid Song.

Taking her visions in a new direction, free of the 'chamber prog' label. Sleepwalking finds Mariana Semkina's gossamer touch flirting with new areas yet maintaining that element of charm that comes with her calling card of Gothic melodrama. Never one to be afraid of exposing her soul, her hopes and fears, her sublime new songs touch a new vein. ---Mike Ainscoe, atthebarrier.com

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