

Keiko Matsui - Soul Quest (2013)

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01. *Dream Seeker* [05:48] 02. *Black Lion* [04:02] 03. *Top Secret* [05:47] 04. *A Night With Cha Cha* [05:30] 05. *Moving Mountain* [02:56] 06. *Antarctica--A Call To Action* [05:51] 07. *Soul Quest* [04:12] 08. *Proof* [05:01] 09. *Two Hearts* [05:49] 10. *Stingo* [04:33] Musicians: Keiko Matsui - vocals Eric Baines - bass Grecco Buratto - guitar Giulio Carmassi - trumpet Brian Dunne - drums Will Lee - bass Chuck Loeb - guitars, keyboards David Mann - flute, horn arrangements, saxophone Derek Nakamoto - drums, keyboards, loop programming Fernando Saunders - bass Andy Snitzer - sax (soprano) Cameron Stone - cello Narada Michael Walden - drums, programming, vocals Kirk Whalum - sax (tenor)

Soul Quest marks pianist Keiko Matsui's 25th recording anniversary. Since the very beginning, her crystalline piano and accessible yet harmonically rich compositions have been mainstays, not only on the smooth and contemporary jazz scenes, but also on the charts. She enlisted an all-star studio group to assist her on these ten tunes, nine of which she wrote or co-wrote. Most tracks were produced either by Fourplay guitarist Chuck Loeb (who contributes one tune, co-wrote several others, and plays on the set) or Narada Michael Walden (who also plays drums selectively and co-wrote the album's closer). Other contributors include Will Lee, Marcus Miller, Fernando Saunders, Kirk Whalum, David Mann, Andy Snitzer, and Brian Dunne, to name a few. The charting single "Black Lion," with its breezy acoustic guitar line from Grecco Buratto and some tasty loops and percussion programming from Derek Nakamoto, is a clear standout, as is "A Night with Cha Cha," with Loeb, Lee, and Dunne. Matsui's piano uses the familiar Latin form as a jumping-off point for improvisation. Her composition weaves an intricate melody line for her piano and Whalum's tenor saxophone with a couple of dramatic changes in the bridge. "Antarctica: A Call to Action" walks a hazy line between contemporary jazz, classical crossover, and even rock, with stellar solos from Whalum on both tenor and soprano, a punchy gatekeeper bassline by Miller, elegant and sometimes thunderous drumming by Walden, and atmospheric guitar from Matthew Charles Heulitt. Matsui uses her piano and other keyboards to direct its many parts like a mini-suite. The title track is a tango-inspired jazz ballad with Matsui interacting dreamily with Cameron Stone's cello over the first half, but Eric Baines' bassline and Nakamoto's funky synth and programming offer a tempo and color shift that Matsui builds upon, exchanging fours with all her players. Set-closer "Stingo," written by the pianist and Walden, is

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her tribute to Sting. Matsui's precise ostinati and arpeggios are pushed by Walden's aggressive kit work and programming, with colorful textures added by Jimi Reitzel's keyboards. There is a cinematic quality to the breezy and labyrinthine elegance of her improvising against a pronounced rhythmic attack. Soul Quest's greatest achievement lies in its diversity, and in the way Matsui applies her imagination as a composer, improviser, and arranger. It ranks with her finest work. ---Thom Jurek, Rovi

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