Cassandra Wilson – Another Country (2012)

01 – Red Guitar 02 – No More Blues 03 – O Sole Mio 04 – Deep Blue 05 – Almost Twelve 06 – Passion 07 – When Will I See You Again 08 – Another Country 09 – Letting You Go 10 – Olomuroro 11 – O Sole Mio Funk Personnel: Cassandra Wilson – vocals, guitar Fabrizio Sotti – guitars Julien Labro – accordion Nicola Sorato – bass Mino Cinelu, Lekan Babalola – percussion NOCCA Chamber Choir

On her 19th album, Cassandra Wilson, ever the musical chameleon, changes directions once more. She is arguably the greatest living female jazz singer. Well known for her blues, soul, pop covers, and jazz standards, her smoky alto bends almost everything to its will. Wilson's phrasing is utterly unique, as original as any horn player's or pianist's music. Another Country, co-produced by Wilson and guitarist Fabrizio Sotti, was recorded in three different studios in Florence, New Orleans, and New York. She wrote all but three selections here: there are two instrumentals by Sotti and a reading of "O Sole Mio." Other players include bassist Nicola Sorato, Julien Labro on accordion, and percussionists Mino Cinelu and Lekan Babalola. Opener "Red Guitar" displays the wisdom of this small-group approach beautifully. Her vocal illustrates a mysterious, sensual jazz blues that is accented by Sotti, hand drums, and an atmospheric, unintrusive accordion. "No More Blues" is more elegiac, a spacy jazz tune with fine syncopation and the suggested undercurrent of a blues backbeat. "Almost Twelve" is an ambitious attempt at bossa nova but it falls short. Wilson restrains herself to fit the song form rather than retrofit it to her voice; it's too much of a compromise. The Latin undertones in "Passion" work far better and the singer is able to engage her lower register and sing in near counterpoint to her accompanists. It's a heady, intoxicating swirl of lyric harmony and rhythmic invention. With its classical trappings and the prominence of the accordion, "O Sole Mio" should sound corny -- it doesn't. Wilson delivers it as a haunting folk song and reinvents it for the 21st century. The slippery meld of jazz, folk, and pop in the set's longest tune, "When Will I See You Again," makes it the most unusual and engaging track here. Wilson's compositional language is as imaginative as her singing, and Sotti's skeletal yet seemingly lush arrangements are sumptuous. The title track employs samba, post-bop jazz, and nuevo flamenco. Wilson's voice compels her poetic lyrics to assert themselves over the melody, as Sotti soars in his tasteful solo. Though there are a couple of missteps here, Another Country is a welcome new phase for

Wilson. Not only are her boundaries as a singer expanding with her musical choices; her songwriting instincts and languages are developing exponentially as well. --- Thom Jurek, Rovi

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