

REEL PEOPLE: Seven Ways To Wonder (Label: Papa Records)

Written by Bill Buckley

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Musos, producers and all round good guys Oli Lazarus and Mike Patto make up the core of Reel People and their debut set 'Second Guess' won acclaim from right across the soul/dance music spectrum. It found favour with both the modern soul crew and those who like their beats a tad more house-flavoured and with this follow-up, 'Seven Ways To Wonder' they're set to repeat that success. Here, the duo almost repeat the formula - but if anything they up the soul quotient - though they don't totally ditch the house sensitivities. It appears to me that the Reel boys might have spent some time this year listening to 4 Hero's wonderful 'Play With Changes' set. There the sound owed much to the classic soul grooves of 70s and 80s artists and producers like Maze and Charles Stepney and here we get that same addictively mesmerising soul feel - though (as with 'Play With Changes') everything's thoroughly modern. Take the opener as a case in point. 'Alibi' remarkably features a production that seems to combine the feel of Incognito, the rhythms of Sergio Mendes and the energy of Stevie Wonder. Add to all that a big vocal from native New Yorker, Darien, and you have a cut that satisfies at every level. Darien's also at the mike for another of the LP's big tunes - 'Upside'. This one's a crisp, fastish, finger-clickin' dancer that will delight the modern soul room. They'll also lap up 'Amazing'. Here the vocal's down to the ever-reliable Tony Momrelle and Imaani and they're just right for the tight little beater that features bubbling keys that will recall Maze's 'Twilight'. Other album goodies include 'Anything You Want' (featuring a funky vocal from Tanita D'Mour), 'It Will Be' (an Incognito shuffle layered under Benson-esque vocals) and 'Perfect Sky' (on which Joy Rose recalls the lovely Minnie Riperton). In truth I could have done without 'Ordinary Man' - too much like Hall and Oates' 'Man Eater' - but it's more than compensated for by the jazzy Vanessa Freeman vocalised 'Rise And Fly'. Add to all that a couple of bonuses in the form of a kitchen-sink-all-hands-on-deck Rasmus Faber remix of 'Alibi' and a great sparse soulful Pete Kuzman tweak on 'Upside' and you have a delicious modern soul album that is truly modern, despite its retro roots. The album will be available in March.

(BB) 4/5