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Pearl Charles Blends Tribute and Innovation

John Amen · Wednesday, January 20th, 2021

With her third album, *Magic Mirror*, Los Angeles-born Pearl Charles upgrades 60's and 70's pop and soft-rock templates, exploring such perennial themes as loss, identity crisis, and relational flux. The project brims with unshakable hooks, spotlighting Charles's ever-crystalline voice.

The sequence opens with "Only for Tonight," featuring an immediately seductive melody and 70's-era beats à la Abba and/or their 90's proteges Ace of Base. "What I Need" is an exemplary earworm, a seamless tribute to such artists as Carole King and Carly Simon. "Oh baby, I don't wanna lose you / maybe that's what I need," Charles sings, reflecting on (and perhaps reveling in) the uncertainty of her love life.

On "Imposter," diaristically angsty lyrics contrast with buoyant beats and synth-y progressions. "Too scared to die, but barely alive," Charles confesses on "Don't Feel Like Myself," a self-referential/millennial revamp of The Carpenters' "Close to You." Rather than lauding her lover, as Karen Carpenter does, Charles broodingly focuses on her "face in the mirror," bemoaning her lack of clarity and direction.

"Slipping Away" is instantly infectious, instrumentally and melodically. "We know we live, we know we die / but we don't know why we're here," Charles muses. The more spacious sonics of "Take Your Time" bring to mind Natalie Laura Mering (Weyes Blood), who also mines the 70's canon, albeit via moodier textures and from a more philosophic perspective.

The album closes with "As Long as You're Mine," including a smooth, guitar-led intro reminiscent of Steely Dan. "It doesn't matter that there are rockets flying / it doesn't matter that the water's rising / it doesn't matter as long as you're mine," Charles sings, ending the album on an idealistically romantic yet lingeringly pensive note.

The winning elements of *Magic Mirror* are Pearl Charles's supple voice and her knack for reimagining the classic templates of 60's and 70's singer-songwriters. Charles blends resourcefulness and a contemporary flair, displaying what might be dubbed an historically informed originality.

7.9/10

(Photo: front image of Pearl Charles’s *Magic Mirror*)

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