



Khiov Music LP 43053
Renée Fleming: Dark Hope

Format: 1LP 180g 33rpm / gatefold sleeve, booklet
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Manufacturer: Khiov Music

Original label: Mercury

Genre: PopIt's fitting that Renée Fleming, 'the people's diva', would make an album of pop songs that feels more like a labor of love than a crossover attempt. "Dark Hope" is filled with songs and arrangements that wouldn't appear on a typical attempt to bring a classical vocalist into the mainstream -- witness her dark, intricate take on the Mars Volta's "With Twilight as My Guide". It should almost go without saying that Fleming's voice is just as remarkable here as it is in her usual milieu, but the album proves time and again that she is game for just about anything. Fleming learned how to sing in the more intimate, confessional style that "Dark Hope's" singer/songwriter and alternative rock fare requires just for this project; combined with her interpretive gifts, she does a masterful job of remaining true to the spirit of the original songs while offering her own twists on them. Her voice dances over the wordy, syllable-heavy lyrics of Willy Mason's "Oxygen", brings a mature moodiness to "Stepping Stone" that was lacking in Duffy's spitfire version, and remains connected to the intimacy in the Arcade Fire's "Intervention" even as the song swells around her. Indeed, "Dark Hope's" swelling arrangements are as much a weakness as they are a strength: at times, it feels like the album's producers didn't trust that her gorgeous voice singing these songs would be enough of a draw. Fleming is divinely torchy on Muse's "Endlessly", but her trip-hop-tinged surroundings are no match for her rich vocals. Her interpretation of Band of Horses' "No One's Gonna Love You" is let down by an arrangement that sounds like generic alt-pop -- though, on the other hand, it's a relief that it doesn't sound like "A String Tribute" to Band of Horses. Despite these problems, both of these songs are among "Dark Hope's" standout tracks, along with the subtly sultry electro-folk turn on Jefferson Airplane's "Today" and the urgent yet airy reading of Death Cab for Cutie's "Soul Meets Body". It's just frustrating that even songs as revered as Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" -- which is virtually a standard at this point -- are burdened with anything that takes away from a voice as remarkable as Fleming's singing a melody that powerful. She deserves credit for undertaking such a bold enterprise.

"Dark Hope" - Renée Fleming (voc); David Kahne: key, b, g); Rusty Anderson, Nick Valensi (g); Will Lee (b); Shawn Pelton (dr) & strings sowie background vocals