

Artist: Geneva Renée  
Title: "Beautiful Wonder"  
Review by Alex Henderson

The term "neo-soul" indicates that the listener is going to get something that has one foot in R&B's past and the other foot in R&B's present, and that neo-soul aesthetic is very much at work on Washington, DC-based singer Geneva Renée's "Beautiful Wonder."

This good-natured, easygoing single doesn't sound like it was recorded in the 1970s; the high-tech, hip-hop-influenced production is clearly modern, not retro. But melodically and harmonically, there is no missing the strong 1970s influence that asserts itself on "Beautiful Wonder." Had "Beautiful Wonder" been around in 1976 or 1977, the tune would have easily worked for Deniece Williams or the late Minnie Riperton. Renée, in fact, has a certain sweetness in her voice that recalls Williams and Riperton in the 1970s, and like Williams, she knows how to hit the high notes. It's important to stress, however, that "Beautiful Wonder" goes for a combination of sweetness and grit, which is another thing that Renée has in common with Williams and Riperton. "Beautiful Wonder" isn't the raw, gruff "rock 'em/sock 'em" southern soul that Carla Thomas recorded for Stax Records in the 1960s, but it does put a modern, hip-hop-influenced spin on the type of northern soul, sweet soul and quiet storm R&B that came out of Chicago, Philadelphia and Detroit in the 1970s. And the hip-hop influence doesn't assert itself in the form of an abundance of rapping. There is no rapping at all on "Beautiful Wonder"; rather, hip-hop is acknowledged with the beats and the production by "Dinky" Bingham.

If Renée wanted to be totally retro, she could have gone for a 1970s-like production on "Beautiful Wonder" and tried to make it sound like a Maurice White or Gamble & Huff production from that era. But stylistically, "Beautiful Wonder" takes aim at fans of neo-soul vocalists like Alicia Keys, Jaguar Wright, Erykah Badu and Jill Scott; it favors the blend of modern and classic elements that those artists are known for.

If one has a taste for neo-soul, "Beautiful Wonder" is worth checking out.

Review by Alex Henderson  
Rating: 3.5 Stars (Out of 5)

Alex Henderson is a veteran journalist/music critic whose work has appeared in *Billboard*, *Spin*, *The L.A. Weekly*, *Creem*, *HITS*, *Jazziz*, *JazzTimes*, *CD Review*, *Skin Two*, *Black Radio Exclusive*, *Thrash Metal* and a long list of other well known publications. Known for his eclectic tastes, Alex has contributed several thousand CD reviews to *The All Music Guide* online and series of reference books since 1996. Jello Biafra, Sonny Rollins, Megadeth, Ice Cube, Live, Chick Corea, Public Enemy, Marduk, Bobby Brown, Ra and Everlast are among the many well known artists Alex has interviewed during his long career.