



Indie-Music.com

P.O. Box 78036, Indianapolis, IN 46278 ~ 888.350.0400 (phone) ~ 888.350.0400 (fax)
"Where Serious Musicians Surf" ~ <http://www.indie-music.com>

Artist: Jen Porter

CD: Closer to the Surface

By Barney Quick, Indie-Music.com

Jen Porter is another of those artists who really turns out to be different from the impression one would get from her promo copy and press reviews. Different, as in light years more impressive.

The comparisons are what might throw one. She needs no comparison to any other artists, however influential they may have been in the development of her unique artistic thrust. (Apparently she has spent ample time in the covers trenches, and while I'm sure that's where she gets her polish and sense of how to craft a song, it hasn't made her original music derivative in the least.)

I like musical ensembles that encompass lots of kinds of instrumentation and sides to their style. One gets this from Porter's Most Fabulous Band in spades. There are several kinds of guitar tones here, sometimes within one track, as well as keyboard sounds of many descriptions, from B3 to synthesizer. Horns and theremin even enter the mix.

Take, for example, the barroom piano and solid acoustic-guitar anchor of the opening cut, "Clever Compromise," quickly joined by notes from a distorted guitar held over several measures, as well as a more clean-signaled electric guitar playing little down-home figures that would sound right at home in a country or soul-music arrangement. Then, on the refrain, Porter's harmony-overdubbed lead vocal projects on top of a lush wash of background singers.

The title cut, "Closer to the Surface," has an appealingly dreamy open space, filled but not overwhelmed by an atmospheric leslie-ish guitar figure. This tune also effectively showcases the control and richness of Porter's voice.

"Long Winter" shows off Porter's ability as a pianist to work out highly expressive, intricate figures with another instrument, in this case Chris Foreman's Hammond B3. This track also gives Joe Thomas an opportunity to demonstrate how a properly placed bass lick can make an important statement within a tune.

"Bursting Water" conveys that kind of unbridled joy that comes from being satisfied at how the years have treated a relationship. The highly danceable arrangement, with a

straightforward rocking beat and an exuberant slide guitar over the gleeful din are right in sync with the looking-back-over-our-adventures lyrics.

The way this tune is followed by “Now is Then,” an anthemic ballad driven by an alternating major / major-with-a-sharp-four piano chord, demonstrates the emotional range within Porter’s approach. Again, there is also a mournful whole-note-and-then-some guitar part that puts the finishing touch on the vibe.

“Wasn’t Her Time,” a tale of fate intervening to stave off death in five-four time, brings all the elements mentioned so far together in forceful service of a well-wrought minor-key chord progression and melody.

“I Don’t Really Know You” is a great vehicle for Porter’s vocal savvy. She goes from a whisper to a throaty shout with each note of it being astoundingly appropriate for what the lyrics and chord changes are calling for. To reiterate, there’s nothing contrived about her delivery, and one never senses that she’s copping licks from any other singer.

“Christain Church” shows how Porter knows just how long to give a particular chord change before moving onto what ought to happen next musically. Her understanding of how to give an arrangement that extra sparkle is also on display here, with the addition of a twelve-string guitar on top of the principal six-string acoustic.

I had no idea that such a rich world of auditory delights awaited me just from perusing Porter’s packaging. I’m glad I held off on the preconceived notions long enough to get a few minutes into this exceptional record.

As we all know, there are a million-plus aspiring fashioners of song, some of whom are proficient on a few different instruments, and most are credible enough to provide their little followings with a worthwhile Friday-night jaunt to the neighborhood pub. Hats off to all of them for giving it a shot.

Jen Porter is up to something bigger. This is real music, wide and deep. It’s accessible, but still invites you to take your time to see what’s really there. I don’t need any comparisons to get a handle on what she’s doing. She’s setting a standard by which others down the pike will be compared.