

Despite the fact that Carlton Dubois McClain is in his early twenties, an old soul is housed within his bones. Performing under the name Céran, it is his aspiration to make timeless music as a singer and songwriter. *Verity* picks up where his previous album (*The Art of Céran*) left off, exploring new ways to marry his classical training with contemporary styles of music. He also takes advantage of being multilingual by penning selections in different languages as well as covering a Spanish ballad, extending his reach even further to an international audience.

“Change For Me” takes a hold of mid-tempo R&B, injecting it with danceable organ riffs and tapping into the spirit of Michael Jackson at the peak of pop stardom. It’s all about the boogie as Céran croons passionately over the groove, but it’s occasionally disturbed by loud, distorted keyboard blares that tear a hole through an infectious vibe. The issue with dynamics is exactly the opposite on “Heart On The Line,” where a soft-spoken vocal delivery gets upstaged by the instrumentation. Otherwise, it’s a tender pop ballad regarding a relationship that has fallen by the wayside. Céran’s talents as an arranger are undeniable on this selection, crafting sensitive piano runs that are supported by ample accompaniment on all sides.

“The Wrong of Right” takes reggae for a spin in pop music’s car, diminishing the dub effects while still keeping the syncopated bounce via staccato keyboard riffs and crisp snare pad accents. Céran makes a good lyrical argument for love to thrive in the face of a loveless world and it’s hard not to argue with him when the beat remains as lively as it does for this track.

“Moodswings” is perhaps the best example of his working within contemporary song structures and making it his own. As a sampled break bops its way around turntable scratches and string swells, Céran tells a woman in no uncertain terms that he won’t be taken in by her ulterior motives. His lower vocal range suits this down tempo selection well, blending beautifully with the music underneath his pointed lyrics.

Original compositions like “Encore Une Fois” and “Amaré Otra Vez” are where things really start to get interesting. Not only do they show that Céran knows his way around foreign languages, but they also display an understanding and respect for global musical idioms. The vibrant piano melody featured on “Amaré Otra Vez” skips through an upbeat Latin rhythm while Céran dusts himself off from heartbreak, looking ahead to a future love. The cover of “Somos Novios (It’s Impossible)” is damn near the showstopper of the album as he interprets the piece with passion and boldness, emerging as an honest-to-goodness balladeer before it’s all over.

“Troubled Heart” is another album highlight that looks toward the soul of Motown for inspiration. Doo-wop style harmonies rise to the surface as Céran sings lead and background vocals over a drum beat that gallops across shifting chords. “State of Grace” closes the release on a spiritual note, looking heavenward towards the Creator for strength and guidance. It’s a fitting nod to his early days in the church and an aural affirmation of what has kept him grounded over the years. *Verity* covers a lot of ground, but there is a noted improvement from his debut album in terms of arrangements. Céran is continuing to sharpen his skills as a songwriter and there are many different directions that his career could go in. Judging from the French and

Spanish selections featured on the album, there is the real possibility of him becoming an international crossover artist. Here's hoping that he continues to follow his heart, for it certainly has not failed him so far.

Artist: Céran

Album: *Verity*

Reviewed by Jason Randall Smith

Rating: 3 stars (out of 5)