

# Paula Atherton, *Dancin' Shoes* Review

by Stamish Malcuss



Paula Atherton's seventh full-length album, *Dancin' Shoes*, is a vibrant mosaic of contemporary smooth jazz that blends her adept skills as a saxophonist and singer-songwriter with the expertise of renowned producers such as Greg Manning, Adam Hawley, Jacob Webb, Curtis Harmon, and Lou Gimenez. The album boasts an impressive lineup of four top 10 hits: "Keep it Comin'," "Ready or Not," "Open Road," and the titular "Dancin' Shoes," marking Atherton's continued presence in the smooth jazz world.

*Dancin' Shoes* commences with "Baila," an up-tempo Latin-influenced track that showcases Atherton's round, warm flute sound. It interplays beautifully with rhythmic band hits and creates an irresistible urge to dance. Atherton's engaging solo work and motivic development set a theme for the album. After hearing this ensemble's performance encapsulating a light, joyous Latin flavor merged seamlessly with a smooth jazz groove, you will certainly want to dig deeper.

The album's journey continues with "Inside Out & Backwards," where a funky groove underpins Atherton's dynamic alto saxophone, enlivened by punchy horn sections and a compelling fusion guitar solo by Lou Gimenez. The track

exemplifies Atherton's ability to infuse energy and forward motion into her compositions, making it a standout piece for its rhythmic allure and intricate solo work.

"Keep it Comin'," produced by Jacob Webb, exhibits a classic smooth jazz aesthetic, with Atherton's agile alto sax playing taking center stage. The track's fluid composition is the perfect setting to showcase Atherton's saxophone screams and chromatic approaches as she dazzles with her versatility and technical fluidity.

"Give Me A Reason" slows the pace with a soulful shuffle ballad, featuring Atherton's expressive sax and heartfelt vocals. Her emotive delivery and rich tonality in both instruments highlight her deep R&B and blues influences, making this ballad a poignant moment on the album.

The title track, "Dancin' Shoes," features a medium-up funky beat that lives up to its name. Atherton, Gimenez, and Manning's collaboration produce an engaging and rhythmically infectious composition, promising to get listeners moving.

"Soul Picnic" and "Ready or Not" further diversify the album's sound palette, from the laid-back, sunny vibes of a family picnic to the smooth, relaxing grooves courtesy of Atherton and Hawley's collaboration. These tracks exemplify Atherton's skill in crafting songs that resonate on multiple levels, from the joyous to the contemplative.

Atherton's take on Curtis Mayfield's "Move on Up" and the collaboration with Curtis Harmon on "Time Out" pay homage to their origins while injecting a fresh, funky energy highlighting her vocal and instrumental versatility. The album's narrative concludes with "Open Road," a driving groove that encapsulates the feeling of embarking on a new adventure, perfectly rounding off the journey that *Dancin' Shoes* represents.

Throughout *Dancin' Shoes*, Atherton demonstrates her profound musicality, versatility, and ability to convey emotion through her instruments and voice. The album's production, courtesy of its stellar lineup of producers, complements Atherton's vision, resulting in a cohesive and diverse collection with something for every listener. *Dancin' Shoes* is a compelling addition to her discography and a must-listen for fans of contemporary jazz.

