

Maynard Ferguson - Conquistador (1977)

Written by bluesever

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1. *Gonna Fly Now (Theme From "Rocky")* 4:22 2. *Mister Mellow* 6:33 3. *Theme From Star Trek* 4:30 4. *Conquistador* 7:34 5. *Soar Like An Eagle* 6:27 6. *The Fly* 6:17

Alto Saxophone – George Young , Mike Migliore Baritone Saxophone – Bobby Militello Bass – Gary King, Gordon Johnson, Will Lee Drums – Allan Schwartzberg, Harvey Mason, Peter Erskine Flugelhorn, Soloist – Maynard Ferguson (tracks: A2) Flute, Soloist – Bobby Militello (tracks: A3) French Horn – Brooks Tillotson, Donald Corrado Guitar – Eric Gale, George Benson, Jeff Layton, Lance Quinn Guitar, Soloist – George Benson (tracks: A2), Jeff Layton (tracks: A1) Keyboards – Biff Hannon, Bob James, Kenny Ascher Percussion – Ralph MacDonald Percussion [Parade Drum] – Phil Kraus Piano, Soloist – Bob James (tracks: B2) Soprano Saxophone – Mark Colby, Mike Migliore Soprano Saxophone, Soloist – Mike Migliore (tracks: B3) Strings – Alan Shulman, Albert Scheonmaker, Alfred Brown, Charles Libove, Charles McCracken, David Nadien, Emanuel Vardi, Eugene Noye, Harold Kohon, Harry Cykman, Harry Lookofsky, Marvin Morgenstern, Matthew Raimondi, Max Ellen, Max Pollikoff, Paul Gershman, Richard Sortomme Tenor Saxophone – Joe Farrell, Mark Colby Tenor Saxophone, Soloist – Mark Colby (tracks: B2), Stan Mark (tracks: B1) Trombone – Dave Taylor, Julian Priester, Paul Faulise, Randy Purcell, Roger Homefield, Wayne Andre, Trumpet – Alan Rubin, Bernie Glow, Dennis Noday, Jim Bossy, Guiseppe Loon P. Mosello, Jon Faddis, Marky Markowitz, Marvin Stamm, Randy Brecker, Ron Tooley, Stan Mark Trumpet [Calls] – Dennis Noday (tracks: B1), Joe Mosello (tracks: B1), Ron Tooley (tracks: B1), Stan Mark (tracks: B1) Trumpet, Soloist – Maynard Ferguson (tracks: A1, A3 to B3) Vocals – Ellen Bernfeld, Gwen Guthrie, Lani Groves, Linda November, Martin Nelson, Patti Austin, Richard Berg, Vivian Cherry

Maynard was shrewd, and Maynard was quick, and he managed to beat almost everyone to the punch -- sorry -- when he recorded the theme from Rocky and watched it rise to number 28 on the pop charts. As blatant as Ferguson's rendition is, it was still the best rendition of the Bill Conti tune at the time (a lot better than the composer's own number one version) -- and Maynard Ferguson's heroic propensity for high notes and his underdog status as a hitmaker make it easy to link him with his celluloid counterpart. It is also the best track on an otherwise overloaded Jay Chattaway production, where the combination of the chrome-plated Chattaway

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hand and list of noted supporting players (George Benson, Joe Farrell, Bob James, the young Jon Faddis, Julian Priester, Harvey Mason, etc.) nearly overwhelms the Ferguson big band and even Ferguson himself. The title track has a certain flamboyant grandeur emanating both from Ferguson and the electronic brigade that dominates the tune, yet Benson's fluid cameo and Ferguson's obligatos are wasted by the irritating female voices on "Mister Mellow." This record gave Maynard Ferguson the largest amount of exposure that he ever had; the Faustian tradeoff is that it often sounds gimmicky today. --- Richard S. Ginell, Rovi

Maynard Ferguson's only gold album, *Conquistador* split its session time between his big band in San Francisco and a contemporary studio ensemble in New York. The 1977 album's memorable themes from *Star Trek* and *Rocky*, as well as the enchanting "Mister Mellow," made use of the studio ensemble with superlative results. Bob James and George Benson added a considerably fresh atmosphere to the album and ensured its crossover success.

While "Gonna Fly Now" and "Theme From *Star Trek*" turned out to be the big hits, the rest of the album remains significant for its overall pleasant atmosphere and late 1970s pop/rock sentiment. The leader's trumpet sound was pure and solid during those years, and Columbia's new digital remix does the sessions justice. The title track stands out for its majestic Spanish ancestry and its fresh, contemporary attack. Electric bass, electric guitar and electronic keyboards combined with funk-laden horn arrangements. The piece has the added benefit from a sensational tenor saxophone solo by Mark Colby.

Elsewhere on the album, Ferguson's hot and high solos are complemented by stellar solo work from Bob James, Mike Migliore, Jeff Layton, Bobby Militello and George Benson. Together, they made *Conquistador* an album to remember. ---Jim Santella, allaboutjazz.com

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