

Jackie McLean - 'Bout Soul (1967)

Written by bluesever

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1. *Soul* (10:15) 2. *Conversion Point* (9:45) 3. *Big Ben's Voice* (10:06) 4. *Dear Nick, Dear John* (4:53) 5. *Erdu* (5:54) 6. *Big Ben's Voice (alt. take)* (9:56) Jackie McLean-alto sax Woody Shaw-trumpet (1-3,5,6) Grachan Moncur III-trombone (1,2,5) Lamont Johnson-piano Scotty Holt-bass Rashied Ali-drums Barbara Simmons-vocal

'Bout Soul does not mean the same thing as soul-jazz, as the opening track "Soul" makes abundantly clear. Written by Grachan Moncur III and poet Barbara Simmons, "Soul" is a tonally free tone-poem that features Simmons' spoken recital. It's about what the concept of soul is, not what soul music is, and that should not come as a surprise to anyone acquainted with Jackie McLean's work. Even as his Blue Note contemporaries were working commercial soul-jazz grooves, McLean pushed the borders of jazz, embracing the avant-garde and free jazz. 'Bout Soul is one of his most explicit free albums, finding the alto saxophonist pushing a quintet -- trumpeter Woody Shaw (who sits out "Dear Nick, Dear John"), pianist Lamont Johnson, bassist Scotty Holt, drummer Rashied Ali -- into uncompromising, tonally free territory. This is intensely cerebral music that is nevertheless played with a fiery passion. Although the music was all composed, it is played as if it was invented on the spot. Fans of McLean's straight-ahead hard bop, or even of his adventurous mid-'60s sessions, might find this a little off-putting at first, but 'Bout Soul rewards close listening. It is one of McLean's finest modern contemporary sessions. ---Stephen Thomas Erlewine, AllMusic Review

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