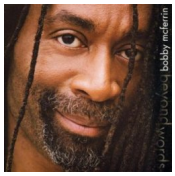
Bobby McFerrin - Beyond Words (2002)



1.Invocation 2.Kalimba Suite 3.A Silken Road 4.Fertile Field 5.Dervishes 6.Ziggurat 7.Sisters 8.Circlings 9.Chanson 10.Windows play 11.Marlowe play 12.Mass 13.Pat & Joe 14.Taylor Made 15.A Piece, A Chord 16.Monks/The Shepherd

Personnel: Bobby McFerrin- vocals, keyboards; Chick Corea- piano, electric piano; Gil Goldstein- accordion, keyboards; Keith Underwood- wood flutes, contrabass flute; Richard Bona- bass, guitar, percussion; Cyro Baptista- percussion; Omar Hakim- drums

How does one write about the ineffable? It is, after all, Beyond Words ... We must, however, reflect on Bobby McFerrin's Beyond Words

There is a certain degree of serendipity in the fact that this recording is being capitalized upon, in the best economic system the world has ever known, through the marketing efforts of both Blue Note and Angel Records as in Classical music, the "grace note" is what in Jazz is known as a "blue note." Beyond Words is an album from the world to the world, encompassing the fleeting hallowedness that structures the allure and effect of a graceful blue note. Hence, it is not for the faint of sensibility and intelligence. Although not a difficult work, without recurring to popish sentimentality or facility in its accessibility, it does require a certain level of engagement in order to disengage the listener from preconceptions and expectations that would mar the delight on musical idioms beyond any evocative or explanatory measure. McFerrin's latest is "deep," as musicians are fond of saying when referring to outstanding music.

It would be rather tempting to play a game of "Where's Waldo?" when trying to document the various musical, cultural or aesthetic influences present in this compact disc, although that would be infelicitous and beside the point. As mentioned before, this is an album from the world

to the world. Creative, or so-called creative endeavors, nonetheless, often times end up as mere masturbatory efforts that have more to do with inbred narcissism than true originality. McFerrin is not affianced in self-pleasure in this Blue Note/Angel release. He wants to gratify his audience with an anointing dipped into one of the widest palettes available for worldwide consumption in contemporary musical markets.

Beyond Words has a wide and fun emotional range that swings in saintly depth. The arrangements, vocalizations, and compositions, as well as the performances of the musicians, have a refreshing sense of cultural innocence and curiosity in their tales. With the exception of “Windows,” a Chick Corea composition, reinterpreted here in historical fashion by McFerrin, the rest of the oeuvre was penned by him. Having Corea playing in this recording was a prudent decision as he has an authentic and imaginative record of accomplishment in various musical worlds. The same is true of most of the rest of the crew that gave rise to the beautiful blessing that is Beyond Words.

McFerrin’s latest also hits the mark with the integrity of the 16 pictorials poured in this recording. From the short-lived “Circlings,” to the beefier “Invocation,” Beyond Words manages to say what needs saying without recourse to vocal or instrumental logorrhea. The whole of Beyond Words is known through its wholesome parts, duration notwithstanding. All told, Beyond Words says a lot. You had better listen...---Javier Aq Ortiz, allaboutjazz.com.

Creative vocalist Bobby McFerrin's return to Blue Note after a nearly ten-year absence indicates a possible desire for a return to improvised jazz, and in a way distancing himself from the classical works he had become increasingly associated with. Working again with pianist Chick Corea and producer Linda Goldstein, his 2002 album, Beyond Words, is reminiscent of the other McFerrin/Corea collaborations (Play, The Mozart Sessions), but somehow these mostly improvised works lack the spark that their previous partnerships have created. Ably backed by Corea's bright piano, Omar Hakim on drums, and Richard Bona on bass, the songs feel to be all the same texture for the most part, never reaching any kind of a peak throughout the album. Beyond Words is a moody and dark affair, with subtle layers of McFerrin's undulating vocals weaving in and out of the musical bed, but instead of sounding earthy and natural, the album is punctuated by synthesized instruments that pull the recordings dangerously close to smooth jazz territory. Unfortunately, by taking one of the most articulate players of man's earliest instrument and layering it in slick, fretless basslines and synthetic Roland XP-80 chords, it almost defeats the purpose of hearing his voice altogether. Still, it is an excellently performed and cleanly produced document of both McFerrin and Corea's abilities, ideal for gentle

background textures on a night in alone. ---Zac Johnson, allmusic.com

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