

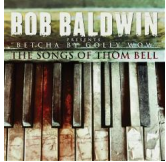
## Bob Baldwin – Betcha By Golly Wow The Songs of Thom Bell (2012)

Written by bluesever

Thursday, 07 June 2012 09:34 - Last Updated Friday, 01 August 2014 10:14

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### Bob Baldwin – Betcha By Golly Wow The Songs of Thom Bell (2012)



01 – *Didn't I (Blow Your Mind This Time)* (ft. Russ Freeman) 02 – *The Rubberband Man* (ft. Paul Brown & Ragan Whiteside) 03 – *La La Means I Love You* (ft. Vivian Green) 04 – *Gonna Be Sweeter* 05 – *Break Up To Make Up* (ft. Will Downing) 06 – *You're Right As Rain* (ft. Paul Taylor) 07 – *I'll Be Around* (ft. Marion Meadows) 08 – *Bell & Creed* 09 – *Betcha By Golly Wow* (ft. Toni Redd) 10 – *People Make The World Go Round* (ft. Marion Meadows) Personnel: Bob Baldwin: piano, bass, drums, percussion; keyboards, vocals, background vocals, horn Russ Freeman: guitars (1); Ragan Whiteside: flute, vocals (1, 2, 6); Preston Glass: keyboards, loops, horns, clavinet, drums, vocals, additional keyboards (1-4, 6, 7); Dennis Johnson: drums (2), drum loop (4); Paul Brown: guitars (2); Vivian Green: lead vocals (3); Gemma Burns: background vocals (3); Will Downing: lead vocals (5); Gerald Albright: alto saxophone (5); Buddy Williams: drums (5); Anthony Jackson: bass (5); B.J. Nelson, Paulette McWilliams, Audrey Wheeler, Craig Derry, Curtis King, Vanesse Thomas: background vocals (5); Paul Taylor: soprano saxophone (6); Marion Meadows: soprano saxophone (7, 10); Tony Lewis: drums (8); Toni Redd: vocals (9); Bob Francheschini: saxophone (9); Onaje Allen Gumbs: arrangement (9); Chembo Cornell: percussion (10).

New urban jazz keyboardist Bob Baldwin disdains the "smooth jazz" moniker, but that doesn't necessarily mean he isn't familiar with the conventions of the genre. He's got ideas that don't have a thing to do with cranking out infinite versions of the same old sound with a few new riffs. Baldwin is a bit more ambitious than that and with *Betcha By Golly Wow: The Songs of Thom Bell* he honors one of the most successful songwriters of 1970s soul music.

Though not intended as the successor to Baldwin's last tribute recording, *Never Can Say Goodbye: A Tribute to Michael Jackson* (Trippin n' Rhythm, 2010), the new album is tighter and more focused than last year's *Re-Vibe* (Trippin n' Rhythm, 2011) which meandered at over 70 minutes in length. Here Baldwin is working with superior material from Bell (and his collaborator, the late Linda Creed) and the results are reproductions that pay respectful homage to the originals even if they don't quite match them.

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Most of Bell's biggest hits are included. "Didn't I (Blow Your Mind This Time)," "Betcha By Golly Wow" and "People Make the World Go Round" became staples of soul music when The Delfonics and The Stylistics performed them and Baldwin's interpretation augments his keyboards with contributions from guitarists Russ Freeman and saxophonists Gerald Albright, Marion Meadows and Paul Taylor, among other guest musicians and vocalists.

There are some curious choices in material as Baldwin bypasses Spinners smashes "I'll Be Around" and "Could It Be I'm Falling In Love?" in favor of the corny "The Rubberband Man," which is salvaged by Ragan Whiteside's flute and Paul Brown on guitar. Bell himself penned a new song, "Gonna Be Sweeter."

"Break Up To Make Up" is the album's centerpiece with Will Downing's vocals gliding over the scorching beauty of Albright's alto sax and augmented by six background singers as Baldwin and the rock-solid rhythm section of drummer Buddy Williams and bassist Anthony Jackson keep everything in the pocket. Downing has lost a bit as he falters toward the end, but he's still one of premier crooners working today. Vivian Green interpretation of "La La Means I Love You" is pretty impressive and she's a vocalist deserving of wider recognition.

If the album has a problem, it is that there is a certain coldness due the reliance upon electronic "bass and drums" instead of live musicians. It may be more efficient to employ synthesizers, but for anyone familiar with Thom Bell's lush arrangements in his heyday, the change in instrumentation is noticeable and jarring.

Baldwin may have seized upon a blueprint to build his future recordings around. He can alternate between his original works, and tributes to other unsung songwriters whose success in crafting hits for others denied them some of the recognition they deserved. Potential possibilities could include the music of Gamble and Huff, Holland-Dozier-Holland, Maurice White, Prince or Stevie Wonder.---Jeff Winbush, allaboutjazz.com

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