

Kenny Barron – Spirit Song (2000)

Written by bluesever

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1. Pelican [04:12] 2. Spirit Song [05:42] [play](#) 3. Um Beijo [07:31] 4. Passion Flower [09:54] 5. Passion Dance [06:12] 6. Sonja Braga [06:25] 7. Question Is [05:21] [play](#) 8. Wizard [07:59] 9. Cook's Bay [07:05] 10. And Then Again [04:35]

Personnel: Kenny Barron - piano Regina Carter - violin Billy Hart - drums (snare) Rufus Reid - bass Eddie Henderson - trumpet David Sanchez - tenor sax Michael Wall Grigsby - percussion Russell Malone – guitar

Long the sideman of choice, pianist Kenny Barron has quietly built up a respectable discography as a leader in recent years. He could have settled into a predictable pattern, for instance, of trio projects—a format he excels in. But so far into his impressive '90s run on Verve, he has favored roads less traveled and heeded the muse of restless creativity. As with his previous album, *Things Unseen*, Barron changes up the textures and colors here, with a range of guests: guitarist Russell Malone, trumpeter Eddie Henderson, David Sanchez on tenor sax and violinist Regina Carter. The sum effect is a varietal garden of sounds and ideas, within the framework of Barron's post-mainstream jazz sensibility.

He graciously metes out improv space to his guests, but Barron's playing still nabs the ear every time it's at the forefront, blending subtlety and technical bravura—but never for its own sake. His songwriting and arranging skills come to bear here, too, from the devilish twists of the title tune's head to the lustrous waltz of "The Question Is" and the suave sashay of "Cook's Bay." For cover material, Barron serves up a softly percolating version of Billy Strayhorn's "Passion Flower," with a piano solo that epitomizes Barron's simmering-yet-adventurous sense of swing. He also ups the tempo ante with McCoy Tyner's "Passion Dance," a heated duet encounter with Sanchez. Another duet closes the album: "And Then Again" is a steamy tete-a-tete with Malone in which the musicians dart in and out of the bebop groundwork at dangerous speeds and angles. A soft-spoken titan, Barron is doing more than almost any pianist out there to give mainstream piano jazz a good, progressive name. --- Josef Woodard,

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Pianist Kenny Barron says he made Spirit Song with the idea of breaking away from the standard bebop chord progressions and 4/4 time, a predictability that's hardly apparent on his this album's Verve predecessors. In any event, this is a typically rich and invigorating collection of mostly Barron originals that reinforces his status as the most gracefully propulsive pianist in jazz today. It's a joy to hear how many rhythmic crevices Barron can explore while engaging percussionist Michael Wall around the title track's four-note vamp, then listen to him follow it with shrewd, sensitive accents on Billy Strayhorn's "Passion Flower" that there's little need for the rest of the rhythm section (although Billy Hart and Rufus Reid are none too shabby). Another highlight is Barron's cavorting duet with saxophonist David Sanchez on McCoy Tyner's durable "Passion Dance," a heraldic, feel-good celebration that still never loses its cool. With longtime Barron cohort Eddie Henderson blowing muted, Miles-like bubbles on trumpet and Regina Carter and Russell Malone playing guest spots, the ensemble is full-bodied and first rate. Last but not least, Barron's composition "Sonja Braga," named after the sensual Brazilian screen actress, lives up to its name. ---Britt Robson, Editorial Reviews

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