

Branford Marsalis Quartet - Upward Spiral (2016)

Written by bluesever

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01. *There's A Boat Dat's Leavin' Soon For New York* 02. *Blue Gardenia* 03. *From One Island To Another* 04. *Practical Arrangement* 05. *Doxy* 06. *I'm A Fool To Want You* 07. *West Virginia Rose* 08. *Sozinha De Ser Com Voce* 09. *Momma Said* 10. *Cassandra Song* 11. *Blue Velvet* 12. *The Return (Upward Spiral)* 13. *Long As You're Living (bonus)* Branford Marsalis - saxophones Joey Calderazzo - piano Eric Revis - bass Justin Faulkner - drums Kurt Elling – vocals

Titans of modern jazz in their own rights, saxophonist Branford Marsalis and vocalist Kurt Elling bring their immense strengths together on their sophisticated and nuanced collaboration, 2016's *Upward Spiral*. Perhaps not the first time Marsalis has showcased a vocalist on a recording, it is the first time he's worked exclusively with one singer throughout an entire album. While the album never feels dated or retro, it fits nicely into the tradition of vocalist and instrumentalist collaborations like 1961's Nancy Wilson & Cannonball Adderley and 1963's classic John Coltrane & Johnny Hartman. Like those albums, *Upward Spiral* is less an album featuring a singer backed by a jazz ensemble, and more of an album that details the meeting of two highly creative artists whose talents intertwine to find new avenues of expression. Joining in the creative process here is Marsalis' longtime rhythm section featuring pianist Joey Calderazzo, bassist Eric Revis, and drummer Justin Faulkner. Despite the high level of mastery on display, Marsalis and Elling don't overthink the proceedings and simply stick to a thoughtfully curated batch of covers and originals. This gives the album the feel of like-minded artists communing over a shared love and appreciation of each song. Some cuts, like the breezy Gershwin number "There's a Boat Dat's Leavin' Soon for New York" and the swinging, off-kilter Sonny Rollins composition "Doxy," sound like pick-up jams chosen in the moment. Others, like Chris Whitley's "From One Island to Another," and the Marsalis and Elling co-write "Cassandra Song," have a theatrical, impressionistic flow born out of the duo's thoughtful arranging. They split the difference on "I'm a Fool to Want You," transforming Frank Sinatra's torchy standard into a mournful, yet somehow still playful duet. Elsewhere, they delve into a languid melodicism on Antonio Carlos Jobim's "Sozinha de Ser Com Voce," make room for spoken word poetry on "Momma Said," and deliver what is certainly one of the most delicate and otherworldly readings of "Blue Velvet." Primarily, *Upward Spiral* finds Elling and Marsalis communicating through

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song, both of them offering tactile, well-organized performances that linger in your mind. ---Matt Collar, Rovi

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