Miguel Zenón – Ceremonial (2004)



1.Leyenda (Silvio Rodríguez) 9:18 2.Ceremonial (Miguel Zenón) 9:45 3.Transfiguration (Miguel Zenón) 6:36 4.Mega (Miguel Zenón) 6:48 5.A Reminder of Us (Miguel Zenón) 6:38 6.Morning Chant (Miguel Zenón) 8:15 7.440 (Miguel Zenón) 7:41 8.Ya (Miguel Zenón) 6:43 9.Great is Thy Faithfulness (Thomas O. Chisholm/William Runyan) 8:16 Miguel Zenón - Alto Sax, Percussion (2 & 3), Vocals (6) Luis Perdomo - Acoustic Piano, Percussion (3), Fender Rhodes (4), Vocals (6), Synthesizer (7) Antonio Sanchez - Drums, Vocals (6) Hans Glawischnig - Acoustic Bass, Electric Bass (3), Vocals (6) Luciana Souza - Vocals (3) Hector "Tito" Matos - Barriles de Bomba (4), Panderos (7) Recorded March 4-5, 2003 at Systems II, Brooklyn, NY

The young Marsalis Music label continues to produce interesting recordings with a mindset of creating music that expresses individuality as well as substance. Last year's releases featured guitarist Doug Wamble's Country Libations and Harry Connick Jr.'s instrumental Other Hours, which created fresh and progressive approaches. Alto saxophonist Miguel Zenon continues on that path in 2004 with his auspicious release Ceremonial.

A native of a San Juan, Puerto Rico, Zenon's new recording brings not only Latin persuasions but also a refined mix of contemporary, classic, and global influences. The recording begins with compositions that are melodic yet leave ample room for improvisation. Zenon's playing is in full command as he freely solos with and against diverse rhythms. His horn has a slight acidic tone that is fluid and purposed with feeling. Zenon's writing skills and influence have appeared on pianist Danilo Perez recordings and are of particular interest. Backed by a potent quartet the music is thoughtful and executed with skill and spirit.

The opener "Leyenda" begins with Zenon's warm alto voice and develops into a gradual upbeat melody that hints at things to come. "Ceremonial" and "Transfiguration" bring Latin charms by

adding soulful rhythms and voices with a modern feel. The quartet is on fire on the complex and funky "Mega" with extreme percussion by "Tito" Matos, which quietly blends into the tranquil piece "A Reminder of Us."

The tour de force composition "Morning Chant" combines rigorous hard bop and spiritual chants in a unique way as pianist Luis Perdomo solos with fierceness and drummer Antonio Sanchez adds percussive highlights behind Zenon's rapid alto lines. The interesting "440" includes a contagious rhythmic pattern with some nice solo work from bassist Hans Glawischnig. The recording ends with the quartet swinging their hearts out on "Ya" and Zenon's own rendition of the hymn "Great Is Thy Faithfulness." Highly recommended. ---Mark F. Turner

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