

Ben E. King - Spanish Harlem (1961)

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A1 Amor 3:05 A2 Sway 2:17 A3 Come Closer To Me 2:34 A4 Perfidia 2:12 A5 Granada 2:25 A6 Sweet And Gentle 2:24 B1 Quizas, Quizas, Quizas (Perhaps, Perhaps, Perhaps) 2:14 B2 Frenesi 3:09 B3 Souvenir Of Mexico 2:20 B4 Besame Mucho 2:58 B5 Love Me, Love Me 2:35 B6 Spanish Harlem 2:54 Ben E. King – vocals Stan Applebaum - arranger Jerry Leiber, Mike Stoller – producer

A close look at this album reveals just how ambitious Atlantic Records could be in the early 1960s, in generating LPs. Technically speaking, Ben E. King's debut long-player is a concept album -- or, at least, a thematic album. Put together in the wake of his first solo hit, "Spanish Harlem," a Latin flavor and beat run all the way through this 12-song platter, which, at times, is really more of a pop record than a soul record. The dense, busy string section that characterized most of King's work of this era is present, and a lot of his singing may recall more the work of Sammy Davis, Jr. than that of any R&B artist one might think of from this period. And apart from the Jerry Leiber/Phil Spector co-authored title hit, most of what is here dates from a decade or more (sometimes several) earlier -- "Frenesi," "Besame Mucho," and "Perfidia" were standards during the big-band era, and most of the rest is of similar or even older vintage. All of which doesn't mean that it is bad -- King's version of "Besame Mucho" is a very successful reinterpretation in a Latin soul vein, and "Perfidia" never sounded better than it does in his hands, even if it and a lot of the rest is a long way from what most of us define as "soul." And for better or worse, the production is first-rate within the context of King's established sound, with a phenomenal string section and a percussion section to die for.
---Bruce Eder, Rovi

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