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Spyro Gyra A Foreign Affair (Amherst, 2011)

I seemed to have lost touch with Spyro Gyra. I was less than thrilled with their last 4 releases despite each receiving a Grammy nomination. Incredibly bad vocals and just an overall anemic sound had me looking elsewhere for contemporary jazz. "A Foreign Affair" boasts three vocals (only one of which I take any real issue with) and is easily one of their stronger outings in the last decade. Keb Mo is featured on the last vocal and his blues infusion is done perfectly and does nothing to take away from an incredibly evenly paced release.

Back to basics? In a sense the sound of this release is distinctly reminiscent of the early more "world music" sound they pioneered for the contemporary scene some 35 years ago. As an admitted jazz elitist it was refreshing to hear saxophonist Jay Beckenstein remark that Spyro Gyra is in no way trying to pass any of the world influence here as authentic but rather it is to show how their travels around the globe has in turn influenced their very distinctive sound.

"Samba For Two" which is obviously steeped in the Brazilian Stan Getz samba roots is a winner along with the beautiful "Antigua." A particularly noteworthy tune is "Sweet Ole Thang" where drummer Bonny Bonaparte infuses some Calypso pop that really makes this release sing.

High Points - An impressive world music sound that adds incredible depth and character to this release.

Low Points - Anything I would add would simply be hypercritical and take away from an otherwise rock solid release.

If you are a Spyro Gyra fan you should love this release! If you took a "trial separation" as I did then this release may bring you back into the fold.

Buy or Sell?

Buy!