

# BOBBY MCFERRIN

## The vocal acrobat pours his joy into songs of faith and devotion

"MAKING MUSIC IS THE MOST JOYFUL EXPERIENCE I KNOW," says vocalist and conductor Bobby McFerrin, best known for his 1988 Grammy-winning smash, "Don't Worry, Be Happy." His new album, *spirityouall*, is a collection of devotional songs and original compositions. "Without faith I couldn't walk, much less sing," says McFerrin. "My career is very public, but if my private world isn't right, I couldn't do it. Faith and family are cornerstones for me. I start every day with prayer, meditation and reading the Bible. I try to get right with myself and my God and the people I care about. I really do think all music is prayer."



Carol Friedman

McFerrin learned this powerful message from his father, Robert McFerrin, who was the first African-American to sing with the Metropolitan Opera Company. "My father was incredibly disciplined and rigorous," he says. "He felt he was the custodian of a gift—a gift that God had given him a responsibility to develop. I could never sing the way he did, but I think a lot about what my job as an artist is—to bring joy."

The singer also views music as a therapeutic tool, and looks forward to engaging audiences with a performance that considers the frailty of life. "Everybody hopes to be released from something," says McFerrin, 63. "Everybody needs to connect to the spirit, to the strength within themselves, to the faith to persevere or transform, whatever it takes. I want people to feel hooked up to the spirit and to their fellow human beings here on Earth."

Given his fluid improvisational skills, it's no wonder McFerrin basks in the glow of spontaneous invention. "I get inspired when

I'm surprised," he says. "That's why years ago my manager started arranging for guests to appear out of nowhere on tour, like the time Robin Williams jumped onstage and we improvised 'Beverly Hills Blues.'" The vocal chameleon has developed a tradition that celebrates musical and cultural diversity. "These days we do a program called 'Bobby Meets' where I get to improvise with local musicians in different countries. My ears get happy when I hear something new."

Still, McFerrin continues to streamline the various musical strands of his past when starting a new project. "It's natural for me to incorporate different influences," he says. "Over the course of my career, it's become clear that's part of what I'm about musically, bringing together everything I hear and love. This album reflects that, too. We discussed it in the planning stages, it happened naturally in the recording process, and it's still evolving as we perform on tour."

—Blake Boldt

