



## BOBBY MCFERRIN

**VOCABULARIES** – Emarcy-B0014036-02, 2010. [www.emarcy.com](http://www.emarcy.com). *Baby; Say Ladeo; Wailers; Messages; The Garden; He Ran To The Train; Brief Eternity.*

**PERSONNEL:** Bobby McFerrin, Vocals featuring singers: Roger Treece, Lisa Fischer, Joey Blake, Kim Nazarian, Janis Siegel, LaTanya Hall, Luciana Souza, Albert Hera, Lauren Kinham, Peter Eldridge, Alexandra Montano, Andrea Figallo, Darmon Meader, Darryl Tookes, Dave Worm, Katie Campbell, Kristina Boerger. Lyrics: Don Rosler, Bobby McFerrin, Roger Treece. Musicians: Alex Acuña, percussion; Donny McCaslin, saxophone; Pedro Eustache, woodwinds; Roger Treece, percussion/synthesizer programming, producer; Linda Goldstein, co-producer

By Nora McCarthy

*Vocabularies* is a massively intricate, multi-dimensional and densely plush work that took seven years to make and 100 gigs of audio memory to contain the abundant bounty of its collective creativity. It goes way beyond anything anyone has done before including McFerrin who surpasses his own record of innovative firsts as an improviser, conductor, arranger, composer and vocal instrumentalist with this masterpiece. The concept for the project came from Bobby's manager Linda Goldstein which resulted in a collaboration between McFerrin, Roger Treece, a composer, arranger, producer, and singer and later in the project, lyricist Don Rosler. A real heavy weight in the industry Treece has earned two Grammys, fourteen Downbeat awards, has over 30 albums to his credit, with hundreds of commissions for his choral work for the Manhattan Transfer, the New York Voices, Mark Murphy, and Janis Siegel (who recommended Treece to Goldstein) and the vocal innovations of Mr. McFerrin, to list a few of his accomplishments to date.

Bobby McFerrin's stamp is all over this CD, as one would expect from his many years of giving us high quality musical surprises. His unmistakable sound, advanced musicianship and otherworldly spiritual essence combines traditional classical elements with jazz, funk, gospel, and African folkloric music. There are over 50 singers on it with rhythmic patterns and changing meters out the yin-yang, utilizing over 14 different languages including an imaginary language created by McFerrin...it's layered like a Czar's wedding cake, with synthesized sounds, exotic percussive patterns, intense and complex arrangements, challenging vocal orchestrations and Bobby McFerrin's incredibly elastic voice stretching

throughout singing in all the registers from bass, alto and tenor to soprano, as well as percussively, which we are familiar with from his solo work and with his Voicestra. It is riddled with call and response sections that are ebullient, joyful and charismatic. The richly thick overall sound immerses the listener in a total experience that speaks to all the senses which was accomplished through the modern 21st century technological wizardry of Treece's synthesized programming and his meticulous surgical-like sculpting of the over 1,400 vocal tracks ... it is like watching a movie in 3-D – it is simply wondrous.

The opening track, "Baby", is a lovely lesson espousing our responsibility to all children based on a song by Bobby McFerrin. It begins with his solo voice motif in a language of pure love and innocence followed by him and a wide ribbon of closely knit voices setting up the tempo with a vamp by alto and tenor voices overlapping in a different key signature reminiscent of a South African Soweto Choir. Also on this composition he shifts tonalities and time signatures within the form, incorporating spontaneous composition with a lot of vocal orchestration. Alex Acuña does a great job on the bongos and the percussion/synthesizer programming of Treece is a big component.

"Say Ladeo" – for me the message of this piece embodies what it is to sing which is the expression of our hearts – something we all share and resonate with. It's what ties us as beings on this earth and in this life experience. So first Bobby speaks of our responsibility to our children through our actions in "Baby" and then expands to address who we are as universal and interdependent beings in "Say Ladeo." He is talking to us through our deeper consciousnesses and our collective identities. This piece features Lisa Fischer and begins with a vocal vamp – a bass line by McFerrin with a Caribbean funk groove followed by lead voice fills, a rubato section shifting motif, ethereal percussion/synthesizer programming of Treece, with Bobby's inventive language in the improv section.

The third track and the second longest on the CD, (10:26) "Wailers," is dedicated to Linda Goldstein. With its 6/8 African feel, Celtic, Arabic and Hasidic overtones and tribal nature, it moves from the mood of the prior two songs into a stark new reality. Traditionally, "Wailers" of Jewish, Welsh and Irish cultures were customarily employed at funerals as a religious rite of passage to mourn and watch over the deceased during his/her transition from death to burial. This primal piece is a transition from our ethereal nature to our connection to the earth, and the uncertainty of human life and how our beliefs, and our superstitions interrelate. It features Lisa Fischer singing both soprano and alto and the work of percussionist Alex Acuña and Pedro Eustache on the Duduk and the vocal choir.

"Messages" – another composition by Treece based on an ostinato by Bobby McFerrin and lyrics by Don Rosler which uses fifteen languages plus Bobby McFerrin's own creative language. This is the centerpiece from which all of the other compositions extend. The messages are the voices of all who have

gone before intertwined with the voices of our own longing for resolution, for consolation, peace, love and understanding. Beginning like both a prayer and a plea in Latin they move into a Sanskrit mantra then into words and phrases in Spanish, Italian, back to Latin, Zulu, Russian, Hebrew, Portuguese, Mandarin, Japanese, French, Arabic, German, English and Gaelic in various order. Alex Acuña on percussion, Pedro Eustache on the Duduk and Donny McCaslin on soprano saxophone, plus the percussion/synthesizer programming of Treece construct the stage upon which the choir of voices use shifting harmonies to project an indelible image of humanity's search to understand the meaning of life. This is the largest choir of voices of all the tracks with thirteen sopranos, thirteen altos, ten tenors and six basses, with McFerrin himself singing lead voice, tenor and also alto which he does on other cuts as well as bass and soprano parts. "Messages" was commissioned by LA Master Chorale and premiered in 2003.

A reprieve from the contemplative heaviness of "Messages," "The Garden" is a light and happy song that puts a positive spin on the story of the Garden of Eden. It is written by McFerrin and Treece and is based on a song by McFerrin. It begins with Bobby chanting as the other soloists enter one at a time in a call and response pattern giving way to the choir setting up the song which comes joyously rolling in like a promise of better things to come and happy endings. Bobby's voice sounds like a woodwind instrument; like a piper dancing around the other singers as the call and response continues throughout the piece and all around the uplifting Reggae influenced groove. The soloists in the intro include LaTanya Hall, Albert Hera, Rhiannon, Luciana Souza, Janis Siegel and Roger Treece.

"He Ran To The Train" is also written by Bobby McFerrin and Roger Treece, and is based on "He Ran All The Way" and "The Train" by Bobby McFerrin, a work commissioned by the Ravinia Festival that premiered in 2003. This song which is the most rhythmically complex of the seven and also the longest at 10:29 starts moving right out of the gate with its strong African feel. It starts with an intro by all the voices, first alto and sopranos followed by the tenor voices then Bobby comes in with a rhythmic percussive voice which sets the tempo followed by a bass line with the percussion where he uses the Yoruba language sparsely. Then it changes to an African 6/8 with a lot of polyrhythmic elements using cross rhythms such as hand clapping in 4 against 6/8 and elements of funk with the choir singing in the surrounding landscape throughout. It continues to move and shift to a section where Bobby is improvising over all of it, then another twist into 7 against 4 – changing meters again – the angelic vocal choir sounds like a trumpet horn section against the 7 while Bobby continues his improvisation. It is at this point that the teleportation takes place for the listener and reveals the magic in the music. Bobby uses his inventive language throughout. The piece is full of imaginative perfectly executed soulful call and response. Bobby's deliciously rich signature lower register sings very strong bass lines along with the rest of