

## RAHEEM DeVAUGHN: Love Behind The Melody (Label: Jive)

Written by Bill Buckley

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DeVaughn's debut album, 'The Love Experience,' announced the arrival of an interesting soul talent. Now with the follow up, 'Love Behind The Melody', to that "interesting" we can add "major". This new set, you see, is a cleverly thought-out affair on which producers like Mark Batson, Scott Storch, Kenny Dope and Kwame have crafted cuts that not only bring out the best in Raheem's emotive voice but which have appeal right across the back music spectrum. Truly there's something for everyone here - a fact best illustrated by the lead single, 'Woman'. Rightly Grammy-nominated, it's ultra-catchy ... but more - its tight beats will satisfy the modern room dancers while its broody feel will surely appeal to the R&B brigade too. Elsewhere things are more defined and less hybrid but there's still enough to satisfy all kinds of congregations. 'Energy' - with sinister bass runs that call to mind Gnarls Barclay's 'Crazy' - offers an R&B dance groove, underlined by the inclusion of Big Boi's rap while the stuttery 'Customer' will please those who dig the R. Kelly approach. Neo-soul is represented by cuts like 'Butterflies' and the Amp Fiddler-ish 'Try Again' and if you like slinky balladry there's plenty on offer. Catchy pop-soul? Well grab a listen to 'Friday (Shut The Club)'. Sampling the Temptations' 'My Girl', I immediately dismissed it as lightweight gimmickry. But, several listens later, its appeal had grown - if the label need a chart hit, this is the one. Away from the gimmickry, Raheem shows he can "do real soul" on 'Mo Better' and 'Four Letter Word'. The former is a long, 7-minute ramble with a real maturity; the latter is great old skool ballad. If that's not enough the LP boasts a tremendous Kenny Dope-produced central section. It begins with a spoken word piece from Malik Yusef and finishes with a Floetry collaboration called 'Marathon'. In between the multi-layered harmonies, the intricate rhythms and vocal whoops of 'Desire' and 'Midnight' will, believe me, remind you of Mr. Gaye and though it's not credited, 'Flying High In The Friendly Sky' is the clear inspiration. Like I said up top, Raheem DeVaughn is now much, much more than interesting ...worthy of serious investigation this.

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