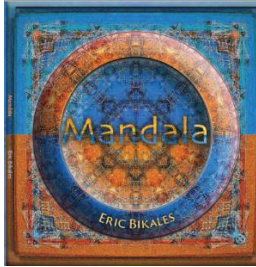


Eric Bikales

Mandala



When I was a teenager Peter, Paul, and Mary had a song called The Great Mandala. Its storyline and emotion made me want to look up the root word, mandala. It was a song that acquainted me with the Wheel of Life and the many variations of the geometric representations it embodies as a way to focus thoughts and energies in many religions. Tibetan Buddhism. Tantrism. Shintoism. You can see a pattern here. To aid you in your journey, music creator **Eric Bikales** produced an album called **Mandala**. It is sometimes contemplative, sometimes jazzy music to accompany you. This isn't flute in the woods or tiny tinkling hand bells kind of music. This is full blown genre bending orchestrated compositions with various dynamic accompaniments that gets you in the groove and keeps you there. Every song is a musical wish, a hope, or a prayer and the dozen songs titles symbolize a characteristic that should be practiced daily to enhance our lives and the lives of others. The album sounds like a plethora of musicians, but it is a one man band called Eric Bikales.

The first track is called **Generosity**. It is light and lively and unspools like a colorful landscape for the mind. A gentle piano, a flowing bass line, a glass harp in the mix, all meld into a tune of sinuous sentiment. There's tiny touch of Bossa nova in the percussion and a Vince Girardi-esque flavor to the melody. It is a good beginning.

Kindness is a gentle, piano driven tune with a whisper of electronic chorus and a tender motif. The bass is complimentary as is the percussion, but it is the overall warm emotions of the song that makes it wonderful. This is blue sky music. This is sunny day music. Everything will be okay if we just open our hearts music.

Another song with the same vibe is called **Compassion** and of course, it makes sense. Most of the time they are complementary emotions and actions. This tune has a heartbeat cadence, but it is not overpowering to the rest of the concept. It is an assurance. The vibraphone is blissful and light and the flute here is a blithe companion. The tune changes tempo and becomes cheerful, almost idyllic as it sings its song.

With just a caring solo piano voice as his aural clay, Eric sculpts the beautiful song **Devotion**. It is a song of layers, of textures, of cascading notes that suggests an unseen, unspoken gratitude. It is a respect, a loyalty, and a love that is a lifetime in the making, but it happens in the blink of an eye. The simplicity of the melody is its attraction.

One of my favorites on Mandala is called **Humility**. I know it is something I sorely lack, but always try to attain. Humility requires an oftentimes undetectable sacrifice in character. Rick Warren who wrote the Purpose Driven Life said of humility, "*True humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less.*" Bikale's music here is weightless, drifting, and frequently intangible. There is a dreamlike quality to the tune, making it fantastic in every sense of the word.

A gentle guitar in a dance with the classic piano creates the final song, **Serenity**. Touched by a bit of Wurlitzer, organ, and a dash of percussion, Eric's unhurried, timeless ballad is the last slow dance of the night. As you spin, so do the stars. Your heart becomes light and carefree. It is the kind of tune that you want to last forever. Perhaps, using the music like a road map, you have those answers.

The remaining track titles are Honesty, Love, Charity, Forgiveness, Resourcefulness, and Respect. There are so many that seek answers and they have come to the same conclusion. The Arts. Art is the answer to many of the questions in our lives. Music, sculpture, dance, painting, and the written word deliberately appear in the world of mankind as a gift to offer solace and peace. And it is available at any time. The music of Eric Bikales is Art with a capital A. Highly listenable.

- R J Lannan, Artisan Music Reviews

Resourcefulness is a Bosa Nova jazz piece with harmonica and piano with a grooving bass line. How does it end up here? Balance.