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René Marie Voice of My Beautiful Country Motema

By [Christopher Loudon](#)

Three years ago in Denver, René Marie ignited a firestorm of media attention when, invited to perform the national anthem at the mayor's State of the City address, she sang "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing" to the music of "The Star-Spangled Banner." It was, Marie noted at the time, her way of celebrating her love of country while also acknowledging that, having been raised in the segregated South, her Americanism requires distinct expression.

Now Marie has broadened her musical statement, not as a political salvo but as a more comprehensive expression of her patriotic perspective. At its most fundamental, the album showcases one of contemporary jazz's finest vocalists flawlessly meshed with longtime bandmates Kevin Bales (piano), Rodney Jordan (bass) and Quentin Baxter (drums). It is, however, also a panorama of American music, extending from the traditional "John Henry" and the 19th-century pastoral "O Shenandoah" to Tin Pan Alley ("Imagination"), classic jazz (Brubeck's "Strange Meadow Lark"), Motown ("Just My Imagination") and 1960s counterculture ("White Rabbit").

Woven into this luxuriant fabric are shrewd reflections on African-American struggles and triumphs. With "Angelitos Negros" ushering in the "Voice of My Beautiful Country Suite" (an amalgam including "America the Beautiful," "My Country 'Tis of Thee," "Life Ev'ry Voice" and "The

Star-Spangled Banner”), Marie’s latest emerges as a multi-striped pastiche that speaks with courage, eloquence and, above all, pride.

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