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Donald Vega

The pianist Donald Vega was born in Nicaragua and lived there until moving to Los Angeles with his family at 14. Latin rhythm accounts for a mere whisper in his style, which reflects conservatory training and a love of jazz's midcentury modern tradition. "Spiritual Nature" (Resonance), his

second album, puts him in charge of a gilt-edged rhythm team — the bassist Christian McBride and the drummer Lewis Nash — and he rarely seems out of his depth. Four of the album's compositions are his, including the crossover ballad title track and "[Scorpion](#)," which recalls the spit-and-polish hard bop of the late 1980s, with a [Jazz Messengers-esque](#) horn section. The choice of covers likewise says much about Mr. Vega's tastes: He doesn't play an Oscar Peterson tune, but he does play tunes by a former Peterson accomplice and a couple of [Petersonian](#) heirs. Still, it's not all [boppish](#) aplomb here. On "Contemplation," another of his own songs, Mr. Vega creates a drift of darkly irresolute chords on a Fender Rhodes alongside the guitarist Anthony Wilson. And his waltz arrangement of a Scriabin [étude](#) (Op. 8, No. 2), with Christian [Howes](#) on violin, has intrigue as well as poise.