



## ALL MUSIC GUIDE

### Leroy Martez Bell **Spending Time**

Review \*\*\*\*

by Chris Nickson

Leroy Bell has a storied past. As half of Bell & James, he penned hits for a huge range of pop and soul figures, and the duo released albums of its own. Now, under his full name of Leroy Martez Bell, he's going it alone, in a very low-key way. *Spending Time* might not strictly be an album (it's under 40 minutes long), but it is a joy of writing and gently soulful performing. That Bell knows how to write a song is beyond doubt, but these stripped-down pieces are the contemporary equivalent of the great '70s singer/songwriters. Accompaniment is drums, bass, and cello (and harmonica on one cut), but done so subtly you hardly notice it. Instead, lovely songs like "Divine Intervention" and "She Believes" seem to be almost solo, with Bell's voice and acoustic guitar very much front and center in the mix. And that's not a bad thing. His playing may be straightforward, but he possesses a supple, gorgeous voice (and one much younger than his years) that works plaintively on the title cut. With only six songs, it's not possible to fully judge where he's going -- these seem more like a taster than anything final. But on the basis of this, Bell has an excellent solo career ahead.