



LOS ANGELES
SENTINEL

By Dr. Valerie Wardlaw, Contributing Writer
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Photo Courtesy of Will Holton

Prolific saxophonist and flutist Jerome Najee Rasheed is back atop the jazz charts with his latest musical offering, his 17th studio project, the luxuriant “You Me, & Forever.” Congruent with his music, Najee is a gracious artist who finds time amid recording, touring, and family to share his gift with other musicians.

The Los Angeles Sentinel spoke with Najee about his new music and his SoCal appearance (August 7) at the Hyatt Regency Newport Beach Summer Concert Series.

LAS: Congratulations on your new music, “You, Me, & Forever.” Is there a special meaning behind the title?

NAJEE: The original title of this project was “Signature” but the record company wasn’t too keen on that. I had a few other options and this one seemed to fit.



LAS: One of the great things about this record is the introduction (for some) to artists Robert Damper, Andrea Wallace, Chuck Johnson and Frank McComb. Was that a part of the concept for this project, to showcase their talents?

NAJEE: Yes, absolutely! I love it when artists lend their talents to a project but I hate it when they don't get the recognition they deserve. I was committed to making sure that I featured artists that I have worked with over the years and that are well known in the music industry and new artists as well. Robert Damper and I went to school together at the New England Conservatory of Music. For the past 30 years, he's been the musical director and keyboardist for Kenny G. It was great fun collaborating with him.

Andrea Wallace is a vocalist I met while performing in Dallas. I couldn't find the right melody for a particular song and gave it to her to see what she could come up with. The result was the track "Giving It All We Got."

Guitarist and vocalist Chuck Johnson has toured with me for seven years and he always brings his best to the stage. I was committed to having him on this project and you can hear him on the Ambrosia track "Biggest Part of Me."

I've known Frank McComb for many years. He's an extraordinary keyboardist and I'm blessed to have him on this record and on the track entitled "Signature."

LAS: You recorded in the United Kingdom, and New York. Is that an important part of your creative process, to work in different locations with different musicians?

NAJEE: Honestly, it didn't start that way. I was in the UK working with Jean-Paul "Bluey" Maunick of "Incognito" and began recording the album there. I had a great experience and when I returned to New York City, I continued traveling and recording. I recorded at the Goo Goo Dolls studio in upstate New York, in Dallas and Los Angeles. I have to say it was a lot of fun and it's always refreshing to work with different musicians.

LAS: On the new record, there's track called "Air." I read that this song was named for a high school band that you played in. Tell us about that.

NAJEE: I played in a high school band called Air. It was an innocent, fun time for me. We played some of everything. I think about those guys from time to time and decided to record a song that reminded me of them and that time in my life.

LAS: The song "Jannah" features James Lloyd of "Pieces of a Dream." How did that collaboration come about?

NAJEE: I have known James for over 30 years. We met when "Pieces of a Dream" opened for Chaka Khan and I was a part of Chaka's band. We have worked together many times before and this track came organically out of a "Straight Ahead" project that promotes music education in Kansas City.



LAS: You are an advocate for artists owning their masters. What advice would you give to new artists regarding the protection their work?

NAJEE: I learned that important lesson from Prince. It's difficult for a new artist because there is a cost to getting in the game. But you have try as best as you can to protect your work.

LAS: Is it true that you offer music lessons to budding musicians for free via Face Time or Skype?

NAJEE: It is true. I have a couple of students who have done really well and are serious about the music. I don't charge for this and I'm very selective but I enjoy teaching and mentoring.

LAS: Your show at the Hyatt offers fans an intimate experience with you and your band. Is it just as fun for you?

NAJEE: I love interacting and being up close with my fans. This is my sixth or seventh time at this venue and I still enjoy it as much today as I did the first time I appeared there.

LAS: Your show features the vocals of the talented singer/songwriter Gary Taylor, one of California's favorite sons.

NAJEE: Gary is a very talented brother and you are so right – California loves Gary. He was with me in the Bay area and they were so excited when I announced him. We were also in London together this summer and the audience knew him and all his songs.

LAS: Again, congratulations on the new music and all the best on the road.

NAJEE: Thank you for talking with me. I truly appreciate it.

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