


 SOUL TRACKS

Najee - You, Me and Forever (2015)

Najee's ascent into the heights of jazz superstardom isn't just about his flair for composition or incomparable sax game, but about trusting his artistic instincts. His last CD, 2013's *The Morning After*, was an instant smash that took listeners through the twists and turns of modern romance. So returning in 2015 with *You, Me and Forever* closes out the cycle, aligns him with more A-List collaborators and cements Najee's decades-long status in the forefront of contemporary jazz.

The sparks, the synergy, the synchronizing of two heads and hearts on the bumpy path to 'Love Always'....getting there as partners is part of the fun and that's what's heard in this exhilarating confection of jazz and soul. Najee continues to surround himself with an enviable peer set (Alex Bugnon, Robert Damper) that enhances his gifts to assemble a mesmerizing meld of fresh and familiar songs. Ambrosia's "Biggest Part Of Me," vocalized with Chuck Johnson, is pretty faithful to the original, featuring Najee's bold sax interplay throughout, and Andrea Wallace's soprano in the mid tempo "Giving It All We Got" hovers between tentative and taken with the prospect of a lasting love. The pulsating "Air" offers exactly like what is implied: gliding flutes and glistening key strokes keeping time alongside Najee's sax to illustrate the dizzying feel of pursuing and being pursued, while the revisitation of Antonio Carlos Jobim's "Wave" unfurls like surrender to a long-awaited rendezvous.

If *You, Me and Forever* seems to skip around stylistically (pop, contemporary jazz, vintage soul), the carousel feel works because its mimicking the dance of love and its many dips and swerves: "Fly With The Wind" pairs Najee and Bugnon, taut keyboard and smooth sax action, on an album highlight and one of its most irresistible jams, and the sentiment behind the lively "Signature," with a refrain sung by Frank McComb, feels like a *Najee's Theme*-era groove and features the kind chivalry that many could stand to take notes on: "*I'ma put my signature on you, get you home and take good care of you is what I'm gonna do/I'm gonna lay my signature on you, everything is gonna be alright/the morning I make you my wife.*"

From spine-tingling slow jams ("Butterfly Girl," the waltz and wedding-ready title track) to the giddy, improvisational tracks "Spectrum" and "Jannah" (the latter is so off-the-cuff that you can hear them cracking on one another at the end), Najee's *You, Me and Forever* will slip into the playlist as easily as any of its predecessors and become a grown and sexy summer staple for 2015. In an era where the music industry seems to cannibalize the vets in favor of the newbies, Najee has little to worry about: after all, his skill-set is well-honed, the crown is well-earned and the legacy will endure...Forever. **Highly Recommended**

By Melody Charles