

JAZZ FAVE ALBRIGHT 'SMOOTHS' IT OUT WITH NEW ALBUM

The first time contemporary jazz star Gerald Albright heard one of his tunes on the radio, he was driving in his hometown of Los Angeles. "I felt like a child at Christmas opening the greatest gift I could ever receive." Nowadays, even though hearing his tunes on the radio has become a commonplace occurrence for the renowned sax player and composer, it still feels like Christmas.

"I rarely listen to my albums once they're out. I like to let them take their own course, as you would with a child," Albright said in a recent phone interview. "It's like when your kid hits 21 — you let go and hope for the best."

"SMOOTH," Albright's fifth and latest Atlantic Records offspring, is an R&B-infused party where folks are strutting ("Don't Worry About It"), slow-dancing (Sedona), relaxing ("G & Lee"), and romancing ("I Surrender"). His latest top 5 smash on the jazz charts, the album boasts an impressive guest list: guitarist Lee Ritenour; bassist Stanley Clarke; and vocalists Vesta Williams ("Don't Worry About It"), Lalah Hathaway ("I Surrender"), Will Downing ("Just 2 B With You"), and (ex-Shalamar singer) Howard Hewitt, who provides backgrounds on Gerald's cover of Shalamar's '81 hit, "This Is For The Lover In You."

On "SMOOTH," Albright's role isn't limited to playing his Selmer saxes; he also contributed several bass tracks, some drum programming, and flute and keyboard parts, as well as writing songs, producing the sessions, and assisting the engineer. In addition to the Shalamar cover, he re-worked another hit, Tony! Toni! Tone!'s "Anniversary," which was "SMOOTH"'S first single.

"The beauty in covering a tune is in adding your own ingredients to the original version," explains Albright. "The challenge is to take the tune to another place musically but to do justice to the original arrangement."

Like any true jazzman, Albright doesn't take the stage in order to simply reproduce his hits — people can stay home and listen to his best-selling CD's if they want to hear them note for note. He's there to make songs both old and new come alive again for himself and the audience.

"I'm moved by everything going on within the ensemble when I'm performing," Albright explained. "It's not just the song's melody or chord structure. It could be a drum beat, a vibe that the musicians are giving off, somebody in the audience yelling 'Play Gerald!' — whatever —

and I'll just do something. The inspiration isn't predictable."

As a child, Gerald sang with his brother in Baptist churches throughout L.A. At Locke High School - where Patrice Rushen and Ndugu Chandler were also students - he began playing saxophone. At the University of Redlands he added bass to his arsenal, a personal musical milestone. His first gig was with Rushen, and he went on to record and tour with everyone from

Anita Baker and Olivia Newton John to the Temptations and Les McCann — not to mention his own highly successful career recording and touring on the international circuit.

"In Europe, people like to hear a person play and sweat. They just love to see you work. In the states, people listen for certain tunes. Either situation is just fine with me."

His success has enabled him to contribute to the L.A.-based

Institute for Black Parenting, an adoption and foster care agency, by headlining their fundraising concerts. And it took him to the Lincoln Memorial in January of '93, where he joined nine other sax players - including such legends as Grover Washington, Jr., Gerry Mulligan, and David Sanborn - in performing for Bill Clinton at the inaugural festivities.

Of all instruments, the saxophone most closely imitates



GERALD ALBRIGHT

the human voice. Asked which vocalists his saxophones resemble, Gerald says, "My soprano reminds me of Whitney Houston (with whom he is touring this summer), the alto has a Luther Vandross vibe, and the tenor reminds me of the late Johnny Hartman."

Coincidentally, Gerald performed his own version of the Hartman-arranged "My One

And Only Love" (originally recorded with John Coltrane) on his '91 album "LIVE AT BIRDLAND WEST."

"I hear similarities in the treatment of vibrato and in certain rhythmic aspects. Luther and Whitney are by far two of the classiest vocalists around today and I like to approach my instrument in a similar fashion: smoothly and with finesse."

DIGABLE PLANETS RETURNS

New York: Grammy Winners Digable Planets are shown here at Sterling Sound Studios mastering their new album, *Blow Out Comb*. This self-produced album will be in stores October 4, 1994 on Pendulum/EMI Records.

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