

PAUL TAYLOR

Burnin'

Whether he's grooving onstage or laying down his latest batch of sensuous and funky tracks in the studio, there's no better adjective to describe the effect Paul Taylor has on his legions of urban jazz fans worldwide than the title of his latest and fifth Peak Records CD, *Burnin'*.

With *Burnin'*, Taylor follows the spectacular success of his 2007 disc *Ladies' Choice*—the saxman's first ever #1 (and #1 debut) on *Billboard's* Contemporary Jazz Chart—with the most powerful and robust musical statement of his career. *Burnin'* is an explosive set of decidedly retro and old school soul influences, which reunites the saxman for the fourth time with veteran R&B/jazz hit makers Barry Eastmond (Al Jarreau, Peabo Bryson, Jonathan Butler, Anita Baker) and Rex Rideout (Richard Elliot, Gerald Albright, Boney James, Najee). Pushing his artistic envelope as never before, Taylor stretches beyond his usual soprano and alto comfort zone and plays lead melody on nine of the ten tracks on tenor sax for the very first time.

"The focus on the tenor happened by very happy accident," Taylor says. "I thought it would be cool to bring my tenor along with my soprano and alto to the sessions which kicked off the project. When I got to the studio and opened up my cases, I saw that the soprano was damaged. It made sense to use both alto and tenor to start writing, and I really started liking the way the lower tones of the tenor sounded. One of Barry's strengths in jazz is producing the tenor, so we just kept rolling with it. It's got a gutsier sound and as things turned out, lent itself to the retro '70s soul sounds that naturally emerged from our writing and recording sessions. I always think back to that Junior Walker 'Shotgun' blast and this was just my time to go in this direction."

The clever Eastmond to Rideout to Eastmond track-to-track flow on *Burnin'* essentially echoes the way Taylor has switched off on his previous collaborations with the producers, which include 2003's *Steppin' Out* and 2005's *Nightlife*. Casual listeners might be having such a blast swaying and grooving that they may not notice the switch off. Another reason for this is the consistency of Taylor's rhythm section under both producers—all the tracks feature Darrell Crooks on guitar and Michael White on drums; Melvin Lee Davis plays bass on seven tracks, while Ronnie Garrett handles it on three others.

If the cool guitar, laid back retro grooves and Taylor's simmering tenor don't conjure images of life "Back In The Day," singer Billy Cliff's vocals about singing our favorite songs during the summertime just might do the trick. Taylor then fires up a few more blasts from the past with the blues-and-gospel driven "Revival" and the R&B party jam "Groove Shack," which brings to mind Ramsey Lewis' "The In Crowd" and Marvin Gaye's "Got To Give It Up." After the lone alto sax tune, the lush and sexy "Remember the Love," the saxman gets down to business on the infectious title track "Burnin'," which mixes a scorching horn textured hook, percussive tenor soloing, shimmering synth elements and an irrepressible rolling groove.

The good feelings continue into the night as Taylor takes us into the "Side Pocket," where he struts his cool tenor melody and gets caught up in a hypnotic swirl with soaring synth atmospheres that scream and whisper: '70s! On the similarly vibrant and up-tempo "It's Like That," Eastmond creates a Stevie Wonder-like clavinet sound behind a potent sax hook, then conjures up a wistful synth Rhodes harmony beneath some of Taylor's sensuous and slow burning Gato Barbieri like playing. On the festive "Juke Joint," Eastmond creates a piano jam foundation and spirited organ harmonies that inspire Taylor to let loose on a true blues jazz jam session. After the set's lone cover, a fired up blues twist on War's "Me and Baby Brother," Taylor closes the set on a high energy note with "So Fine."

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A native of Denver, Taylor has lived and worked in the thriving musical environment of Las Vegas since graduating as a music performance major from UNLV. He began playing sax at age seven and discovered his true calling while playing in a local high school garage band called Mixed Company, which played Top 40, funk and Crusader-styled fusion. Aiming to build his resume beyond the many dues-paying Vegas lounge gigs that marked his early professional life, he commuted often to Los Angeles and hooked up in the late '80s with (his later producer) Dino Esposito.

Taylor did one of Esposito's sessions at Jeff Lorber's home studio; a few years later, in 1994, Lorber asked Paul to play with him at the Catalina Island JazzTrax Festival. Popular keyboardist Keiko Matsui and her then producer/husband Kazu liked Taylor's charismatic performance and soon offered him an audition with their band. He recorded and toured with the Matsuis for two years (appearing on *Sapphire* and *Dream Walk*), and Kazu Matsui eventually produced the saxman's debut, *On The Horn*, which spawned the #1 radio hit "Till We Meet Again."

Taylor quickly found his own niche in the smooth jazz world, and his quick but well deserved popularity led *Pleasure Seeker* to the top of the radio charts. Although Taylor has since been one of the genre's most popular live attractions as a solo artist, he eagerly accepted Russ Freeman's invitation to tour with The Rippingtons as a special guest artist in 2000. After making his Peak debut with 2001's *Hypnotic*, Taylor's career reached a fever pitch in 2004 when "Steppin' Out," the title track from his 2003 Top Ten *Billboard* Contemporary Jazz album, became *Radio & Records'* third biggest genre airplay cut of the year. He also toured as a featured performer with the all-star "Groovin' For Grover" lineup (including Jeff Lorber, Richard Elliot and Gerald Albright) and performed and made his acting debut on the legendary ABC-TV soap opera *One Life To Live*. The incredible momentum continued with his 2005 release *Nightlife*, Taylor's latest to hit the Top Five of *Billboard's* Contemporary Jazz Chart.

While the title track of *Ladies' Choice* was rising high on *Radio & Records'* smooth jazz chart, "How Did You Know," a song featuring R&B singer Regina Belle, crossed over to the Top 20 on the Urban AC chart. The album kept Taylor's inimitable vibe rolling between his 2006 and 2008 performances across the U.S. as part of the popular Norman Brown's Summer Storm tour.

Taylor's hitting the road again this summer. In addition to performances with his own band, he will be performing dates co-headlining with contemporary jazz pianist Alex Bugnon, and launching an exciting new live urban jazz tour called Gentlemen of the Night, with fellow saxophonists Marion Meadows and Michael Lington,

"I really love getting into the studio with Barry and Rex," he says. "It's something I am so grateful for and never take for granted. But nothing tops the moment when I get a chance to connect with the audience—it's just *Burnin!*"

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