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PIECES OF A DREAM GETS BACK TO BASICS

Soul Intent due in stores February 24, 2009

In the age of digital technology, the art of assembling a handful of musicians in the same place and time to craft a live, organic recording full of creative interplay and artistic energy can be easily lost. But keyboardist James Lloyd and drummer Curtis Harmon, the founding duo and driving force behind the enduring contemporary jazz collective known as Pieces of a Dream, haven't forgotten that the old school is still the place where some of the best and most enduring musical ideas are born.

Nearly three decades after their first recordings, Pieces of a Dream revisits their original approach to songwriting and recording with *Soul Intent* (HUCD 3136), set for worldwide release on Heads Up International on February 24, 2009. In many respects, the new album takes a back-to-basics approach, one that maximizes the most fundamental and enduring components of the Pieces experience.

“One of my main goals was to go back to the original approach to making a Pieces record,” says Lloyd. “The idea was to bring everyone into the studio at the same time so we could all work together in real time. A lot of people really get into that vintage sound from our first three albums, that period from '81 to '83. I figured if we went back to those old-style methods of recording and writing, then that element of vintage Pieces might show up in the music itself. It was an opportunity to bounce ideas off each other in a way that we could never have done had we recorded it separately. Five heads are definitely better than one.”

The sense of togetherness and common purpose is evident from the opening bars of the upbeat and lighthearted “Sway On,” a tune that builds a solid groove on a straightforward recurring riff. Written and produced by Lloyd, the track maximizes the interplay between Lloyd's keyboards and Tony Watson, Jr.'s artful sax runs.

The soulful and nostalgic “Vision Accomplished” is a collaborative effort by Lloyd and Harmon. As such, it takes the Pieces experience back to its earliest and deepest roots. “This song really captured the true Pieces of a Dream flavor,” says Harmon, “because it was written by the two original members of the band. It gets back to the heart and the core of how we like

to write, what we like to play and what we want our sound to be.”

But Lloyd and Harmon are just the tip of the creative iceberg on *Soul Intent*. At a number of points along the way, the album is a free-for-all where any and all parties in the studio had a hand in the songwriting process. “Hindsight,” “Things Are Looking Up” and “D Fuse the Situation” are all credited to the band as a whole – including guitarist Rohn Lawrence, who had just joined the Pieces lineup as the album was coming together. “We wanted to incorporate some of Rohn’s guitar into the mix – not just as a player, but as part of the songwriting process as well,” says Lloyd. “It was really surprising how those three songs came out. It was the first time in a long time that we’d done that together as a complete band.”

Lloyd sees his work on “D Fuse the Situation” as a nod to keyboard legend Herbie Hancock, his longtime idol. “I can’t really think of myself as being in the same league as Herbie,” says Lloyd, “but when I listen to that song, I feel like there are some moments where his inspiration is coming through. It’s a very old-school track, where we just let loose and play.”

In the home stretch, “Stand Up” rides a groove that’s both cool and energized at the same time, thanks in large part to saxophonist Joe Cunningham. “This one has a faster, more funky vibe, and I will tell you right now, this song is going to rock in concert,” says Harmon, who wrote the track with assistance from bassist Bennie Sims and Cunningham. “It turned out a lot better on the album than I originally thought it would. At first, I wasn’t getting the vibe and the energy that I was looking for. But when I added some guitar and percussion, as well as the saxophone parts, the song started to breathe and really come to life.”

The set closes with the emotionally powerful “Anywhere You Are,” a track carried along by the fervent sax work of Eddie Baccus, Jr., a longtime Pieces member. Co-written by Harmon, Sims and Baccus, “Anywhere” takes a number of interesting turns, shifting from a stirring ballad to a triumphant march and then back to a ballad in the final coda.

While there’s no denying the consistently high caliber of music generated by Pieces of a Dream over the course of their lengthy career, *Soul Intent* may be the most direct, back-to-basics experience of this enduring jazz combo in many years. “For this CD, the songs were recorded as the writers had originally intended them to be,” says Harmon. “They weren’t reworked and rearranged from their original intent and turned into something else. They weren’t tampered with. This recording as a whole portrays the intent of the writers a lot better than some of our past albums. As a result, the initial inspiration behind the songs comes across better.”

The intent is clear: a little bit of soul, delivered the old-fashioned way.

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