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SAXOPHONIST / VOCALIST WALTER BEASLEY CONFRONTS TURBULENT TIMES ON NEW HEADS UP CD

Free Your Mind set for worldwide release on January 27, 2009

We live in challenging times. Every day, the headlines warn us of – pick one – an unsettling economic upheaval, a precarious balance of world power, a life-threatening dose of nature’s fury, a contentious season of political transition and more. And then there are the personal struggles – the emotional upheavals in our individual lives that may not be part of the evening news, but are no less life-changing. After a while, the cumulative effect of these and countless other concerns weighs heavy on the heart and mind.

Saxophonist/vocalist/educator Walter Beasley suggests that it may be time to let go. His new Heads Up International recording, *Free Your Mind* (HUCD 3147), is set for worldwide release on January 27, 2009. The album is Beasley’s attempt to make sense of recent emotionally charged events – some global, some personal – that have changed his perspective on his own life in particular and the human experience in general.

“All I wanted to do with this record was accurately reflect the times and how I felt about them,” says Beasley. “I had been working so much in the past few years, and living this musical life so intensely, that I hadn’t taken the time to recognize the emotional impact of some things that had been happening in my life and in the world. With the times being what they are, I think this is a record that can help people let go of their concerns for a while and just lose themselves in the moment.”

In addition to Beasley’s own compositions, *Free Your Mind* also includes the work of a number of guest songwriters, including Pieces of a Dream keyboardist James Lloyd, who pens five of the album’s 11 tracks. Lloyd also handles the keyboard and producing work on these same five tracks.

The opening track, “Steady As She Goes,” is just what the title suggests – a midtempo piece that effortlessly draws the listener into the set, yet hints at the energy and diversity that follows. The much slower and more seductive followup track, “Love Calls” – written by Kem L. Owen – features Beasley on lead vocals as well as saxophone. “Kem is just an amazing writer,” he says. “This song has always touched me, and I just wanted to slow it down a little bit and pay tribute to a great artist and a great song. It’s definitely a crowd pleaser.”

Further in is “Message To Mark,” a quiet and introspective piece written by Beasley that features the tasteful trumpet work of Derek Cannon. The song is a tribute to multi-instrumentalist Mark Ledford, who died of a heart attack in late 2004 at age 44. “Mark was an extremely talented musician who played with Pat Metheny,” says Beasley, who is godfather to Ledford’s children.

“We were like brothers, two people whose musical careers were very similar in that we both played, sang and wrote music. But we had lost touch because of some things that were happening in our personal lives, so I wasn’t able to talk to him toward the end of his life. But since music was the thing that brought us together and made us so close, I said what I needed to say in my music.”

The Latin-flavored and polyrhythmic “DukeZillia” is a nod to jazz and R&B keyboardist and composer George Duke, whom Beasley considers a major influence on his musical development. “I was at the keyboard, and I was playing these chord changes,” Beasley recalls, “and I realized the music that was coming together was very much in the style of Duke. I saw this as my opportunity to write something that was indicative of the kind of lessons I had learned in my early childhood from his music.”

“Barack’s Groove,” a cool and self-assured piece underscored by an African rhythm, is a tribute to President Barack Obama. Obama has changed history for every child of any color in this country, Beasley says. “Barack and Michelle Obama have demonstrated to people of color and families of color that you can be born into a traditional African-American family – or a Latino family or an Asian family – and actually become president of the United States,” says Beasley. “If I have a son, and he says, ‘Dad, I want to be president someday,’ I can now show him a picture of a black man and say, ‘Son, that is possible in this country.’”

“Miss Minnie,” the poignant closing track, is Beasley’s heartfelt tribute to Minnie Dangerfield, a close friend of his family and an important influence on his life while he was growing up in California. This beloved matriarch, whom Beasley referred to as his “second mother,” passed away in April 2008 at age 91. “I would call her religiously every couple weeks, even after I went off to college and became an adult,” Beasley recalls. “She always gave me good advice. When I was making big decisions in my life, she would always tell me what I needed to know – not just what I wanted to hear.”

For Beasley, the making of *Free Your Mind* has been a learning experience, not just musically but also emotionally – perhaps even spiritually. “This is a more mature piece of work than anything else I’ve ever recorded,” he says. “I’ve done some growing up, and this album is a reflection of that process. You get to a point in your life where you realize that music is not everything. It usually happens when you start losing people who have been close to you for years and years. That’s a wake-up call. Now I appreciate every breath I take, and every relationship I’m in. I appreciate all the things I did right in my life, and I appreciate all the things I did wrong too. I want all those things to be a part of the legacy of my music. That legacy is something I’m not going to compromise.”

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