

# YELLOWJACKETS

For more than 25 years, the Yellowjackets have pushed the boundaries of improvisational jazz, and have been leaders in the music's inescapable evolution.

The Yellowjackets began as the Robben Ford Group, a three-piece backup unit assembled for the guitarist's 1977 release, *The Inside Story*. However, when Ford and his band headed in different creative directions, keyboardist Russell Ferrante, bassist Jimmy Haslip and drummer Ricky Lawson renamed themselves the Yellowjackets and released their self-titled debut album in 1981. Ford made appearances on the Jackets' first couple recordings, then moved on to other projects.

With the success of innovative instrumental bands like Weather Report around the same time, crossing and merging genres had become a successful strategy. By 1987, Lawson had left the band and was replaced by William Kennedy, whose polyrhythmic sensibilities opened doors to an even greater sense of exploration. The result of this exploratory sensibility was *Four Corners*, a 1987 recording with a distinctly world music sensibility.

Subsequent albums dispensed with some of the multi-layered intensity of *Four Corners* and took a more acoustic direction. *Greenhouse*, released in 1990, welcomed tenor saxophonist Bob Mintzer into the Yellowjackets lineup. Mintzer's dedication to the jazz tradition, along with his highly developed skills as an arranger, have since taken the Jackets to a new level of sophistication.

Throughout the '90s, the Jackets continued to explore a diverse cross-section of sound and rhythm. They entered the new millennium with their self-released *Mint Jam*, recorded live at the Mint in Los Angeles in July 2001 and released the following year. The two-disc set was nominated for a GRAMMY® for Best Contemporary Jazz Album. Backing up the regular lineup of Ferrante, Haslip and Mintzer on *Mint Jam* is drummer Marcus Baylor, who has since become a permanent member of the band.

*Time Squared*, the followup to *Mint Jam*, was released on Heads Up in May 2003. Their first studio recording in five years, *Time Squared* captures much of the energy and spontaneity that made *Mint Jam* a formidable GRAMMY® contender.

*Peace Round*, the 2004 holiday album, includes several traditional holiday songs, each with a unique contemporary jazz spin. *Altered State*, released in March 2005, continues to merge the traditional with the progressive by exploring unusual time signatures and exotic rhythms.

The Yellowjackets celebrated their milestone 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary with the 2006 CD/DVD release of the aptly titled *Twenty-Five*, which captured live performance in France and Italy.

In the summer of 2007, the Yellowjackets were joined by guitar virtuoso Mike Stern for some electrifying performances at the Montreal Jazz Festival. The dates served as the catalyst for *Lifecycle*, a Jackets/Stern studio collaboration that promises to be one of the most innovative and memorable jazz albums of 2008. The first Yellowjackets recording in 15 years to feature a guitar player, *Lifecycle* illustrates the kind of energy and creative brilliance that results when five talented players pool their individual skills as songwriters and musicians and merge into an entity that's far greater than the sum of its parts.

*Lifecycle* is set for release on May 20, 2008, and the band is scheduled to play a series of tour dates with Stern throughout the year.

## MIKE STERN

In a career that spans three decades and a discography that includes more than a dozen eclectic and innovative recordings, four-time GRAMMY® nominee Mike Stern has established himself as one of the premier jazz and jazz-fusion guitarists and composers of his generation.

Born in Boston in January 1953, Stern grew up in Washington, DC, then returned to Boston to study at the Berklee College of Music. After college, he got his start as a guitar player with Blood, Sweat & Tears at age 22. Following a brief stint with Billy Cobham's powerhouse fusion band from 1979 to 1980, he moved to New York City, where he was recruited by Miles Davis to play in Miles' celebrated comeback band of 1981. Stern appeared on three recordings with the jazz maestro – *Man with the Horn*, *Star People* and the live *We Want Miles*. He toured with Jaco Pastorius' Word of Mouth Band from 1983 through 1985 and returned to Miles' lineup for a second tour of duty that lasted close to a year.

In 1985, Stern recorded *Neesh*, his first recording as a leader, for the Japan-based Trio label. A year later, he made his debut on Atlantic with *Upside Downside*, featuring such celebrated colleagues as David Sanborn, Jaco Pastorius, saxophonist Bob Berg, bassists Mark Egan and Jeff Andrews, keyboardist Mitch Forman and drummers Dave Weckl and Steve Jordan. Over the next two years, Stern was a member of Michael Brecker's potent quintet, appearing on *Don't Try This At Home*.

In the summer of 1986, Stern toured with David Sanborn and later joined an electrified edition of Steps Ahead, which featured Mike Mainieri on midi vibes, Michael Brecker on the Electronic Wind Instrument (EWI), Darryl Jones on electric bass and Steve Smith on drums.

Stern's second Atlantic album, *Time In Place* (1988), delivered on the promise of his debut. He followed with *Jigsaw* (1989) and *Odds Or Evens* (1991), and at the same time formed a touring group with Bob Berg that included drummer Dennis Chambers and bassist Lincoln Goines. They remained a working unit from 1989 to 1992, at which point Stern joined Michael and Randy Brecker in a reunited Brecker Brothers Band, appearing on *Return of the Brecker Brothers*, released in 1992.

The '90s proved to be both prolific and critically successful for Stern. His acclaimed 1993 release, *Standards (And Other Songs)*, earned him the pick of Best Jazz Guitarist of the Year by the readers and critics of *Guitar Player* magazine. He followed that up with two hard-hitting offerings – *Is What It Is* in 1994 and *Between The Lines* in 1996 – both of which scored GRAMMY® nominations.

In 1997, he recorded *Give And Take* with bassist John Patitucci, drummer Jack DeJohnette, percussionist Don Alias and special guests Michael Brecker and David Sanborn. Stern's ninth release for Atlantic was a six-string summit with colleagues Bill Frisell and John Scofield that was appropriately titled *Play*. His *Voices* (2001) release, his first foray into vocal music, was another GRAMMY® nominee.

After 15 years with Atlantic, Stern shifted to ESC for the 2004 release of *These Times*, an eclectic set that included guest appearances by some high-profile session players – bassist Richard Bona, saxophonist Kenny Garrett and banjoist Bela Fleck.

Stern joined the Heads Up International label with the August 2006 release of *Who Let the Cats Out?* an album with an impressive guest roster: trumpeter Roy Hargrove; bassists Richard Bona, Anthony Jackson, Meshell Ndegeocello, Chris Minh Doky and Victor Wooten; and many others. *Who Let the Cats Out?* scored Stern his fourth GRAMMY® nomination (Best Contemporary Jazz Album) in December 2006.

After some highly successful Montreal Jazz festival dates with the Yellowjackets in the summer of 2007, Stern joined Jackets in the studio for the making of *Lifecycle*, the first Yellowjackets recording in 15 years to feature a guitar player.

*Lifecycle* is scheduled for release on May 20, 2008, and Stern is set to play numerous tour dates with the Jackets throughout the remainder of the year.

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