Najee - The Smooth Side Of Soul (2012)

01 – Dis N' Dat 02 – Just To Fall In Love (Feat Phil Perry) 03 – Perfect nites play 04 – You Tube
play
05 – In The Clouds 06 – One Night In Soho 07 – Mari 08 – Fu Fu She She (Feat. Chris Big Dog Davis) 09 – First Kiss (Feat. Jeff Lorber) 10 – Sound For Sore Ears (Feat. James Lloyd)

Multi-award winner Najee is one of contemporary jazz's long-standing ambassadors and continues to challenge himself with respect towards his fan base that has further translated to his overall industry longevity. As a lifelong fan of R&B and jazz music, Jerome Najee Rasheed decided to follow his musical childhood inspirations while developing his woodwind skills. Along the way, the New York native hooked up with the education powerhouse Jazz-mobile program - co-founded by jazz legend Dr. Billy Taylor and woodwind mentors, Jimmy Heath (The Heath Brothers) and Harold Jones from the New York Philharmonic. Brother Fareed also played a major role in Najee's musical path as a fellow student with Najee at The New England Conservatory of Music, as a fellow musician and producer and currently as Najee's manager.

Besides this incredible support system, Najees' always hungry attitude would bring a wealth of collaborations. His early years were focused more in the R&B world, first gaining major exposure with Chaka Khan and Freddie Jackson. Najee was a frequent contributor to other recording classics including Live at The Greek with Larry Carlton, Stanley Clarke and Billy Cobham, and two Prince projects, Rainbow Children and One Night Alone Live. Yet it was his ability to balance R&B with jazz which earned him NAACP Image and Soul Train Awards, plus consistently topped the charts in both genres over a course of fifteen albums for EMI, Heads Up and Polygram Records, while a major host of friends came on board like Will Downing and George Duke.

Now joined with the Shanachie Entertainment family, Najee flexes his woodwind dexterity and radiates pure bliss for jazz and R&B on his label debut, The Smooth Side of Soul. Whether riding on a groove or creating attractive ballads, Najee and his solid guest list, aligned by veteran urban producer/musician Chris 'Big Dog' Davis and a contemporary jazz pioneer Jeff Lorber, delivers on all cylinders. "Dis N' Dat" finds Najee and James Lloyd (Pieces of a Dream) feeling the hard-hitting funk from the bottom up; introduced properly with a fiercely crackling and popping bass. Phil Perry's delicious and passionate tenor fully compliments Najees' dancing saxophones and flute for the house music injected first single, "Just to Fall in Love." "One Night in Soho" honors the Soho districts of New York and London, supplying plenty of tight dance funk backbeats. Najee and Davis' playful interaction and snappy phrasing are a one-two knock out punch for "Fu Fu She She," laid down by Davis' mild hip-hop ambiances. Najee's lyricism is the focal point for the jazzy R&B kissed soundscapes of "You Tube," the atmospheric waltz, "In the Clouds" and the caressing, picturesque Latin edged "Mari." In a tasteful tribute to Jimmy Heath, The Smooth Side of Soul rightfully concludes with Najee and Lloyd digging into some muscular be-bop, courtesy of Heath's composition - "Sound for Sore Ears."

This is a rare happening when I can frankly conclude that The Smooth Side of Soul is an assured hit from beginning to end. To this day, Najees' overall body of work with his classy tones, incredible musicianship and woodwind mastery are precious musical treats to savor time and again. Five out of five stars. --- Peggy Oliver, reviews.theurbanmusicscene.com

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