

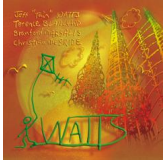
## Jeff 'Tain' Watts – Watts (2009)

Written by bluesever

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01. *Return of the Jitney Man* (7:03) 02. *Brekky With Drecky* (5:36) 03. *Katrina James* (5:23)  
04. *Owed...* (5:06) 05. *Dancin' 4 Chicken* (9:33) 06. *Wry Koln* (6:18) 07. *Dingle – Dangle* (6:38)  
08. *Devil's Ring Tone: The Movie* (6:52) 09. *M'Buzai* (3:06) 10. *The Devil's Ring Tone* (6:05)  
Jeff "Tain" Watts: drums Branford Marsalis: saxophones Terence Blanchard: trumpet  
Christian McBride: acoustic bass Lawrence Fields: piano (4)

Noted for his distinct and propulsive style, the eminent drummer/composer Jeff "Tain" Watts is a longtime member of the Branford Marsalis quartet and a leading sideman for many artists; yet it's his own recordings as a leader that are the most telling. True to form, this eponymous release has plenty of the drummer's fireworks but also shows that the power of his pen is almost as mighty as his sticks, with compositions that contain humor, incredible swing, angular rhythms, and some social/political awareness.

Watts could not have assembled a better group of equally iconic jazz leaders— saxophonist Branford Marsalis, trumpeter Terence Blanchard, and bassist Christian McBride. The compositions exploit the best from these consummate players, balancing individual freedoms and cohesive group unity. Branford's acrid tenor blows like no one else alongside Blanchard's stylized elastic brass-tones, trading notes and cutting hot solos while Watts and McBride's soulful bass form a rhythm section that would make Elvin Jones and Charles Mingus smile.

The overall energy flows better than on Watt's Dark Key debut release *Folk's Songs* (2007). From the vibing "Return of the Jitney Man," some N'awlins struttin' on "Katrina James" and wicked satire in "Devil's Ringtone (the movie)" which features a phone conversation between Satan and a client of former president George W. Bush, with a soundtrack from hell including torture and screams (a humorous commentary on that administration's eight years). A clean version of that track shows how the band articulates the music via a deep pocket groove and

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multiple changes including a New Orleans funeral march.

There's subtle depth here. Take the countrified bebop on the unforgettable "Dancin' 4 Chicken" heightened by McBride's stunning playing; Blanchard's silky voicing on the pseudo-Monk tune "Dingle - Dangle" and "Brekky With Drecky" dedicated to saxophonist Michael Brecker, based on an Ornette Coleman piece as Branford plays with laid back ease against a blues setting. A pleasant surprise is the singular ballad "Owed...", a lovely piece that features guest pianist Lawrence Fields.

Watts' persona (soulful, contemporary, street-wise, injected with swing and blues) permeates the music. Still at the top of his game, he expertly drives and massages the music with octopus-maneuvers and constantly changing traps. His exclamation point is forged on the imaginative soloing on "Wry Koln," the Latin-tinged burner which first appeared on Citizen Tain (Columbia Records, 1999) and the orchestrated isolation in "M'Buzai."

Watts resonates from start to finish and is one of Tain's best. ---Mark F. Turner,  
allaboutjazz.com

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