

Gerald Albright - Sax for Stax (2008)

Written by bluesever

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1. Theme From "The Men" 2. Knock On Wood 3. Never Can Say Goodbye (featuring Will Downing) 4. Memphis Passion 5. Respect Yourself (featuring Ledisi) 6. I Stand Accused 7. Cheaper To Keep Her 8. Walkin' Down Beale Street (featuring Kirk Whalum) 9. What You See Is What You Get (featuring Phillip Bailey) 10. Who's Makin' Love 11. W.C. Handy Hop

Gerald Albright: baritone, tenor, alto saxes; flutes (1, 3, 4, 6), bass guitar (4, 6, 8), percussion programming (4, 11); Teddy Campbell: drums; Lenny Castro: percussion (1-3, 5-10); Melvin Davis: bass (1-3, 5, 7, 9, 10); Errol Cooney: guitar (1-3, 5, 7, 9, 10); Tracy Carter: keyboards (1-3, 5, 7-11); Mark Cargill: strings (1, 3, 6, 9); Rex Rideout: keyboards (2, 5, 6, 9, 10); Will Downing: vocals (3); Rick Watford: guitars (4, 8, 11); Arlington Jones: keyboards (4); Ledisi: vocals (5); Darrell Crooks: guitar (6); Selina Albright: background vocals (6); Kirk Whalum: tenor sax (8); Phillip Bailey: vocals (9); Mabvuto Carpenter: background vocals (9).

It's all about Memphis with Gerald Albright's Sax for Stax. The veteran saxophonist revisits the sounds of the 1960s and '70s that helped define a label and, to a certain degree, a generation of soul musicians.

A native of Los Angeles, Albright has effortlessly straddled the line between jazz and R&B, making music that is easily accepted by fans of one genre or the other. His inspirations include such tenor sax legends as John Coltrane and Eddie Harris, as well as alto sax specialist Julian "Cannonball" Adderley and the versatile Maceo Parker. For this project, Albright was approached by Peak Records executive Mark Wexler about doing an album that tied in with parent label Concord's re-launching of Stax. Albright plays alto, tenor, and baritone sax on all tracks, but also contributes flutes, percussion programming, and bass guitar on some selections.

No Stax tribute would be complete without Isaac Hayes. Albright delivers a hard-charging cover

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of Hayes' "Theme from 'The Men,'" a seldom heard instrumental track from an obscure television series. With string arrangements by Mark Cargill, the core ensemble of Teddy Campbell on drums, Lenny Castro on percussion, Melvin Davis on bass, Tracy Carter on keyboards, and Errol Cooney on guitar, Albright captures the spirit of the original theme while making it fresh. A highlight is his Maceo Parker-esque alto solo near the end. Cargill's strings are very effective.

Guest vocalist Ledisi leads on the Staples Singers' "Respect Yourself." Cooney's rhythm guitar brings that early '70s flavor, while Albright's grinding alto adds a little seasoning. Rex Rideout, who produced and arranged several tracks, provides additional keys.

Memphis' Kirk Whalum plays tenor sax on one of three Albright originals, "Walkin' Down Beale Street," an easy-going track that lives up to its name. Earth, Wind & Fire's Philip Bailey joins for a moving presentation of the Dramatics' "What You See Is What You Get." Albright's arrangement injects a bit of Latin style on this mostly instrumental track.

Though this is mostly a cover album, it represents some of Albright's finest work. The selection of songs is excellent and the arrangements do justice to the originals without sounding trite. But more importantly, Albright shows his versatility in playing different saxophones, flutes, and bass. Sax for Stax is a fine tribute to the Memphis-based label and its artists. ---Woodrow Wilson, allaboutjazz.com

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