

Jazz Legend John Klemmer

John Beaudin - Hi John welcome. Boney James said that your 'Touch' album was one of the sexiest pieces out there. Have you guys met? Also have you met any of the other young sax players out there?

John Klemmer - I know Boney mostly through his Producer Paul Brown, who is a very nice guy. I have met most of the current 'Smooth Jazz Players' a number of years ago when they came to my Concerts. As far as Boney's comment about my 'Touch' album I am very flattered and quit frankly probably is right! (laughing) What a lot of artists don't understand is that when I made 'Touch' my intention was to only compose and play what I felt in my heart and the style of music I loved and felt I did the best. There was no overt attempt at making a 'sexy' recording or a 'hit record.' Although as I was making the record I had a strong feeling it was going to go through the roof! This whole area is where I think a lot of guys get confused, lost and perhaps grossly mistaken especially in the 'Smooth

Jazz' arena. Not only about how they judge my motivation about how and why 'Touch' was made but also how they go about in making their own recordings. Whatever you do, play has to be genuine and honest or else it won't really 'communicate' with an audience and the music needs to 'hit them in their guts' in a significantly huge and long lasting way. I hear a lot of what I call 'faux sexiness' and 'faux emotion' in current recordings. (Pretending and trying too hard to be sexy or emotional etc.) It doesn't sound genuine and honest. It's like I can tell they (and or their Producers) say to themselves, "Oh, if I play sexy or emotional that will get me a hit and make me popular." It doesn't work that way! People can tell consciously or even more unconsciously whether you are being genuine or not and there's nothing worse than a 'phony.' It's like watching an eighty year old woman walk down the street in hot pants and Go-Go boots. It just doesn't work! It doesn't look or feel right because it's inherently dishonest. My 'Touch' album became a classic and had such an incredible impact because it was honest. People felt in their guts the genuine honesty and vulnerability of the music composed, performed and they responded accordingly. I didn't consciously make a sexy recording with 'Touch.' I just focused in on my own love and the tenderness, emotions and passions of others. Of course, it turns out that those elements are part of what many

people consider to be sexy. I have been told a million times that I am naturally an incredibly sexy guy, composer, player and performer. If that is true, so be it but I don't spend time thinking about or planning how to be or play sexy.

John B - You have been doing this genre of Jazz long before it became fashionable. What do you think about these young Sax guys on Jazz radio?

John K. - My first statement here is what I said a while ago when there was not one day that went by when someone didn't ask me what I thought of Kenny G and I had to listen to them putting this guy down. I would say to them, "Look, every man has a right to do whatever he wants to do to please himself and even more support his family as long as he is not directly hurting anyone." I learned about that when I was 'coming up' as a musician in Chicago. A few of us guys had nothing to do one night and decided to go hear this sax player that everyone in town was making fun of and thought was really corny. To make a long story short that night I had an unexpected private conversation with this (very nice) guy and he whispered in my ear, "You know John, I'm not crazy about playing this music and I can certainly play better than what you heard tonight but my wife is dying of Cancer and I have five kids to raise and support and two of them have

Downs syndrome." (This was validated as true.) As I drove home that snowy night in Chicago I said to myself out loud with tears streaming down my eyes, "I will never judge another guy, player, person or musician again!" However, I still have and am entitled to my educated and experienced opinions. I have never heard such a blatant era of plagiarism in my life as I have heard the last number of years. I came up in era that if you sounded like any body else you should go shoot yourself! It's okay and natural to be influenced by other players but I have heard guys without any sense of concern or shame duplicate other players exactly or at least you can hear them attempt to. However, I do not necessarily blame them as due to the times and era we live in combined with the mood, tone and pressures of record companies and radio. These guys know that to survive, record and get airplay they have to sound like everybody else on radio or they won't get a record deal or any airplay because currently that seems to be what's expected if not demanded and looked for by 'the powers that be.' So, I am very understanding and forgiving for this situation. That's the way things are right now and perhaps, who knows, they will be this way for a very long time but I think it has lowered the standards of excellence and times change. I have nothing against 'commerciality' at all! I love it! In many ways, I have

come to learn that you have more freedom in commerciality than in other forms of Instrumental or Jazz music due to the high emphasis on tradition it seems to have. I believe you can still be innovative, sophisticated and with high quality in the commercial arena. I would love to hear more of that if the 'powers that be' will let them. However, I still hear slipping through some really nice stuff especially sonically and in the production area. These guys can really play well and I am fascinated and excited to hear what they would play if they had more freedom. I believe in the natural, human spirit and desire for guys to want to express themselves and believe as the mood of the times possibly change you will hear better and better stuff. In the same way you can't eat the same food for dinner every night or wear the same clothes every day. Everything can't be 'smooth' all the time. They all sound like very competent and good players and the 'cream will naturally rise to the top' in time. I feel compelled to comment on something else of great importance and that is that all these so called 'younger' players seem to be very professional, drug-free and really decent guys with families to support and not out acting like a bunch of 'nuts' which seemed so prevalent in long times past which to many gave 'Jazz' a bad name. (Someday I hope the word 'Jazz' will disappear and be substituted with some other word.) My final comment on this is

that I see and hear slowly emerging a completely new style of music that has yet to come together and be accurately titled. We are going through a transitional period which has not settled or locked in yet, which for lack of a better word right now is being called 'Smooth Jazz.' By the way, 'Smooth Jazz' is a marketing term not a term of musical style.

John B - I love your 'surrender your self to the music' attitude. The ego can get in the way of the music but it's also a concept that is foreign to some musician's. Ego is such a big part of some musician's lives.

John K - That's right. However, 'ego' is a large part of a lot of people's lives and not just musicians and artists.

John B - Bruce Hornsby told me a while back that virtuosity has never been part of what Pop or even Rock music was about. He's a guy that really works on his playing and he looks around and doesn't see a lot of people on the Top 40 working on their chops. What do you see when you look out there? Do you still practice and work at it?

John K - I can't make such an all encompassing,

judgmental statement like that because I don't know what everyone is doing or not doing. Most guys I have known in so called Top 40 play three to four different instruments! Maybe they are not 'virtuoso's' but they play more instruments than I do! I think that the Top 40 judgmental thing is 'elitist-archaic old jazz talk and attitude stuff' that's not been true for a very long time and if it still exists should be dropped. I do think I see, due to the advent of all the new technology, the focus changing for a lot of musician's which is understandable as one has to keep up with the times and learn this stuff or at least expose yourself to it. They are new tools to hopefully in time be used if not already in creative and positive ways. However, the focus of time and energy on the new technology could quite seriously effect what guys are focusing and spending time on like not on their chosen instruments but more on the tech stuff. A guy came up to me wanting to meet me. I asked him, "What do you play?" He said; "An AKAI MPC 2000." Times change! I have my own unique practice schedule as most players do. Some of what I do are as follows:

#1. In the past I saved my practicing for live performances! I learned that part of what an audience enjoyed was watching and listening to me 'work through my stuff' live on stage. They could tell I was working through it and it was exciting and

interesting for them to see and listen to however I think those times are past. However, I still try to not practice too much as I want to save the initial excitement and joy I have for playing the horn for when I perform, especially live. I want to share with an audience all that with them. Of course, if there is something new or special I am working on I will practice that until it's mastered and I will also practice or warm up more when I am recording. It really depends on how much I am performing and playing at any given time. If I'm not working and performing a lot at a given time period I will play (not practice) to keep things at a certain status quo. I never really practiced I just played night and day until

I dropped!! I accomplished more that way and it was more fun!

#2. I have always had a 'ton of chops' almost too much chops as I practiced furiously night and day when I first started playing. I figured then that the faster I could master all aspects of the technical side of the Horn(s) the quicker I could move on to the more sophisticated 'meat' of playing the Horn and music. So, years later I would consciously not practice to keep my chops level down or else my playing would be too much both in recording and performing live. Especially in today's climate as

if you play to good with too much chops, you will sound 'savant grade' to today's listeners and what they are used to hearing lately!

#3. I am practicing more these days as I have decided to change my sound some and have some new ideas I want to incorporate into my style of playing. My desires and goals determine how much and what I practice or don't practice. I may purposely stop practicing certain things if I want to get rid of them in my playing style.

John B - I was fifteen when I first listened to you and one of the constants in your music for me has always been it's kind of a respite from the outside world. I like the intimacy that's always there. On 'Touch' for instance where you at personally and emotionally when you recorded it?

John K - To explain where I was at and when I conceived the music of 'Touch' as well as all my other music would take hours to explain. Let me just say that I learned early on that you have to 'be' and 'live' like the things you want to express musically for them to truly and powerfully be communicated.

John B - You strike me as a deep thinker. Interestingly, you were doing Smooth Jazz long before the term was invented. Tell me, were you a

New Age or deep thinker long before that term was invented?

John K - I have always been interested in Psychology, Philosophy and Sociology. One will find that most all artists worth their salt are deep thinkers, curious, interested in many things in one way or another and some are just nuts! (smiling)
New Age and Smooth Jazz are marketing terms not styles of music and art. Deep thinking and spirituality is as old as time and was here eons before New Age. I just decided to express a lot of that in my compositions and recordings because I liked it and it's who and what I am and like to be.

John B - I have in my personal and emotional life 'truths of life'. These are little secrets that I wish I would of known when I was maybe twenty but you know how life is, one has to play it out sometimes and simply having someone tell you one of these 'truths of life' doesn't mean that we will get it. Are there some for you? What do you know now that you wished you would have known at twenty?

John K - I would like to forget a lot of what I know and more about business, making money and how and why women think and do what they do!
(laughing)

John B - When you took your long break a while ago what did you do with yourself?

John K - Everything but nothing that much different than all people do everyday in their lives. It's just too much and too long to go into detail here. All my breaks have been valuable growth and change periods all with specific reasons and goals.

John B - I know you like Yanni. Why do you think people pick on him so much?

John K - Probably because he is pretty, popular, famous, successful and rich! All exactly like me (smiling) and they are jealous too. Certain people (musicians) hear and see a a guy like this doing well and they say in their heads, " Hey, that should be me or why is he getting all that and not me and I'm just as good if not better than he is!" Not all people pick on Yanni. He is quite popular and the people who pick on him are the elitist, jealous, ignorant and unhappy people who like to laugh at anything clean and good. They think he is a 'goodie two shoes' and think that anything more 'dirty and crazy' for lack of a better word is 'hipper' and better. They are actually people who are afraid!. It's the oldest human process in history; put someone else down so you can feel better about yourself, especially if you haven't achieved anything for yourself! The 'real'

great people are confident and open minded enough to accept and see value in most all things. That's where the typical 'jazz musician attitude' is so old and tired. The really great jazz artists liked and appreciated everything! Most of all the 'put down' people (in their ignorance) would be stunned at the music people like Charlie Parker and Bill Evans liked and listened to but never told anyone for fear of being put down or laughed at! Actually, Yanni started something that could have been advanced and gone a long, long way in creating new musical styles and exposing millions of people to music they might not have ordinarily heard.

John B - I really loved Brazilia from 1979. It literally made me feel very alive. That first track, the title song just jumps out at you! 'Tropical Snowflakes' is another of my favorites a true stress less tune. I loved the orchestration as well.

John K - It was fun writing, playing and recording. I always wished I would have done certain things differently however.

John B - Lots of your classic albums are not available on CD. Do you have any news on re-releases for instance I'm waiting for 'Barefoot Ballet.'

John K - You'll have to ask the 'Verve' music groups about this. They in their infinite wisdom of choice and policy can only determine this as I don't own these particular masters.

John B - 'Arabesque' from 1977 is another that has stayed with me. I listened to that today and it's just another reminder that so many people in Smooth Jazz have been influenced by you. Any thought on Arabesque?

John K - It was fun writing, performing and recording, however there are always things I might have wished I did differently.

John B - Is there an echo in here? (Laughing) I want to talk about one more of your classic albums 'Cry' from 1978. You know my first impression back then was that this album was a brave move on your part. Interestingly, it left me with the same feeling that I got from Paul Horn, 'Inside The Taj Mahal.' There was a flow there, that easy listening experience when you know the artist is in the 'zone.' It's truly a classic, it's just you and your instrument and it's a breathtaking album. Any thoughts on it now?

John K - Everything you said is true. However it

wasn't until after I recorded 'Cry' that people made me aware of the Paul Horn recording. I had never heard it. 'Cry,' solo sax was and is the essence of me and the essence of 'Touch.' It was a fight all the way to get it released as was the other solo sax recording on 'Elektra' called 'Life.' It's the most gorgeous experience in the world, solo sax, especially because of the electronic effects I use to enhance the Palette of sound I can use. There are many, many solo sax recordings still unreleased and I have and still am recording solo sax all the time as well as performing live with it. It's the most powerful experience I have ever had with an audience. It has more power than a five hundred piece Orchestra because of the way I do it and the secrets I use to do it both musically, Sociologically and Psychologically.

John B - Tell me about 'Making Love Vol 1.'

John K - 'Making Love' Vol 1 (of probably 10 Volumes) are recordings I made on the spur of the moment going into the studio with the best musician's in the world and they turned out to be 'magical sessions.' There was no rehearsal and no one saw the songs before hand, it was just that rare experience of everything and everybody 'clicking.' We were all amazed! During the first part of the recording when I realized what was happening

during the guitar players solo, I sneaked into the control room and told the engineer to get some 'back up' machines and tie them together and under no circumstances stop recording! It's the best recordings, music and performance since 'Touch' and 'Barefoot Ballet' but nobody knows that yet. (No one could hear the 'depth' either when 'Touch' first came out.) I added the continuous sound effect of rain and thunderstorms running through out the entire record because I heard it and it felt right and it turned out to be a form of what is called 'white noise' as a 'bed' for the music. It also was an accurate accounting of the musical experience as it was actually raining on the way and outside of the studio while we were recording. The sound effect also 'takes you potentially to some other place.' Of course, the jazz purists' think it is silly and it has too much depth for the current 'Smooth Jazz' genre but the people, the listeners gets it and that's what counts! This recording went over everybody's head but in time will be understood and appreciated for what it is.

John B - I read an interesting article about your old teacher Joe Daley. I liked the story about you both watching the man on the moon instead of having a music lesson. Was he right are there more important things in life than music and tell me about Joe?

John K - To tell you about Joe would take too long and in a way is irrelevant. He was a great teacher and he was good to me. Everything is important and tied together. One makes one's choices as to what and which way to lean or focus a little bit more than other things perhaps.

John B - John, thank you so much for your time. Through out the years your music has made a huge difference for me.

John K -You are most welcome. It's made a huge difference in my life too!