

" JOHN KLEMMER "

"I am a "romanticist" & very "emotional" by nature. I discovered early on in my life that I was that way & that "that" type of Music is what I "hear" & "do best."

JOHN KLEMMER, the passionately gifted saxophonist who gave us the exquisite "Brazilia", talks openly to SEMOUR NURSE at The Bottom End in this very special interview.

Seymour Nurse: How did you first get into jazz, and who were the musicians that inspired you the most?

John Klemmer: I was, as a youngster, into "Early Rock N Roll & R&B" ["white

blues"] like Little Richard, & Elvis etc. I went to a record store & saw an album cover of John Coltrane's "My Favorite Things" & it was a saxophone I had never seen before. I then realized I was in the "jazz section" [what is "jazz" I asked myself?] & chose, by album cover & instincts, those jazz albums I wanted to "try". I took them home & as I listened two [2] things struck me [at 11 years old];

#1. I liked "most" of the Music & I could tell it was more sophisticated, complex, harder to play & took more knowledge etc. than what I had been listening to & playing up until then.

#2. I said to myself; "I can't play like that & I have to learn how to, simply because, "I can't play like that!" [Yet!]

ALL-ANY "jazz artist" or ANY-ALL musical artists inspired me both on record or "locally". I learned & enjoyed something from everyone. But realistically I did grow up in what might be called "The Coltrane

Era".

S.N: You play many instruments, and even began learning the guitar at the age of 5. What made you decide to focus mainly on the saxophone?

J.K: I was 11 years old. I saw a sax player on T.V. & mentioned to my parents as we watched T.V. together that I liked the way it looked & sounded. That's all I said. I never said I wanted to play one. For my birthday, totally unexpected & not asked for, my parents gave me a brand new alto sax & "a teacher with lessons" to go with it. [I think they partially did it because one of my uncles had played sax many years before. I did not know that then.] I "took to it" immediately & because I could "do it" very well & it was fun & intellectually challenging, I just stayed with it. As I got older & found myself to be some what "shy" or "reclusive", plus, living in a very traumatic family environment, it also was a way to keep busy & "do something" & escape & distract myself from the trauma's I found myself

living in & having to deal with. It also gave me an outlet to "express myself" emotionally etc.

S.N: How was your experience playing with Big Bands, and Don Ellis?

J.K: I played in many Big Bands in my early years around Chicago. They were great experience's in learning "how" to play with other musicians ["stay in tune" & "stylistically"] plus "sight reading" music you were seeing for the first time, discipline & I watched "how" these Band Leaders "led" their Bands both good & bad. My VERY BRIEF experience with Don's Band was interesting for me with all the Electronics he was experimenting with. I didn't care for all the different time signatures. Some of what he was trying to do I didn't care for & felt it was "over the top". Don seemed to me to be a man of experimentation & "extremes" both in music & his personal life. He was totally dedicated to all his ideas despite criticism. In summation; He created a "style" of

music for himself & a "sound" & had interests & goals "outside the norm & traditional" which he stayed dedicated to.

S.N: At the age of 23, you recorded the album "Blowin' Gold" which was co-produced by Marshall Chess, who also produced music for the Rolling Stones. "Blowin' Gold" has been regarded by many as the being the first and most innovative jazz/rock fusion albums. This album was so ahead of its time, experimenting with various sounds and effects that nobody else was touching on, during that period. How did the idea for this project come about?

J.K: Many if not most things in life have an "evolutionary" process of many different things that at some moment in time "come together". I had moved from Chicago to L.A. while after already recording 2 previous "jazz" albums for Chess. I was now living in L.A. where the "'60's Rock Revolution" was happening so I was exposed to much "Rock" of that time. I worked briefly with [I

was primarily working with my own bands] Don Ellis's Band who was deeply into "electronics". I am naturally inquisitive, open to try new things & experiment. I "discovered" the "echoplex" ["delay"] that I primarily liked because; I liked the sound, if I played a certain way I could create "chords" [I studied piano], was always frustrated I could only play one note at a time [opposed to my very early experience playing the guitar] and "it" just seemed to "fit" my style of Composing & playing. Plus, early in Chicago, before moving to L.A. & my exposure to "electronics", I was already exploring playing "faster than" Coltrane's style of "sheets of sound", as it was nick-named, where you play so fast you can create an "illusion" of playing "chords. That was important to me back then in Chicago as I had a "piano less" trio as my Band for a while. Without a piano player I had to learn & know how to play a certain way where a listener could "hear" the melody of a song but could tell the song even easier if I could "play or infer" the "chords" of

the song as well. In L.A., after having originally "starting" on Guitar at 5 years old & still stuck in my unconscious, it was "easy" psychologically etc. for me to experiment with various "pedal effects" that Guitar Players used, on sax. [Where other sax players felt that doing such was "sacrilegious" etc.] I was having so much fun & so busy in my just arriving in L.A., I literally forgot, [!] I had a record contract! I got a call from Marshall Chess [I knew nothing about him] in the middle of the night with him jokingly telling me; "Hey Man! You owe us some records!" & he then explained his father had died & was taking on a "role" at Chess Records, had worked with The Rolling Stones ["white blues" to me], wanted to make Chess Records sound more contemporary, knew I played great & was "adventurous" & knew I was in L.A. where the "rock explosion" was taking place & that I was very well aware of it all, if not, actually playing with many of these artists. Marshall literally said to me [at 4 A.M. on the phone]; "John. Why don't you fly back to Chicago & bring with you some

of those "long hair hippie cats" [:)] & use the "Chess Records House Rhythm Section" [who did all the Muddy Waters, Ramsey Lewis, early Minnie Riperton etc. etc. records for Chess] & lets put it all together & see what happens?" I said; "Sorry I forgot I had a record contract & owe you some more records & there are some "long haired hippie cats" [:)] in my current band & I know the guys in the "Chess House Band" [Pete Cosey, Phil Upchurch & Morris Jennings etc.] Only one thing I demand; "No Drugs" etc. [I do not nor ever had nor like "drugs" in me or around me, but, because of the "type" of album cover chose for "Blow'in Gold" & the type of music that it & the albums to follow, people then & still today think it's "stoner" etc. Music. Not true. Nobody was "stoned" making all those albums. We were just having fun making [new] great Music!]

I flew out to Chicago with a keyboard player, started composing some songs beforehand & looked over some past songs I wrote [I never

stop composing day & night] & spent a week recording everyday while I had the flu in Chicago at the Chess Termar studio, went back to L.A. & never heard any play back of what we recorded. Most all were first takes. I never record anyone else's' songs but Marshall "asked" if I would record "Hey Jude" as a "favor" [Marshall never interfered with the recording process-he simply listened-with his mouth hanging open!] [:)] & the piano player I brought with me from L.A. asked if we could "try" his favorite song "Third Stone from The Sun" & I said; "OK. Just this one time will I try songs other than my own because we're having fun & I really like you guys, however, as always, it's my final choice whether they go on the album or not". [As an anecdote the keyboard player I brought with me from L.A. was intrigued by the huge Hammond B-3 Organ parked in & covered up in a corner of the studio. He knew "that Organ" was used on tons of great Blues Records he loved & "begged" if he could try/play it. That's how Organ ended up on the record.]

I immediately left for a State Dept. tour of Africa after finishing recording & **had no idea I had a "hit record" until I got back 4 months later.** I continued experimenting making more, now called "**jazz-rock fusion records**", until I left Chess. So. As you read back all the "above" **one can see how all the different elements & experiences from the past & all that was happening "currently" culminated & joined "at one time" in "a particular situation" in time.**

S.N: Two of my favourite compositions of yours are the "**My Love Has Butterfly Wings**", and "**Humbling Love**". I have to acknowledge that it is your use of the echoplex in these songs that make them so exquisite.

J.K: I explained how that happened above. "**I came upon it, loved it, it fit my style of Composing & I used it ever since**". I knew I could not "**patent**" the sound [nor any & the devices that can create "**delay**", but I knew that if I used it all the time [because I loved it], any sax player who used "**delay**",

from then on, would sound like "me", & avoid using it. So, in a sense, "I owned ["claimed"] it for "me".] [:)]

S.N: For me, one of your most exciting albums is "Magic and Movement", which featured live material from 1973/74. "The Tree of Forbidden Fruit" with Tom Canning, Cecil McBee, and Alphonse Mouzon really highlighted the depth and power of your playing and "Blood from the Sun" is such a moving piece with a great piano solo from Mike Nock. This was a fantastic live session.

J.K: That album is a combination of "Live At Montreux" & "Out-Takes" from the "Waterfalls" album. It was after that album & that "time" I changed musical directions, because, I felt there was no more for me to "do or say" in "that" style & genre of music & no place more "that style" of music could go in. Plus, I was bored with it. "I did it". It was time for me to move on. [I can always tell now when I am going to [be forced] to change musical directions.

My fingers will just not "go" to where they used to. Something "clicks" inside my head & makes it that way. "Time to change/move on & then I have to "discover" where "me" wants to go next!] **S.N: You are aware that your music had a profound affect on London's 'Jazz-Fusion Dance Movement', particularly during its infancy (Jazz-Funk period) in 1979-80.**

S.N. Probably your earliest contribution to our dance floors was as a guest soloist on the Roy Haynes track, "Thank You Thank You" from the same album that gave us the remarkable "Quiet Fire". "Thank You Thank You" has such a nice funkiness to its groove, and your solo is very commanding with so much character.

J.K: I have no awareness that my music had a profound affect on London's 'Jazz-Fusion Dance Movement'. No one told me & I haven't come to the U.K. as much as I have wanted to. [There is an old saying; "The Artist Is Always The Last To Know".]

I was on tour & when in S.F. someone from Fantasy Records called & asked if I wanted to do a "quest solo" appearance [2 songs/tracks] on a "concept album" they were putting together with different sax players. ["Thank You" came from that session from the Fantasy album "Five Birds & A Monk".] I literally recorded it [all first takes] & had to get back to the theater for my second show. I don't like my playing on that track. [Anecdote; Throughout that whole recording project Roy Haynes had an impacted tooth & his right cheek was swollen to the size of a grapefruit. Roy never complained & just finished the project.]

S.N: Roy Haynes was drumming like that on the, "Thank You Thank You" with an impacted tooth... I am so impressed. I still have to say that I have had so much fun dancing to your solo on the "Thank You Thank You" over the years. In 1978 you released the album "Arabesque" which gave us dancers the exciting "Paradise". This is such a great track with an exquisite

intro before it embarks upon its magical journey. This is a very beautiful album, with a strong group of musicians.

J.K: I had a wonderful time Composing that Music & flew in some great N.Y. studio musicians to mix in with the great L.A. studio musicians I chose. There is more of that style of Music recently & currently available to purchase & hear [online/digital only thus far] at iTUNES & AMAZON.COM etc. called "RIO" [VOL. 1 & II.]

S.N: We were blessed with another striking version of "Paradise" that was released a year later on the album, "Straight from the Heart", featuring one of my favourite bass players, Bob Magnusson. This album also gave us another nice "Fusion foot dance shuffler", in the form of "Touch". This session was recorded direct-to-disc, which creates great interactions amongst the musicians. Some regard this as one of your finest albums.

J.K: Recording Direct To Disc albums is

very exhausting to do. You record one complete side at a time & do numerous times to have different takes to choose from. No editing. No overdubbing. It's essentially a "live album" recorded in a studio with high level "audiophile" equipment. I did them [2 Direct To Disc] "Straight From The Heart" & "Finesse" because they offered me a tremendous amount of money. But it also was an "artistic" & an "endurance" challenge. Bob Magnusson is a great bass player & a great guy. He was in my "touring band" at the time. He can also be heard with me on my "Nexus" album. [I will tell you a "secret".] [:)] Many of the tracks on "Straight From The Heart" can be heard on "RIO" [VOL. I & II]

S.N: A year later you released what proved to be your most popular track on UK dance floors, which of course was "Brazilia". This tune was my real "first love" of Jazz-Fusion dance tracks, as I was introduced to it at 12 years old, and was so moved at how beautiful it was. As in the "Paradise", the intro is magical, and as for

Abraham Laboriel's bassline... You soar on the "Brazilia", and Jorge Dalto and Abraham Laboriel's. solos are flying too. The orchestral arrangement from Ian Freebairn-Smith just adds to the magic. You must have had a ball playing this track.

J.K: Yes all those albums were great fun. There's not much else to say about them except EVERYONE involved loved what they were playing, put their hearts in it & had fun. Along with that and many other things, my hope was; "To Make Music That Would Last Forever". However, quite frankly, I never imagined anyone "dancing" to that Music. That's "news" [pleasant news] to me. S.N: "Brazilia" also features beautiful tracks such as "Tender Storm", "Copacabana" and the delightful rendition of "Summertime". I would have loved to have heard you record an album with Antonio Carlos Jobim and a full orchestra. Which Brazilian artists have inspired you?

J.K: All Brazillian Artists have inspired me. One time the Guitarist [& friend] Oscar Castro Neves gave me hundreds of copies of cassettes from his private collection he had of obscure Brazilian Artists for me to listen to. Over the years, record companies keep trying to "break" a Brazilian Artist in the U.S. etc., but, to try to be "commercial" & sell more, they "water down the music & the Artist" & make it not sell & ruining the Music as well! [I like Bebel Gilberto's recent CD'S & others on The Six Degree's Record Label.]

S.N: You headlined a band which for me was one of the greatest Jazz-Fusion line ups of all time, which featured Herbie Hancock, George Benson, Harvey Mason, Jean Luc Ponty, Roy Ayers, and Phil Upchurch. This must have been quite a jam?

J.K: That was a "one time only" event. We were all hired to play together on a T.V. show. It was difficult because we all had trouble hearing & seeing each other. We all did the best we could at the time in a very

hot T.V. sound stage.

S.N: Just the fact that you guys were on the same stage is pretty phenomenal within itself. You have always been prepared to venture into new musical territories, and created a series of Solo Sax albums. The "Cry" (Solo Sax 1) was a masterpiece. For me, this album has so much more depth and feeling within one instrument than many recordings produce with a full band. What inspired you to go down this solo route?

J.K: When younger & living in Chicago, after moving away from my parents home in the suburbs & then living in a small apartment, it was always hard to find someplace to practice, especially at night. Around the corner from my apartment was a fairly large Laundromat that I noticed was not that busy, if at all, & I would go there to practice all night. At times there were Policeman & homeless people etc. who would just come in to listen to me & be "my audience". Years later, on tour, in my

shows, in the middle where I would announce the names of the songs we played & introduce the band, to give my band a rest & the audience a "break" & something different to listen to, I would play "solo sax" [usually always with the delay effect] & you could always only hear a "pin drop" & would get a standing ovation. I decided to record & release a Solo Sax album, which, was pure hell fighting with my own Management etc. at the time & the record company to release it. ALL were stunned at the acceptance, popularity & sales of "Cry" & then "Life". There are more Solo Sax CD'S coming out soon. I love the "Solo Sax" Concept most of all because I am free to "do" anything I want. I can add an acoustic guitar player, piano player, dancer or vocalist etc. anytime I want for as long or short as I choose. I can play "anything" & in "anyway" I want. "Complete Freedom & Completely Me". S.N: You formed the record label "Touch Records USA" where you and other artists could express yourselves freely without being confined to the restrictions of labels and stereotypes.

This is a fabulous concept that has produced some remarkable music.

J.K: Touch Records USA is a "vanity label" only for just "special" occasional projects few & far between & digital only. [Thus far.] It's really not a "full fledged record company". I have no desires to have my own "record company". It was/is just a "fun thing" to do. It is a terrific "idea" but I'm afraid not much will be done with it. I don't want to "be a businessman". [But. One never knows the future! Right?]

S.N: One thing that I have always admired about your work is the openness, and depth in which you express your romantic nature through songs like, "Hush", "FreeFall Lover", "Walk In Love", "Poem Painter", "Heart", and "Desire" ... to name a few. This is also represented in the beautiful artwork and poetry on your album covers. I find your poetry as inspiring as your music.

J.K: Thank you so much. I AM a

"romanticist" & very "emotional" by nature. I discovered early on in my life that I was that way, & that "that" type of Music is what I "hear" & "do best". I also realized that by adding my "poetry" or whatever to my albums "personalized" & "humanized" my records & gave people "something extra" than "just" the Music and they could know more about me as a "person" [just like "them"] & perhaps helped people understand more "why" I recorded the music on "that" album they were listening to. One can read much more of my Poetry & Prose on my Website: johnklemmer.com. Also, I love it & it's more of a chance to be creative & "express myself". I am a "lyricist" as well on my own & in collaborations with other Song Writers. ["Walk In Love" was recorded by The Manhattan Transfer & Acker Bilk etc. & were/are quite popular in the U.K. I understand.]

There is already more than enough "music to make you go nuts" out there. I have

dedicated myself to; "Do The Most Beautiful Music I Can Until The End".

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S.N: What projects are you currently working on, and can we expect to see you in the UK soon?

J.K: I am always Composing day & night & recording & performing etc. There can be numerous projects going on at the same as there is now. **I don't know when I will be coming to the U.K. "in person".** I will tell you that a number of years ago **I seriously thought about, researched & considered moving to London** as I was thinking at the time that **there was "more going on creatively" there than in the U.S.** I am reminded of that consideration when I hear **Artists coming out of the U.K. such as "Sade" & other Artists be they Pop, Rock or "Dance/Electronica" etc.** [Please tell "Sade" that; **"I'm in Love with Her & will Marry Her anytime She wants if She will have me".**] [(:)] [Please tell the **"guys in the band" I think they are great"**, but, sorry, I

**am only interested in Marrying Sade!]
[:))))))))))))))]]**

S.N: I can totally understand the Sade thing. I shall pass on your proposal when I see her. Come on, how can she refuse after hearing your music? John, thank you so much, for your music has inspired me in such a special way, and has also assisted me on many occasions in creating a "sensual and intimate atmosphere" in the company of a lady [:)] Much appreciation for the interview, and thanks again for making a "sad romantic very happy."

**J.K: Thank you for your very kind & flattering interest in my Music & myself. Again, I had no idea "you were dancing to my Music". How fantastic for me to learn that!
John Klemmer**