



briansimpson

Already a familiar and exciting force on the contemporary jazz scene for years as keyboardist and musical director for superstar saxophonist Dave Koz, Brian Simpson's breakthrough as a solo artist with his Rendezvous Entertainment debut *It's All Good* was the genre's major story of 2006. Focusing once again on compelling acoustic piano melodies, bright jazz improvisations and spirited funk grooves, Simpson keeps the extraordinary momentum hopping — and, true to the moniker he chose for the album, soaring — with *Above The Clouds*.

The title track of *It's All Good* proved instantly and joyfully prophetic, as it hit #1 on the Radio & Records Smooth Jazz Airplay chart and remained in the Top 5 for four months; his follow-up single "Saturday Cool" went Top 15. He performed "It's All Good" during the many concerts he did with Koz and

during the inaugural run of the Dave Koz And Friends At Sea Cruise (now heading into its third year), for which he is also music director. In the summer of 2006, Simpson was also part of the hugely successful 30-date Rendezvous All Stars Tour with his label-mates Wayman Tisdale, Kirk Whalum and Jonathan Butler.

"The incredible response to both the song and the album 'It's All Good' was a tremendous validation of all I had been working on for so many years," he says. "After so many years behind the scenes, I'm a solo artist and I'm here to stay. I really wanted the music on *Above The Clouds* to make a statement, like, this guy's hanging for the long haul and he's someone to be taken seriously. The most important thing for me has always been connecting with people, especially in the live setting, with the music

that I write.

"I was on a creative roll and began working on these new tunes the minute I had finished recording *It's All Good*," Simpson adds. A lot of these songs came to me very quickly, and I kept most of the original ideas I had on the demo versions. Overall, the album's got a very masculine sound, with strong basslines and drums throughout. Nobody's holding back!"

Even while Simpson was establishing himself in the early '90s as a hit R&B songwriter and touring musician for stars such as Teena Marie, Janet Jackson and Rachelle Ferrell, he was jamming at night in local L.A. clubs with the city's top jazz and soul musicians. The sessions for *Above The Clouds* brought out some of the best from his hefty rolodex: guitarists Tony Maiden, Darrell Crooks and Ray Fuller; bassists Alex Al, Smitty Smith, Larry Kimpel and Melvin Davis; drummer Michael White and percussionist Lenny Castro. Saxophonist and frequent Rendezvous Entertainment producer Darren Rahn joins with his trumpeter/flugelhornist brother Jason Rahn to create the fiery horn section on the vibrant and thumping jam "From The Hip," which also features guitarist Chuck Loeb's cool, crisp electricity.

In addition to Loeb, Simpson's "who's who" contemporary jazz guest list includes Koz, Tisdale, Whalum, bassist Brian Bromberg, and legendary keyboardist George Duke. The late, great saxophonist Michael Brecker, who passed away in January, 2007, also contributed a tour de force performance on the hard driving yet emotional straight ahead jazz-flavored closing track "That's Right."

Simpson fans that had a blast grooving along to "It's All Good" will vibe instantly with the playful melody and easy rolling funk rhythms of "What Cha Gonna Do?" the first single from *Above The Clouds*. The irrepressible "Juicy," featuring a rich, dazzling piano/sax interplay between Simpson and Whalum — in the spirit of Les McCann and Eddie

Harris — keeps the party going with its mix of contemporary grooves and '60s soul-jazz flavors. After "From The Hip," Simpson seduces us with his sensuous and romantic side on the sweet retro-flavored "Let's Get Close," "One More Time" (featuring the sweet muted trumpet of Ron King) and the wistful, frolicsome "The Last Kiss."

On Simpson's very first solo album, the now hard to find 1995 release *Closer Still*, he recorded a song for his oldest daughter, "April." *It's All Good* featured "Blues For Scott," a dedication to his son. The tradition continues with "Fiona's Song," a lovely ballad for his 11-year-old daughter featuring solos by Koz and Tisdale before all three stars come together and harmonize. The tropical flavored "Bali" features the tender acoustic guitar charms of Ramon Stagnaro, while the buoyant title track finds Simpson duetting beautifully with George Duke's unique vibes sound; Duke also has a lush mini-moog solo. Before the rousing closer "That's Right," Simpson strips down for the thoughtful and emotional solo piano piece "Memories Of You."

Though Simpson's greatest creative and commercial triumphs behind the scenes have come playing alongside some of the top R&B artists in the world, he was mostly listening to straight ahead jazz while growing up in the Chicago suburb of Gurnee, Illinois. While he says Booker T & The MG's played an important part in his musical evolution, he was strictly an Oscar Peterson man when he majored in piano at Northern Illinois University. He was a star performer in the school's big band, which won numerous Downbeat awards and performed all over the world.

Upon graduating with a BA in music, Simpson moved to Los Angeles, quickly immersing himself in the local jazz scene. He soon found himself jamming after-hours with the likes of future stars Everette Harp, Boney James, and Norman Brown. Brian's story takes an interesting twist shortly thereafter. He found

himself taking a temporary leave of absence from the jazz scene, touring the world with pop divas Teena Marie, Sheena Easton and Janet Jackson. His foray into the pop world didn't end there; in January 1991 he co-wrote the #1 pop hit "The First Time" by Surface, which conquered both the R&B and Adult Contemporary charts. In the years leading up to joining Koz's band in 1997, the keyboardist was the go-to contemporary jazz sideman, playing with George Duke, Stanley Clarke, Najee, Larry Carlton, George Howard, Billy Cobham and Gerald Albright.

"Working with Dave has been such an incredible experience for me," says Simpson. "He's the consummate artist and perfectionist, so good at everything he does, and it's always a challenge for me to make everything happen behind the scenes. I've worked with many other sax players, but there's something special about him

as an artist and a person. He's really a great inspiration in so many ways."

He has recently toured with Dave Koz's At The Movies Tour, performed a handful of solo gigs, some dates in Japan with Eric Benet and resumed his duties as musical director for the Dave Koz & Friends At Sea Cruise. In January, he played that same role on The Smooth Jazz Cruise hosted by Wayman Tisdale.

"I've had some great success as a songwriter and a sideman," Simpson says, "but ultimately, I came to Los Angeles to become a solo artist, and it's so exciting to be achieving that goal after working at it for so long. To start playing the first notes of "It's All Good" and have people recognize it and start grooving to it is the ultimate for me. It's such a beautiful thing. The feeling fits perfectly with the imagery on the cover of *Above The Clouds*. It's great flying music!"

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<http://www.bsimpsonmusic.com/home.htm>