

EUGE GROOVE

Born 2 Groove, the title of Euge Groove's new Narada Jazz recording and his fifth release in seven years, is more than simply a clever twist on the popular saxophonist's funky stage name.

True to the soulful, uplifting spirit of the collection—his first ever recorded in High Definition Audio—it reflects Euge's belief that everyone comes into this world with unique abilities and special gifts. "If we are fortunate enough to have great people around encouraging us," he says, "those natural abilities can be nurtured along."

In Euge's case, those talents, combined with years of hard work, have taken him around the world as a longtime veteran member of Tower of Power (1988-92) and sideman for superstars like Richard Marx, Joe Cocker and Tina Turner. His four previous albums since the release of his self titled debut in 2000 have brought him to the peak of the pop instrumental realm with a total of eight Top 5 Radio & Records singles, four of which hit #1. The name of his last #1 hit in 2005, "Get 'Em Goin'" says it all about the exciting ongoing rapport he has with his fans that makes him one of instrumental music's most dynamic live performers.

On his 2005 disc *Just Feels Right*, his second for Narada Jazz after *Livin' Large*, Euge (real name: Eugene Grove) created a true musical blast from the past, stirring up an old school vibe with an all-analog recording exclusively featuring equipment that predated 1976. The concept was to try to re-create the vibe of an album that might have been on the shelf during America's Bicentennial year. "Working from an initial concept on that project, I learned the importance of a strong starting focal point," he says. "I wrote and arranged all of the songs on *Just Feels Right* myself, and with *Born 2 Groove*, I wanted to start out the same way. Only this time, the concept was to take the music to church."

Writing, arranging and programming nearly every track himself, Euge set out to create his most personal statement yet as an artist. He invested a great deal of time and effort to find musicians who could best convey the uplifting spiritual vibe he wanted. Thinking beyond the typical L.A. sidemen who play on so many of today's contemporary jazz projects, he, with the help of his live musical director and bass player Cornelius Mims, purposely chose an ensemble steeped in church music that would bring a 180-degree shift to the new songs.

Euge's core band on the new album are all schooled pop, jazz, soul and gospel musicians who beautifully traverse the sacred and secular: Mims (Kenny Loggins, 2Pac), who is always having the band on 6 a.m. flights back to LA so he can catch his church gigs; keyboardist Tracy Carter, the Musical Director at Faithful Central Bible Church in Inglewood, California; guitarist Jubu Smith (Tony! Toni! Tone!); and drummer Trevor Lawrence, Jr. (India.Arie). The saxophonist co-produced *Born 2 Groove* with contemporary urban jazz mega-producer Paul Brown (Boney James, Kirk Whalum, George

Benson, Al Jarreau), who helmed various tracks on Euge's first two albums (including 2002's *Play Date*), produced *Livin' Large* and also co-produced *Just Feels Right*. Brown has contributed to each one of the saxman's releases.

"I wanted to bring the music to church and hear what my songs would sound like if they had the soul of church musicians. They speak a completely different language of music than I am used to. I told Cornelius, who has been my bassist for the last two years, that I wanted to 'go there,' and we started talking about different musicians who could help us make it happen. I had worked with Trevor, who is young but has that old school vibe, on a live gig I did. I remembered Jubu from the Toni's House of Music Album. And Tracy plays this kind of music every Sunday. One of the things that came out of the churchlike approach we took was the way Cornelius tuned his bass down a whole step. He makes it sound like this fat, huge thing, while Tracy adds these cool churchy chord voicings.

"The other thing I did that was unique for me on *Born 2 Groove* was record in HD digital, after recording strictly in analog last time," Euge adds. "The whole HD thing is incredible and I love the sound of the record, with all the great interaction between the musicians. We cut seven of the ten tracks completely live with (multiple Grammy Award-winning engineer) Bill Schnee, but with the idea of making it sound contemporary. I wanted the drums to have that big, fat neo-soul punch. After we had tracked eight of the songs, I brought them to Paul Brown to help me finish them. No one makes the sax sound better than he does."

Born 2 Groove begins with the laid back, gently playful "A Summer Night's Dream," a track reminiscent of Euge's first big instrumental hit "Romeo & Juliet" featuring touches of his trademark texturing behind his gentle soprano lead voice. The saxman hooks into a more deeply soulful approach on the bright and vibrant, coolly funky "Mr. Groove," whose double entendre title says it all about both himself and the flow of the song. The vibrant image of an Italian piazza is foremost on his mind on the wistful and haunting, gently mystical "Café del Soul" and the simmering sensual fire of "Slow Jam," which features some of the collection's most expressive playing and improvisations. The title track keeps that searing, just about to blow energy going with a true ensemble jam featuring clever touches of retro-soul ambience via Smith's wah-wah guitar clicks and Carter's Fender Rhodes and Wurlitzer piano. The title of the soaring, feel good mid-tempo tenor-driven "Religify"—which literally means to "make religious"—draws from the song's brimming churchy soul sound.

"Geez Spot" takes that spirit even deeper and moodier with a feel good, heavy 2 and 4 thing like Euge's hit "Chillaxin'," Peterson's bubbly Hammond B-3 and Euge's seductive tenor melody. The slow burning, neo-soul flavored vocal track "I Love You More Than You'll Ever Know"—a hit for legendary soul singer Donny Hathaway in 1973—is a powerful showcase for renowned soul singer Ali Ollie Woodson, who was lead singer for The Temptations during their 80's and 90's comeback. After the sweet and soaring, joyfully optimistic soprano ballad "Movin' On"—a track that truly defines the churchy vibe of the disc--Euge closes the set playing harmony lines behind R&B legend Jeffrey Osborne's penetrating lead vocals on "Baby What I Wouldn't Do." This song is a collab-

oration not only in performance, but was co-written by Euge and Osborne as well; Euge plays every instrument on the track.

Born and raised in Hagerstown, Maryland, where his mother played piano and taught the Cherub choir at Christ Lutheran Church, Eugene Grove began playing the piano at seven and the saxophone at nine. Yet even as he developed an ear for the R&B he heard on the radio, his musical studies were strictly classical. He developed a wider appreciation for jazz while attending the famed University of Miami's School of Music, but it was hearing pop sax solos by David Sanborn for the first time that inspired him to pursue playing pop music.

Euge launched his professional career in Miami in the mid 80s, playing in salsa bands, top 40 club bands and doing the occasional high profile session date like Expose's "Seasons Change," a #1 Billboard AC hit. Not long after he moved to L.A. in 1987, he wrote a track for Richard Elliot's The Power of Suggestion album, and Elliot recommended Euge to take over his spot in Tower of Power. Euge toured with TOP for four years, including a year backing Huey Lewis & The News. His resume grew from there to include recording, touring or performing stints with Joe Cocker, Eurythmics, The Gap Band, Elton John, Bonnie Raitt, Aaron Neville and Richard Marx. Marx included Euge's horn on "Keep Coming Back," a #1 AC hit duet he recorded with Luther Vandross.

In 1999, coming off the road after two years of touring with popular Italian singer Eros Ramazzotti and Joe Cocker, the saxophonist paved the way for his eventual solo stardom by recording some tracks of his own. Without a record label to distribute the music, he put his songs on the now-defunct MP3.com website, dubbing himself "Euge Groove"—a corruption of "Eugene Grove"—in an effort to distinguish himself from the thousands of other musicians looking to attract the cyber audience. Downloading started almost immediately, and Euge was soon topping the MP3.com jazz chart. He signed soon thereafter with Warner Bros. "Vinyl," his first single from his Warner Bros. debut, set a record by spending 27 weeks on the R&R charts, eventually ranking at #24 for the year. Play Date kept the trend going with two more #1 radio hits, "Slam Dunk" and "Rewind."

"The transition from supporting my family as a touring sideman to pop stars to being a solo contemporary jazz artist has been very challenging," he says, "but there's a real satisfaction in being able to express myself as a sax player and songwriter. Starting with the very first demo I made in 1995, the music I make is really who I am. Recording in HD, the definition and clarity is very revealing and transparent, meaning every last detail on the new album had to be just right. What I love about Born 2 Groove is that it's got the spiritual side and the technical side living in religified harmony."