

NORMAN BROWN

STAY WITH ME

Guitarist, singer, and songwriter Norman Brown continues his Grammy® winning ways on *Stay With Me*, his very first album for the Peak Records label. This breezy, warm collection of ten original tunes offers a heaping helping of what the smoothly inventive guitar technician is known for: Tasty grooves, ear-caressing melodies, and delicious contemporary guitar licks that manage to evoke the spirit of the classic jazz guitar giants who first inspired him.

This time out, Brown has distilled his very unique musical formula, stretching out by showcasing his urban vocals on several tunes, including the title track, as well as writing and producing most of the album's material himself. Explains Brown, "I did a lot of collaborating on the last two albums, and I wanted to showcase more of my writing on this album to show what I've learned from all that collaborating. I also wanted to get back to producing, and I produced six of the cuts on this record." The title *Stay With Me* is also encouragement to his longtime supporters, adds Brown: "I wanted to send a message to my fans: Stick around -- it's getting better and there's a lot here for you."

Making a special appearance is an old friend, singer-songwriter Brian McKnight, who wrote and produced the title track "Stay With Me" and lends his vocals to the backgrounds while Brown handles the lead vocals. The contemporary R&B tune will delight fans who learned of Brown's vocal skills with his 2004 urban AC hit "I Might" from his previous chart topping album, *West Coast Coolin'*.

Fellow smooth jazz stars Rick Braun and Kirk Whalum reunite with Brown for the super group BWB one more time for Brown composition "It's Not Over" featuring Braun's trumpet and Whalum's sax magic. "I just loved being in that group!" Brown enthuses about the ensemble. In addition, hit-making guitarist and producer Paul Brown huddles with him to create the tunes "Pop's Cool Groove" and "Soul Dance," and also lends his production skills to the contemporary R&B vocal groove "I Need You."

The overall vibe of *Stay With Me* is set by the lead track and first single, "Let's Take A Ride," a tune as groovy as a convertible cruise on a sunny day. In addition to Norman's distinctive guitar melody, the tune features his layered background harmonies. The musician says the tune was inspired by his older brother, who first encouraged him to pick up a guitar. "When I first wrote it, I wanted to call it 'My Buddy And Me.' It was the kind of that thing he liked to do," Norman reminisces of the brother the family called Popsicle until his untimely death in a car accident when Norman was a high school senior. "The song reminded me of that feeling I would get when I'd ride with him."

Another family member, Brown's father, was the inspiration for "Pop's Cool Groove," an evocation of the sound of pioneering guitarist Wes Montgomery set to a bossa nova groove. "He would sit down in the basement and listen to me practice for hours and hours. And he really liked Wes Montgomery and that style, so I learned that style,"

Brown explains. "And when I finished this song, it was like, Oh yeah, this is Pop's cool groove."

Other album highlights include the sexy, soul-satisfying ballad "So In Love," the thoughtful "Every Little Thing," and the inspirational, toe-tapping tribute "You Keep Lifting Me Higher."

Brown says that the album's overall vibe was partly inspired by his past. Though the sunny musician is more apt look forward in his artistry, he says fans kept telling him that his second release, *After The Storm*, was their favorite album. "I won a Grammy for *Just Chillin'*-- didn't matter, fans say they love that *After The Storm* CD," he laughs. "I had to go back and listen to it, I had stopped listening to it, just moving forward. So I just went back and re-lived that album. It gave me a reminder of who I am."

BACKGROUND

Born in Shreveport, Louisiana, and raised in Kansas City, Missouri, Brown first picked up a guitar at the age of 8. First inspired by Jimi Hendrix, it was his father's preference for the sound of Wes Montgomery that set Brown on his stylistic journey. After high school, he moved to Los Angeles to pursue his musical career, attending the Musicians Institute where he also taught for a time. While playing with his own group in local clubs, and drawing comparisons to George Benson, Brown was discovered and signed to the fledgling MoJazz label, a division of Motown. He delivered his debut, *Just Between Us*, and followed with the gold-certified *After The Storm* and *Better Days Ahead*.

With critical acclaim and sales behind him, the talented musician made the leap to Warner Bros. and released *Celebration*, which first teamed him with producer Paul Brown. The follow-up, *Just Chillin'*, earned Brown much-deserved Grammy recognition in the best pop instrumental category. That project was followed by his release *West Coast Coolin'*, where Brown tested out his skills as a vocalist, a move that was embraced by the urban AC radio market and found him topping the charts.

With changes at the Warner Bros. label, Brown was looking to make a change. The Peak Records label, a joint venture with the Concord Music Group, stepped in. Initially concerned that the strides he'd made in the urban market might be discouraged, Brown says that, "Peak was totally in harmony with that artistically. That was the biggest part of the transition for me. I wanted to continue to be Norman Brown and do my jazz and instrumental music, but, at Warner Bros. I had broke through to the urban audience and want to keep reaching out to those fans as well."

Brown's audience has been expanding over the years. His compilation *The Very Best Of Norman Brown* was one of the best-selling smooth jazz albums of 2005 and 2006. Just this January, Brown's engaging personality led Broadcast Architecture to tap him for its fledgling Smooth Jazz Network as an on-air personality, hosting the 2 to 7 p.m. shifts on Saturdays and Sundays. Moving forward, Brown has already cemented his tour plans, with solo dates this spring and a roster of very special guests for the 2007 edition of

his popular Norman Brown's Summer Storm tour: superstar vocalist and Peak Records label mate Peabo Bryson, saxophonist Marion Meadows and legendary keyboardist Jeff Lorber.

Armed with the knowledge of who he is as an artist, Brown says he spent just four months in the studio making *Stay With Me* -- his shortest recording time on a project ever. Brown adds, "I'm giving fans exactly what they fell in love with me for: The exciting playing, my lyrical writing, my production as well as my new growth as a singer. So I think it's complete, it's a nice summary of where I am at this point."