

Jose James

The Dreamer

Listeners were first introduced to Jose James via his debut album, *The Dreamer*, released in 2008 via new/independent music champion Gilles Peterson, and his Brownswood Recordings label home. Citing influences from John Coltrane, Nat King Cole, Marvin Gaye, Billie Holiday, Kurt Cobain and Jean-Michel Basquiat, *The Dreamer* presented James as a young jazz artist, fast becoming a genuine master of his craft, earning him album credits including 'writer', 'producer' and 'arranger'.

The album relies heavily upon its wonderful instrumentation, but the haunting pianos, commanding bass and sublime horns all take a back seat to James' inimitable and awe-inspiring vocal that takes centre stage throughout. To call it simply 'captivating' doesn't do it justice – it's a delectable vocal that re-instils an enthusiasm in music, and will hopefully go as far as to make you want to further explore the world of jazz music and bask in the treasures that await you.

Although the release of album number two is on the horizon, fans can currently extend their Jose James catalogue through the numerous remixes floating around on iTunes, featuring alternate takes on *Desire*, *Spirits Up Above*, *Love* and *blackeyedsusan* (remixes by IG Culture and Ben Westbeech), along with a handful of guest vocal contributions on projects by Italian jazz connoisseur Nicola Conte, as well as *Jazzanova* and *Bassment Jaxx*.

It really is Liberation Frequency's great honour to introduce you all to the incomparable Jose James...

What made you want to explore a career in music?

Well my father is a musician – tenor sax, latin percussion – and I really respected his artistry, but my first love was literature and creative writing. I think that's why I was into hip-hop because of the lyrics. Most serious jazz is instrumental so it takes a different place in your mind as well as emotionally. But my first taste of the performance bug for real was in high school as a featured vocalist with a visiting 9-piece band – what a thrill! I knew I would be a performer – then I discovered Coltrane and it was all over!

How did you end up joining Brownswood?

My first time in London was the winter of 2006 and Brownswood was just preparing its first releases. I didn't know Gilles was starting a new

label, but I knew I was ready to be a part of some new progressive energy. I had just recorded an EP in NY the week before and performed at the Vortex for the first time. I was hanging out in London and giving out my EP, one of which landed in the hands of Gilles! One of the tracks was *Equinox* by John Coltrane, which is one of Gilles' favourite classic Trane tracks I later found out. It was meant to be.

What was the creative process of putting *The Dreamer* together like?

Amazing. Just pure music. I wanted to compose and record in the same way that *Kind of Blue* was made, or much of the late Coltrane Quartet albums – bringing in charts the day of and recording it fresh, capturing the moment. It worked. Gilles gave me some great ideas for covers and they worked too – *Nola* and *Park Bench People*. Junior Mance coming on the session was just pure love – he's so great! It really brought the whole project to another level. We recorded about 30 songs total and used 10. Beautiful.

Were you happy with how *The Dreamer* was received?

Absolutely! It's been a huge critical success for me and more importantly it has moved people... I really wanted that album to mean something and for people to really get it and they did. It's a huge honour to be a part of something like that, to touch people.

How are things shaping up for a follow-up album – will the music follow straight on from *The Dreamer*, or will you incorporate different styles and collaborators?

The next album is a continuation of what we started – an energy and an idea of where jazz, soul and hip-hop live together. This will be a next step in terms of styles and sound, but naturally and coming from the same mindset that music should mean something, be an honest expression. And right now, I'm in love, so it's playful and sexy and wonderful. Other than that you'll have to wait and see!

How would you describe your approach to live performances?

Creative. I never perform the same way twice and everything is very natural and in the moment. I want to bring my full self in performance and I give myself to it fully! I live for that moment and space and time.

Written by Imran Mirza