



ON STAGE INTERVIEW

"BONEY" JAMES

He's Done It His Way

By Robert Hooper

Boney James has always done things a bit differently...but hey...it works for him. Then again, maybe that's why he's been so (pardon the pun) instrumental as a musician.

"I know it sounds cool to say you grew up in a musical family and were heavily influenced by your parents or whoever, but that didn't happen in my case. In fact, no one in my family can even sing 'Happy Birthday,'" laughed James.

James wanted to roll with this a little bit.

"I'm not kidding you. There's no one in my family who can walk and whistle at the same time." With his typical wit, the two-time Grammy nominee and Soul Train Award winner then added, "We joke a lot about the milk man."

One thing's for sure, James' career has certainly been no joke.

The internationally-renowned musician has accumulated three Gold records. His current and tenth CD, *Shine*, debuted at #1 on the Billboard Contemporary Jazz charts, #6 on the R+B chart, and #44 on the top Pop Chart. James produced the CD as well as wrote 9 of the songs. Four of his originals have

become mainstays on most smooth jazz FM stations: "The Total Experience"; "Metropolis"; "After the Rain"; and "Here She Comes."

Known for popularizing the relatively new genre of "urban jazz" (an updated version of contemporary jazz containing elements of hip-hop), James has produced a number of remakes of classic soul songs, such as Chaka Khan's "Sweet Thing," Stevie Wonder's "Creepin," and Bill Withers' "Ain't No Sunshine (When She's Gone)." In addition, he collaborated with trumpeter and smooth jazz sensation, Rick Braun, on an album called *Shake it Up*. Their highly-acclaimed duets include "Grazin' in the Grass," which has been previously performed by the Friends of Distinction and Hugh Masekela. Other collaborations on "Shine" include a number of contemporary jazz heavyweights: Faith Evans, George Benson, Dwele and Philip Bailey.

As for any classical training, James could hardly keep from laughing out loud. "I know that sounds cool too... to say you're classically trained and well-grounded in music theory, but that's definitely not where I've come from musically. I'm not formally trained. In fact, all I ever had was a few private lessons on sax. As for where my inspiration comes from, I'd have to say



that my music has always come to me intuitively."

Born in Lowell, Massachusetts, James, 45, began playing the clarinet in third grade.

"I signed up to play trumpet, but all they had in the box were clarinets. So, I became a clarinet player."

As for how and when he picked up the sax, that's a bit "Jamesesque" as well.

"You could kind of say I was forced into it. One day the high school band came in and I was really impressed at how they were decked out. As I was gazing at their really cool uniforms, my music teacher told me that if



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I wanted to play in the band I'd have a better chance as a sax player. So, I switched to sax and never looked back."

While in his teens, James moved to New Rochelle, NY, where he developed a special affinity for R&B great Quincy Jones and the legendary Motown sound. "I loved Stevie Wonder...and still do," said James. There was also someone else with whom James quickly became enamored – saxophonist Grover Washington Jr.

"He was probably my greatest influence."

Shortly after moving to LA at age 15, James joined a fusion band, which quickly enjoyed some success as an opening act for Flora Purim and the

Yellow Jackets. Despite some quick notoriety, James was still unsure as to his career path. You see, the jazz superstar-to-be had another love – and one you don't normally associate with musicians of any genre.

"I'm a history nut," admitted James, who is living proof that you don't have to be a geek to love the History Channel.

After receiving his history degree from UCLA, he began playing music full time. Interestingly, James also began playing another instrument, the keyboards. Shortly thereafter, he secured his first gig as a keyboard player for Morris Day's band on the hit single "What Time Is It?" The stint with Day helped James secure a number of touring and recording sessions with several big-time acts:

the Isley Brothers, Bobby Caldwell, Randy Crawford, and Teena Marie.

In 1992, he produced his first album, Trust, a stellar work which made James an overnight sensation. "I've been incredibly fortunate to have had the success I've had."

Over the years, James has performed with many of the major players in contemporary jazz, both on stage and in the studio. Although he enjoys both mediums, there's no question as to his preference.

"I love playing live," said James, who also admitted to enjoying "peace and quiet." It seems that with his busy touring schedule these days, he really doesn't have much time to listen to music. "When I'm not playing

music, I'm thinking about new material, and that's hard to do with the radio on," joked James.

As for the secrets to his success, James had this to say: "I never worry about what others are doing or what's popular. I just try to concentrate on my thing and playing the music I love."

Be sure to see "Boney" James in concert, 8pm, Saturday, August 25 at the Kravis Center at 701 Okeechobee Blvd. in West Palm Beach.

For tickets or more information, call (561) 832-7469 or visit www.kravis.org.

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