



Curtis Haywood Interview

Artist Interview by: Nina Goodrich

Driven by his passion for music, saxophonist, composer, Curtis Haywood, is committed to reaching deep into the hearts of his listeners and spreading the universal language of healing into their souls. Crossing all genres with his self-titled album, Haywood, a former member of the group Joshua, stirs the desire for love, intimacy, sharing and spiritual awareness.

Along with his own sultry, sexy, stellar musicianship, Haywood brings world known artists such as bassist Artie Reynolds, drummer Ainsley Taylor, keyboardist Chris Fischer, guitarist Willie Brown and percussionist Paul Aponte into the fold for his intoxicating debut album, Curtis Haywood.

Rounding out his album, Haywood includes self-compositions, some familiar & favorite R&B tunes, and a few soul-stirring calls for healing in a near gospel approach.

Music does not get any better than this as Haywood draws the listener deep into his circle with his compelling soprano sax. This CD definitely stirs the soul, leaving the listener wanting more.

JazzReview: I am excited and thrilled to have gotten this interview. This is a watershed album for you. You are young, exciting and your sound is sweltering.

You stated your sole intent, when playing, is for your voice to resonate to the core of your listener's soul. You continue by saying, "I want the music to penetrate the listener's body, mind and spirit, giving the listener a blessing so he/she may come away whole."

JazzReview: You blow one HOT horn. "Rain Song" has already hit #7 on SmoothJazz.com's Indie chart and #25 on the Radio and Records Indicator chart. I expect to see your album at number one before all is done.

Curtis Haywood: I went with "Rain Song" because of the special testimony behind the song. I'm taking the proceeds from that song and donating them to charity. In the literal sense, it is a literal prayer for rain for the country in Africa, specifically Ethiopia. I've studied early African history and, no doubt, human history starts right there in the cradle. The country is ravished with famine, for years, hundreds of years. My music, first of all, is simply an extension of who I am as a person. And, as we always say, "music is the healing agent of the universe."

Healing takes place on a spiritual and emotional plane, yet there's a physical tangible need for healing, as well. In this day and age, it's money that helps accomplish that. It's something both me and my wife believe. She is on her way back from a missionary trip, helping people rebuild their lives, so that song goes really deep for me...and on a spiritual level, for my friends, fans and others. If your life has become desolate and down, it is a prayer in any specific area, whether emotional or spiritual. That's my prayer for you; that the rain of prosperity would come back into those areas. That song goes really, really deep for me and that's how I chose it for the album.

JazzReview: I had a feeling there was something very meaningful about that song. Please tell me about the gift of music you give to your listeners. You began your foray into the world of music as a child with a trumpet, which you refused to go to bed without.

Curtis Haywood: I sat there in awe when my mother told me that story and they kind of held it there for me for a little while, cause you know, I was very young. I have vague memories of it but it was really when my mom reminded me of it that I realized I said, "Mom, didn't you know something special was happening there?" My parents were very traditional in the western sense, believing staunchly in education and driving that home (to me) so being an artsy person wasn't exactly their (my parents') cup of tea, so to speak. Right up until high school, I had to fight with them to let me attend the School for Performing Arts - you know, where that movie Fame was filmed.

Also, I studied with my dad. He's really the pioneer, the one who brought the music out in me. So, it's kind of like a Catch 22 situation. He was fostering the music inside of me yet, when they saw it start to take off, they thought, "Oh, no. What did we create here?"

JazzReview: That's too funny. Well, they did a good job, that's for sure. Your new, self titled album is a watershed album because you are debuting as a solo artist, independent of your former band, Joshua - a jazz fusion group.

Would you care to mention Joshua in shaping where you are now?

Curtis Haywood: Joshua was one particular side of who I am, musically. You can listen to some of the tempos if you go to my website. The group was more progressive and very "Yellowjacket" oriented. Very "Spyro Gyra" driven. And that whole flavor. It really helped me grow as a musician. The other musicians were much stronger than I was. So it really pulled me into another level. However this album is really giving the other---R&B, funk side of me that didn't really get to totally voice itself when I was with Joshua. I have no regrets of Joshua.

To give you some information even, behind the name, we all have a very strong, very Biblical, spiritual, belief. I don't know if you are familiar with the story of the Israelites in the Bible? Joshua was the one who took over for Moses. He actually crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land. There was definitely a symbolic meaning behind that name, as far as crossing into new territory. A lot of people who come out of church stay locked in and are very into their own liturgical music and are unwilling to cross into unknown boundaries. So, that was some of the issues behind even the naming of Joshua. The philosophy was: Let's go out. Let's take this music God has put inside of us and share it with the world.

JazzReview: That's very interesting history. I like that. I think it's also characteristic of this particular album. I think it crosses over into several genres. It has a little pop, some gospel and some romance. It would appeal to the mainstream audience.

Curtis Haywood: It was specifically architected that way. I had that in mind for every song. Of course, there will be those traditionalists, those naysayers, but again, coming from a spiritual point of view, when you're speaking to someone's spirit, it has to cross boundaries. How can I speak to someone, to only one nationality? I'm speaking to many nationalities and I have to make my music open to all. I look forward to many, many more projects that will then touch many faces of the earth.

JazzReview: Oh, I think you have a wonderful start. I see you going very far with this project.

Curtis Haywood: I really see myself on the grandstand of what Yanni is doing, or has done. And, just to give you a little more insight of where I'm going as a person; first, I'm seeking my Masters in Music Therapy. I am a mental health therapist. I deal with people who have mental issues, who have substance abuse issues so, again, that's really deep from where my spirit comes. When you hear the passion of the music come out of me, know that's where it's coming from. It really is taking healing into a literal sense that if you can view Yourself, you can see it, you can achieve it. I don't know if you know anything about that book series, The Secret. If you get a chance, look into it.

I've been into therapy, in the healing field for quite a number of years, helping heal people from a mental health point of view and then I finally stumbled onto the field of music therapy, which is another extension of the whole alternative medicine field that this country has been on for the last ten years. I hit the roof when I found out about music therapy, to see they were finally putting into practice what I had believed for years.

JazzReview: You are very interesting. Along with being a stellar musician, you have such spiritual depth. I like that. I've always believed music is a healer. And, I've often heard that kids who get into music are much less likely to get into crime.

Curtis Haywood: Absolutely! I don't know of many people in my field, who are busy being creative, who are angry. Oh they may have suffered trials and tribulations like we all do but if you get to the heart of any of the issue, even those who have left tragically us, if you get to the heart of any one of them there was a healing factor in every single one of them.

JazzReview: I have a grandson who suffers with autism, but I can often reach him through a song. And, I can tell where he is emotionally by the songs he sings to me.

Curtis Haywood: That is just one of the segments of the population I hope to reach - part of my dream. Part of my goal is to also travel as a public speaker and setting up systems of music therapy throughout the country. Again, music is simply the conduit I choose to use so people can finally find out who I am.

JazzReview: You have a wonderful start toward your goal. I think you are on your way and you're going to continue to grow as this project is wide open. I do hope you'll find your way to the Gulf Coast. We have an outstanding admiration for music in our communities.

Another one of your own compositions, "Heal Our Land," is a reflection of who you are. Please tell me about what was going on with you when you wrote this song.

Curtis Haywood: "Heal Our Land" was initially written right after 9/11. There was a lot of pain in our country. Healing requires completion. This song was written to help with completion and moving on from that horrendous event. And then again, when Katrina came along, I thought, "Oh my gosh! Can it get any worse?" I, too, needed healing from that so that's where that song came from. I also had my two daughters in the background on that song. (Bryanna & Nia-Diamond) They are also on the video, that extra track viewable on computer. You can actually get there easily through a link on the right hand side of my web page. It's also on U-Tube video.

JazzReview: They did a marvelous job. I know that made you feel good. Do they understand they are being heard by millions around the world?

Curtis Haywood: They definitely know -but I don't know if they'll fully grasp it yet. They're also on the video. I don't know if you got there yet?

JazzReview: I got to your CD site, downloaded the band link, and then turned stupid.

Curtis Haywood: (with a hearty laugh) I wondered if that would be user friendly. You can get there easier from a link on the right hand side of my own web page, there's a link that says "Check out Curtis' new video." My daughters were on the video for "Heal Our Land" so, that was very special.

JazzReview: You open the album with a romantic Brian McKnight favorite, "Anytime." How did you decide to open with such a romantic song?

Curtis Haywood: It was a very easy choice to make. As much as I am into spirituality and want to introduce myself and let people know who I am, there's also a marketing side that has to be addressed. That song has always, always struck a chord with me. As they say, I am a hopeless romantic. That song was always on the list and I used it in opening to catch people's attention. Then when they get to know who I am they will know why I picked that song - I've been married for 20 years, --I truly am a romantic at heart and that song just reeks of the different levels of what people in relationships go through. Quite frankly, relationships are at the top of the list of what areas people need to go through as per healing.

Now, when you watch the video, to kind of put a period on it, you'll see I actually put a kind of twist at the end. The song is really left open ended I put a little twist at the end of the video to bring closure to it. Once again, healing is all about closure. I hope that will inspire you to watch it and see how I chose to end it and I hope that will strike a chord.

JazzReview: How does that song relate to your idol, R&B saxophonist, King Curtis?

Curtis Haywood: Oh man, I worked his record to death! I mean - the soul, the godfather of soul - when I hear him I get speechless. I found him because of my dad's record collection. My parents have kind of like a little bar downstairs, and the turn table was behind the bar and, I would just play and play his song, "Soul Serenade." It really resonated. And it came to full fruition when David Sanborn did "Soul Serenade." I was absolutely in heaven because Sanborn was definitely one of my heartfelt influences, along with Grover Washington as I was growing up.

When I heard Sanborn do it, I was absolutely (speechless). If you ever hear King Curtis, he's just like any one of the down home rhythm and blues players. They aren't playing a lot of notes but they are playing the volume. And, it cuts right through you. That's what helped me get myself together as to cutting through your flesh, getting right down into your spirit. That's what King Curtis is to me.

I'm not surprised I'm on the track that I'm on because there are too many indicators saying, "This is where you belong."

JazzReview: You also do a splendid version of Stevie Wonder's "Creepin'." It blew me away. How did you decide on this Motown favorite? Your sax is infectious throughout this song.

Curtis Haywood: I can't take all the credit for that because I heard a version done by the famous R&B singer, Jamie Foxx. I credit him with the arrangement of that song. He actually did that version, that you heard me play, and I took it and just slightly worded it down a bit--And, made it more of a smooth jazzy version. I actually struggled with that one because I really wanted to do it closely to the way Jamie Foxx did it. You know how it is when you walk into a store and hear a song and say, "I'll take it. I want that one." That's what happened when I heard his version of that song. It came off a compilation of a tribute to Luther Vandross, who actually made that song popular. There was a

compilation Jamie Foxx single on it, along with others - all a tribute to Luther. So I can not take credit for the arrangement of that song.

JazzReview: You did that song so well, each note drawn out the way it was intended. I loved it.

Curtis Haywood: Again, the three cover songs I included on that album all had to do with the roller coaster of love. Again, I am a hopeless romantic. I'm one of those guys who will absolutely creep into your dreams.

JazzReview: "Springtime" is an airy, up-tempo number, reminding me of summer days and walks through the park. What did you have in mind when writing it?

Curtis Haywood: That's the current name but I think I started out calling it "Moving." It's one of those songs that - I love to drive, and if I had a convertible, that would be a song I would listen to while driving. It's a fun, relaxing song. Like the song says, put the top down and let the wind blow through your hair. It's a song where you just go to the beach side, pull out your picnic basket and turn the radio up--just enjoying life, listening to a nice, solid groove.

JazzReview: The track "Journey" is riveting, laden with rich sax, complete with a little funky beat. This song swings. Airy background vocals complement your horn as the keyboardist takes a hot solo. A little about some of your artists?

Curtis Haywood: These were people I go to church with. They are artists, who, just like me, have taken a hard journey and are trying to make it in this world. Life is not about the destination everybody is rushing to get to. It's about the journey along the way. It's about the hills and the mountains you have to go through to get there. And, the bumps and scratches which build your character along the way - that is the journey, if you will, in the wilderness, so to speak. When we're out there suffering, going through all the pain, that's what builds character. That's the journey that makes you or breaks you, so to speak. It's not the end result (we need to focus on.) It's not the job, the house, the cars...It's the journey. And, even if you did get those things, it's still the journey that takes place. That's what matters.

JazzReview: You did a nice job on that and the background vocals complemented your horn. The keyboardist did a hot solo on that one, as a bonus.

Performing with your former group, Joshua, took you to Capital Jazz Festival in Washington, D.C., on stage with Grammy Award Winners Take 6 at the International Arts Festival NYC, and to B Smith's Rooftop Cafe, among other places.

Does one particular place or moment stand out from those days?

Curtis Haywood: That small northeast tour with Take 6 was definitely the crux of our stay together. And, again back to the spiritual story - it was just when the Israelites got to the Jordan River that they were right up to the crux - some made it and some didn't... And, even when they crossed over...when Joshua did that, now that I look back, I see that tour. Right after that tour is when we went on our separate ways. Probably, as they say, it just wasn't in the cards. When the Israelites sent the spies into the land, the spies came back and said, "There are giants in the land." But there were two who said, "No. We can do this." I consider myself one of those two. That's when I decided move on. I would never say anything bad about my band members and feel nothing bad for them. But I felt I had another purpose deeply in my heart. Nothing should stop you when you feel a burning purpose in your heart, nothing, but nothing, should stand in your way of trying (to reach that goal.) I know that's kind of a tough way to view things, because people go through life. But, when something's burning in my heart, I'll die trying. So, that's what really stuck out for me.

We actually had a record deal on the table when we did that tour with Take 6 and I felt like one of the two spies that came back with the good report. Everyone else started letting their fears and doubts take hold and get in the way. I was like, "No guys. No, no, no."

JazzReview: Sometimes it happens - we grow together for a period of time. Then, we begin to grow apart based on each person's needs and experiences so we can grow into ourselves.

How do you feel being out here as "the" main artist, with so many of your own compositions?

Curtis Haywood: I do not take that lightly. Here we go again - Moses, as much as a front-runner as he was, he said, in his private time, "Who am I? This is for me to do?" And, so, I'm definitely not in my comfort zone for everything that it takes to get - you know, when it comes to the music; that speaks for itself. But, everything else that goes into it,--I have a performance tomorrow for the release of my CD, at the Sugar Bar (Ashford

& Simpson, if you know of them), a night spot in New York. As a matter of fact, if it wasn't for the consumer aspect of it, making it easy to find, --that's why I named it for myself, Curtis Haywood, I would have named it "On My Own." That was going to be, that was actually the first naming of the album.

I'm plenty scared for all that goes into the rest of this, particularly, because I'm no spring chicken. I'm sure people would laugh at me and say, "Wow. You're doing this now?" Again, Moses was 80 years old when he got the call.

JazzReview: Absolutely. It's too late now. You're already out here.

Curtis Haywood: I'll be the first to say there are plenty of steps you can take to make your dream happen. And, there's plenty you can do within your power to bring those dreams to reality. Then the rest is up to God. Now, here I am, standing at that same cliff. I've done all that I can do, and the rest, God, is up to you.

JazzReview: You did such a wonderful job with this album, there's no doubt in my mind, and you're going to be on top for a long time. You cross over so many genres - pop, spiritual, jazz, a little funk - And because you are so spiritual in nature, you have reached a very broad audience with this work. I see nothing holding you back. You're even in the right place.

At the end of the day, what would you like your fans to know about you?

Curtis Haywood: Only that I'd like to share some words - a riddle of encouragement I shared with my clients the other day. It was given to me and I shared with them: 1) What is holier than God? 2) What is more evil than the devil? 3) The rich have a want for it. 4) The poor have it. 5) What is standing in the way of your recovery? They all have the same answer: One word Nothing!

JazzReview: I like that. It is very true. It's very therapeutic.

Thank you so much for your time. I'll be watching for you at the top of the charts.

Curtis Haywood is making his mark in the music world with this amazing debut, a compelling, infectious, touching and sensual album.

This may be Curtis Haywood's debut, but it definitely won't be the end of what we hear from this artist. What a way to begin!