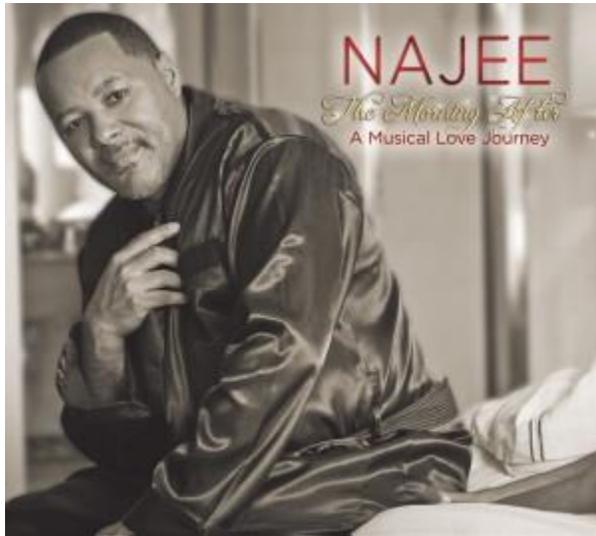


Link: <http://grownfolksmusic.com/blog/gfm-spotlight-interview-najee/>

GROWN FOLKS MUSIC

GFM Spotlight Interview: Najee



GFM's Ivan Orr recently chatted with the incomparable [Najee](#) about his latest project *The Morning After-A Musical Love Journey*

GFM: The project contains some fantastic collaborations. Over the course of your career that's been a hallmark, could you tell us about some of the collaborations on *The Morning After-A Musical Journey*

Najee: Traditionally my albums have always featured somebody or a group of people and honestly it started out around my second or third album. I started doing that because I realized that my audience was based in R&B, people who were primarily R&B listeners who I was probably their first introduction to Jazz. So I've continued that tradition... last album we had Phil Perry and before that we had Eric Benet and on the project we have Me'Lisa Morgan and Brian Bromberg among others. I also worked with Demonte Posey who has produced a lot of Eric Benet's stuff, he's a great keyboardist in his own right.

GFM: You have a very special tribute to the late George Duke. Tell us a little bit about that track.

Najee: is an area of Tokyo, George and I spent a lot of years traveling the world together. On one of our trips to Asia we played in Tokyo and it seemed like whenever we played there they would put us up in the section where we would have a lot of fun. So when I heard that groove played by some of the former members of George's band I heard him in it as well, I just kept

hearing him and his spirit and I said “We’re just going to dedicate this one to George.” When we put it together it just brought me back to all those good times with George.

GFM: *The Morning After* takes the listener on a global musical journey, tell us a little bit about the concept and your thoughts on the importance of developing a global perspective.

Najee: In my business you have to travel quite a bit. I’ve been blessed to see so many parts of the world and get paid to do it. One song in particular on the project is “Mafalala” which was inspired by a friend of mine from Mozambique Moreira Chonguica. We had performed in Mozambique about a year and a half ago and I’ve played on his albums as well and gone over to Capetown, SA to perform on his records and we’ve been friends for many, many years. He took us on a tour, which is his tradition whenever you come to that part of the world and you know him he will take you to one of the local townships. He did that for me years ago in Capetown. This particular time we were in Mozambique and he took us to Maputo which is a big area in Mozambique and there’s a section named Mafalala.

When you go through there it’s like the classic English Story “A Tale of Two Cities”. On one side of the city you see all this wealth with prosperity, shopping malls etc., and you go to this one section and it has dirt roads and little tin shacks, no running water, no electricity but you see the kids running around and they are happy and you say to yourself how blessed we are but at the same time how spoiled we are as a people. We came up with a groove, a Reggae groove and as you know Reggae has become so international but it’s really African music. So the Reggae groove on there just reminded me of the spirit of the people. So I took people on a journey there and I know a lot of people will see that title on there and not be able to pronounce it, it’s pronounced just like it looks. I’ve been fortunate to visit numerous townships over the course of my career, many when I was performing for Nelson Mandela in South Africa. But this one touched my heart in a different kind of way for some reason.

GFM: Tell us a little bit how the environment of the music industry has changed over the course of your career.

Najee: I was fortunate when I came into the game, I came through what we call the “Big Machine” the big labels. The publicity machine was available to me and also there was an environment where if you did a video and they liked it they would play it. I was very much the recipient of being able to be on BET and MTV over in Europe and Japan and VH1 that has changed obviously because the market has shifted in a different direction. I always get this thing from time to time people say “Where you been Najee I haven’t heard about you?” I’m like “Well I’ve been here.” I’m doing everything that I did back then but what I think they are really saying to me is “I don’t see you on TV as much anymore.” So that’s what they’re really saying but I’m still doing what I did back then.

GFM: Can you tell us your thoughts on the importance of musical mentors?

Najee: Personally I have to credit [my musical mentors] that as a major part of why I’ve been able to do what I do in this industry. Having people that I was blessed to be around as a kid. In New York, in high school in particular I was blessed to be around people like the legendary

Jimmy Heath, Frank Foster and Billy Taylor and the Jazz Mobile and at that time all we had to pay was \$5 a year. To study with them and for them to share their wealth of knowledge and experiences that they had in the business... and I'm really excited to say that at this stage in my career I'm sort of doing the same thing. I have a few chosen students... so I would have to say I would not be the same renowned musician without those gentlemen.

GFM: Describe Najee's sound using any element in nature...

Najee: If I had to choose one I'd have to say water. The reason why is as a kid it took me time to learn to play slow because as a kid I grew up around three other saxophonists in school where we all competed with each other. The thing was to try and play passages as fast as you could. Until this day I still like to play fast, it was an art form to learn how to slow down and play a melody without having to run through all the scales and harmonic structures and intervallic studies. So every Monday we'd come to school and someone would have a new lick and you'd try to cop that and on and on.