



RICHARD ELLIOT ROCK STEADY

Where do you go from #1? If you're veteran saxophonist Richard Elliot, long known as the "James Brown of Contemporary Jazz" for the intense soul inspirations of his recordings, a relentless tour schedule and joyfully exhausting onstage performances, you dig deep into your R&B/jazz roots. You keep the infectious melodies and funky grooves flowing and follow a two word mantra that says it all about where you've been and the places you're headed: **Rock Steady**—the name of his highly anticipated debut on Artistry Music.

With a bestselling discography of over 15 recordings since 1986's *Initial Approach*, thousands of live dates spanning over two decades and one of the largest and most loyal fan bases in contemporary urban jazz, it's incredible to hear Elliot declare: "What I'm doing now, enjoying this upward trend in my career, is seriously the most fun I have ever had." Then again, the multi-talented tenorman, composer and producer has been on one of the most incredible rolls of his career since the 2005 release of *Metro Blue*, which debuted at #2 on Billboard's Contemporary Jazz chart.

The album's key single, a simmering cover of The Stylistics' "People Make The World Go Round," spent an unprecedented 11 weeks at #1 on Radio & Records airplay chart. In 2007, "RnR," the title track from the dual album Elliot recorded with fellow genre superstar—and co-producer of "People"—Rick Braun, stayed at #1 on the chart for over two months. Elliot and Braun crisscrossed the U.S. as part of Jazz Attack (with Peter White and Jonathan Butler) in 2005 and 2007, and spent 2008 touring as RnR. The saxman also did media appearances and performed in South Africa for the first time, and did his first ever shows in Russia and St. Petersburg in January 2009. He and Braun are also headlining another Jazz Attack tour with Butler this year. Around that time, Elliot and Braun also teamed up with their manager Steve Chapman and industry veteran Al Evers to form ARTizen Music Group, whose roster included urban saxman Jackiem Joyner and acid jazz standout Shilts (from Down To The Bone). They later sold the label to their current recording home, Artistry Music.

In the past, Elliot's never been big on starting off a new recording project with an overriding concept in mind, preferring to let each one develop more organically—but he came up with a unique starting point for **Rock Steady**, developing the album around the idea of calling upon his roots and influences in R&B to create an overall vibe that had a decidedly retro feel while also incorporating more contemporary flavors. He sets his cool agenda by dubbing one of the disc's crazy-cool, hard funk horn jams "Retro Boy" and ventures from there. From the slow burning grooves and classic funk horn textures of "Straight Up" through the soaring and passionate, James Bond film score-like "Restless" and the simmering, Hammond B-3 tinged "The Preacher," there's a little taste of everyone Elliot was listening to while growing up in Los Angeles. He found his voice on the tenor through the likes of King Curtis, David Sanborn, Tom Scott, Average White Band, The Bar-Kays, Sly Stone, every singer on the Motown roster and even

Tower of Power, the legendary Bay Area band the saxman toured and recorded with from 1982-87.

“The funny part of how **Rock Steady** took shape is that I had the whole retro-soul idea in place when I started to write and record ‘*Metro Blue*,’” he says. “But because I don’t like to limit the way the creative flow is going, that album took on a decidedly European flavor, which turned out so well that we kept going with it. So we got a bit sidetracked but in a good way, and **Rock Steady** gets back to that original idea. I see all of my solo albums as if they are vocal albums but using the sax as the voice, and once again, I had fun challenging myself as a writer and player, offering the latest step of my evolution in these areas. When formulas work in the past, many artists have a tendency to do the same thing again and again. But it’s more exciting to forge ahead and try new ideas that fit into my natural growth as an artist.”

Elliot called on his deep all-star soul-jazz rolodex to find the perfect combination of players to help him realize his evolving “old school” meets “new school” vision. Beyond working with his longtime core touring band members Ron Reinhardt (keyboards), Dwight Sills (guitar), Nate Phillips (bass) and Ricky Lawson (drums), he ensembles with Braun, who is also the album’s co-producer. Also of note are percussion great Luis Conte, keyboardist Jeff Lorber, saxophonist Gerald Albright and trombonist Nick Lane; veteran singer Lynne Fiddmont steals the show on the title track with her infectious “What It Is” vocals. Lorber adds his clever keyboard flair to “Straight Up,” a track he wrote with Elliot, Braun and Albright; and the silky and atmospheric seduction “License To Chill,” a co-write by Lorber, Elliot and Braun. Elliot and Albright toured together in the early 2000s (with Lorber) as part of the Groovin’ For Grover tribute phenomenon, but **Rock Steady** marks the first time these two powerhouse saxmen have recorded together.

Elliot and Braun built the 11-tune collection around three rarely covered 70s R&B classics that represent that influence on the tenorist’s musical development, but in a way that enhances their emotional power and rhythmic energy rather than simply copping the original vibe. The three foundational tunes Elliot tackles on **Rock Steady** are Curtis Mayfield’s “Move On Up,” whose original nine minute version appeared on the singer’s 1970 debut album *Curtis*; the Aretha Franklin-penned title track, which was a Top Ten pop hit for the Queen of Soul from her 1971 album *Young, Gifted and Black*; and “Keep On Truckin’,” a #1 pop hit for Eddie Kendricks in 1973, two years after he left the Temptations.

As he’s done throughout his career on classic soul hits like “People Make The World Go Round,” “When A Man Loves A Woman” and “Until You Come Back To Me (That’s What I’m Gonna Do),” Elliot makes each track his own. He gives “Move On Up,” which he became reacquainted with as part of the soundtrack to the 2002 film “Bend It Like Beckham,” the full treatment; it’s a bright, snappy, bold and brassy jam that is at the heart of the album’s concept. Elliot does Aretha proud on the title track with some of the disc’s edgiest and happily raging sax melody lines, which roar over Reinhardt’s spirited B-3 and Braun and Lane’s sassy horn section. Saved for the last track is “Keep On Truckin’,” whose title is as much a metaphor for Elliot’s lengthy and fruitful, full of twists and turns career, as “Rock Steady” is the project’s big production number, a complete 70s soul immersion balancing throbbing funk grooves with cool sax verses, soaring horns and even a shimmering synth vibes flavor courtesy of Reinhardt.

Other key tracks which further reveal the diversity Elliot forges within the overriding theme include the sensuous and slow burning “Yaquala,” named for the wife of the song’s co-writer, keyboardist Tim Gant; “Candice Dance,” a cut titled for Elliot’s teenage daughter, whose whirlwind personality is perfectly reflected on yet another intense blast of energy that the saxman likens to “the wind carrying furniture up into a massive tornado;” and “Spindrift,” a co-write by Elliot and bassist Nate Philips that artfully blends electronica atmospheres with a shuffling dancehall vibe.

The Scotland born, L.A. raised Elliot found his musical voice on tenor as a teenager and landed his first professional gig touring with Natalie Cole and The Pointer Sisters while he was still in high school. Before joining Tower of Power—which began a stretch that he calls the most influential period of my early career—he played in the adventurous fusion band Kittyhawk and did some dream recording sessions with his Motown heroes Smokey Robinson, The Four Tops and The Temptations. He later performed with Melissa Manchester and Yellowjackets, which found him hooking up for the first time with the legendary fusion band's founding drummer Ricky Lawson.

Elliot was still on the road with TOP when he released his debut album *Trolltown* in 1986. Its success gave him the confidence to leave the band and start a solo career which has been seriously rockin' steady ever since. Embarking upon one of instrumental music's most dynamic and multi-faceted career, Elliot's sound played a huge part in pioneering the genre and radio format that became today's contemporary urban jazz. Over the years, he has scored four #1 albums (*On The Town*, *Soul Embrace*, *After Dark* and *Jumpin' Off*) and a growing number of #1 airplay singles.

In addition to his participation in the current decade's all-star tours like *Groovin' For Grover* and *Jazz Attack*, in the mid-90s he helped launch another of the genre's annual franchises, the *Guitars & Saxes* tours, which he continues to participate in. At his peak, Elliot was annually doing over 100 tour dates, but he has scaled back to spend more time with his family.

Outside of music, Elliot has been an entrepreneur engaged in the latest emerging technologies. In the 90s, he co-founded the cutting edge multi-media company PacificNet that served some of the giants of the corporate business, entertainment and sports industries. At one point, the company—which created important music related systems like Code Sonics—employed 50 people. He is currently a partner in World Processing, a company that provides effective and convenient ways for people to move their money around via “stored value cards” and mobile devices.

“I think calling this new album **Rock Steady** was an obvious and inspired choice for many reasons,” Elliot says. “The music that inspired the CD has an enduring quality and is part of our American musical heritage. Beyond that, it's the perfect metaphor for the good fortune I have had to be doing what I love to do for so many years. I took a risk leaving TOP for a solo career and never dreamed at the time that I would still have these wonderful opportunities to record and tour over 20 years later. I don't gauge my career based on sales, popularity and money. However, what matters most is my personal and artistic growth and the opportunities that reveal themselves as I evolve.”

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PUBLICITY:

Sheila Eldridge

Miles Ahead Entertainment

Tel: (201) 722-1500

Fax: (201) 722-1119

Sheila@milesaheadentertainment.com

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