

RICHARD ELLIOT

With the intensity of a tiger emancipated from a cage, **Richard Elliot** pounces onto the concert stage with his white and black striped saxophone in hand. Aggressively he bounds across the stage as if stalking his prey. Swiftly hitting his stride, his body rhythmically stretches and contorts, exploding with a fiery passion as melody and groove merge into song. As natural as a predator ensnaring his prey, Elliot commands and conquers with a frenzied attack of soul, funk, pop and jazz. The electricity is palpable as he becomes one with his music.

Ever since the late 1980s, Elliot has been one of the icons of soul-jazz, repeatedly topping the radio charts album after album and entertaining throngs of loyal fans on the national concert circuit. Off stage, he also attacks life with abandon. Elliot, who already demonstrated his business acumen by co-founding a successful Internet multimedia company a decade ago, is co-founder and partner of the new **ARTizen Music Group** record label that now releases his albums. He's an unassuming father of five who looks like the guy next door. However, he's a highly focused overachiever and despite his considerable successes, he remains humble and peaceful despite the frenetic pace of his life and dual careers. With so much constantly happening around him, he's not an easy man to pin down.

But take a close listen to the title track of his new ***Metro Blue*** album, the last song on the disc. After all the upbeat and mid-tempo R&B tracks, Elliot finally slows down to provide a rare glimpse into his soul. The track begins with the sounds of rain, footsteps and a distant radio broadcast in a foreign tongue. You can feel the cold, damp, gray city around you. The sparsely produced, melancholic track is raw, naked emotion. It's pure heart - beautiful and unconventional, simple yet complex, somber yet optimistic. With the mask finally removed, Elliot allows himself to be vulnerable, thus becoming one with his listeners.

“‘Metro Blue’ was the last song **Rick (Braun)** and I wrote for the album. We knew it would be the title of the album. Basically we created a sound collage to serve as a canvas for a melody and I started to play what I was feeling, which was contemplative. Life is full and I feel blessed. I'm in a great place in my life and I'm very happy,” Elliot enthused.

Although he's been a seminal voice on the instrumental music scene for almost two decades and his music helped spawn a new radio format, Elliot is excited about the now. “This (*Metro Blue*) is a very important record for me. There's a lot of newness, both in the music creatively and on the business side of things with our new label venture.”

Elliot co-produced *Metro Blue* with Braun and they collaborated on nine new songs for the collection. “I wanted to create a different sound that is organic, funky and soulful. I wanted it to have a moody urban vibe, but not an American urban sound; more like a Euro urban sound,” Elliot elaborated. “Musically we did everything slightly different than how I would usually do things. I felt the title *Metro Blue* described the sound and the vibe I wanted to capture: urban and moody. Although recording it was a different process, it was probably the most fun I've had making an album.”

One of the things Elliot and Braun did differently in the studio was use a single sax track on the choruses instead of layers of sax parts. Elliot's sax was echoed by or entwined with Braun's trumpet or flugelhorn, a guitar or the horn section, which essentially was comprised of Elliot and Braun laying down layers upon layers of horn parts.

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Recollections of big funky vintage horn sections bring the heat to the retro 1970's sounding “Inside Out,” which opens the collection. The cool seductive “Camella,” written for Elliot's wife, is a slower deep groove that was co-

written and co-produced by **Jeff Lorber**. “Thankfully Camella liked the song when I played it for her. We actually had a back-up title just in case she didn’t,” confessed Elliot with a smile.

Gregg Karukas came up with the pulsating groove on “Coastline.” Elliot delivers the moody melody front and center on the Euro-flavored track. Over the years, Elliot has been known for delivering knockout covers of R&B classics. For years, he had wanted to redo The Stylistics’ haunting “People Make The World Go Round.” “I’ve always loved this song. It doesn’t sound like anything else on the radio. I’m glad that I waited to do the song with Rick (Braun). He added a hypnotic chill rhythm underneath to a more traditional arrangement. It came out sounding really different,” said Elliot. The track was the first single from the album serviced to radio stations.

Lorber laid down the pumping funk groove, a nifty piano solo and some quirky ear candy on “Say It’s So,” while the Elliot and Braun horn section blew up the track. **Ronnie Garrett** and **Phil Davis** created a bass-powered groove for “Chill Bill.” Elliot said, “It took a while to write the melody to this one because the groove and the track sound very different. We used a simple single sax and the chorus ended up taking on a fusion-like quality.”

Bright, familiar and as warm as the summer sun, “Mystique” is joyous and conveys a sense of excitement and anticipation. **Peter White** makes an appearance on guitar. “In recent years, I consciously shortened the melodies I play. For this one, I went back to using an open, long lyrical melody like my early compositions,” said Elliot.

The funky Latin rhythm track laid down by **Lenny Castro** guides “Mango Tango” while the sax is purposely understated, setting a textured chill vibe. **Brian Culbertson** collaborated with Elliot and Braun on “Maxi’s,” the first song written for the album. A big lyrical melody and an energetic Euro house dance beat make it the most fun track on the record.

Elliot and Braun are working together outside of the recording studio as well. The two contemporary instrumental stars are partners of the ARTizen Music Group, along with their long-time manager **Steve Chapman** and industry veteran **Al Evers**. They first started considering the possibility of launching a label a few years ago, with the goal being to explore unique and innovative ways to market music to the smooth jazz lifestyle. “Some people have been coming to my concerts for over twenty years. This audience is a loyal fan base and we feel that we know them as well as anyone,” said Elliot.

Both artists had the opportunity to leave the major labels they were with and they decided the timing was right to launch ARTizen. “We didn’t want to be out there trying to convince other artists to sign with our label and not be on the label ourselves. Rick and I wanted to be the first artists released by ARTizen. By actually committing our own careers to the new label, we’re putting more skin in the game,” Elliot explained.

Another key element of ARTizen’s mission is to embrace and exploit the Internet and the digital delivery of music. Brazenly delving into new technologies is something Elliot already knows about. A decade ago, he teamed with his then road manager to launch **PacificNet**, a cutting-edge Internet multimedia company. At one time, PacificNet was one of the first in the world to offer wireless Internet services and became one of the top Internet service providers in Los Angeles. Clients of their groundbreaking services included CBS, GTE, TRW, Dun & Bradstreet, and many other prominent business and celebrities. Elliot believes that ARTizen will grant him the opportunity to meld his dual careers and affinity for music, technological innovation, and business.

Born in Scotland 45-years ago, Elliot moved to Los Angeles with his family when he was a kid. He was introduced to the tenor sax as a teenager and landed his first professional job touring with **Natalie Cole** and **The Pointer Sisters** while he was still in high school. Then he played in the adventurous fusion band **Kittyhawk**, followed by dream recording sessions with Motown legends **Smokey Robinson**, **The Four Tops** and **The Temptations**. Another fusion band, **The Yellowjackets**, brought him onboard for recording and touring work. Between dates with them, Elliot toured with **Melissa Manchester**. In 1982, he became a full-time member of the legendary **Tower Of Power**. Elliot spent five years with the dynamic funk showmen, which he refers to as the most influential period of his early career. “It was every horn players’ dream to play with Tower Of Power. They taught me how to be a professional,” Elliot recalled fondly.

While with Tower Of Power, Elliot released his solo debut album, *Trolltown*, in 1986. It was well-received and gave him the confidence to leave the band to forge his own legacy. Since then, he's released four #1 albums (*On The Town*, *Soul Embrace*, *After Dark* and *Jumpin' Off*) and has a formidable collection of #1 radio singles. Elliot's music helped pioneer the formation of the smooth jazz radio format and he remains an image artist to this day. Although he's had more than a couple dozen singles that have saturated radio playlists across the U.S., his emotional, gut-wrenching cover version of "When A Man Loves A Woman" remains a radio and live concert favorite.

"Although it's so hard to leave my family, playing live is still my favorite part about being a musician," said Elliot. His years with Tower Of Power taught him how to become a consummate entertainer and his concert performances helped cultivate an enormous following. The fervor and urgency with which he performs each time he takes the stage has won the hearts of audiences. Elliot gives a part of himself out there and the audience can feel it. He tours extensively, even though since he became a father he scaled back his touring itinerary a bit from over 100 dates a year. A decade ago, Elliot helped launch the highly successful **Guitars & Saxes** concert tour that pairs four contemporary instrumental stars, a perennial tour that he's been a part of on and off over the years. This spring, he's been having a blast on a collaborative tour called **Jazz Attack**, featuring Elliot, Braun, White and **Jonathan Butler**. The trek runs through the summer.

Making a mark with a distinctive and powerful voice is something many of us strive for in life. In music, it's a bit more challenging when your voice is an instrument. Richard Elliot has used a saxophone to create a lasting voice through soulful instrumental music. Throughout his career, he's done it consistently, thoughtfully and innovatively by pouring his heart into song with the purpose of entertaining, uplifting, and loving.

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