

RICK BRAUN & RICHARD ELLIOT

R n R

The collaboration between two giant, complementary yet separate forces can produce previously unimagined greatness. Both parties contribute uniquely and often bring something special out of each other. They are coaxed outside of their comfort zones to explore previously unexplored avenues. Disparate perspectives stimulate fresh ideas resulting in thrilling new possibilities. With open minds, they combine and harmonize to create something truly magical.

The exciting collaboration between trumpeter **Rick Braun** and saxophonist **Richard Elliot** has been in the making for over a decade. They've toured together for years and have made guest appearances on each other's records. Between them, they have 24 solo albums and a massive catalogue of chart-topping radio hits. When they launched the **ARTizen Music Group** record label with a couple of music industry veterans almost three years ago, it was only a matter of time before the two heavyweights stepped into the ring side by side to deliver a knockout album full of punchy beats & rhythms, potent melodies and collaborative sparks that melded naturally and have roots way beyond music.

The dynamic duo wrote and produced **R n R**, a long-anticipated cool-jazz treat that bodes to be the album event of the year in the contemporary instrumental genre. The collection of original funk, R&B, jazz and pop songs will be released in late summer and promises to bring the heat well into the New Year.

"We've had so much fun playing together live that it was time for us to get together musically," declared Elliot. "We have different approaches yet they are complementary. We called upon our roots (Elliot was a long-time member of **Tower of Power** and Braun played with **War**) and we constantly bounced ideas off each other (in the studio)."

R n R was conceptualized on the fly as they entered the studio to record without any preconceived ideas. The result is an album that has the spontaneity and smoldering energy of a live performance. "I think the album is very energetic and percolates. We didn't want to overpower the melodies by just blasting a lot of horns in people's faces. In fact, we did the opposite by using single trumpet, flugelhorn and tenor sax melodies much like old recordings from the '40s, '50s and '60's, which gave the record an intimate and warm sound. The horn section parts were doubled to really give it that oomph and muscle. We treated the lead instruments as would vocalists recording duets, which gave them each a personal voice," explained Braun.

Armed with grooves from a number of sources, including album contributor's **Jeff Lorber**, **Rex Rideout** and **Philippe Saisse**, Elliot and Braun wrote the melodies while recording, which was an unusual process for them, especially for Braun who played a horn with one hand while controlling the soundboard with the other. "While recording, it was ensemble playing," said Braun. "Richard played sax and I had a trumpet or flugelhorn as we came up with melodies spontaneously. What you hear on the finished album are a lot of first takes. That's rare. We let the songs develop and be inspired 100% from the interaction between us."

It took about three months to record *R n R* in Braun's suburban Los Angeles home studio whenever the artists were between tour dates. Since they'd have a day or two here, and a day or two there, their recording process had to be quite focused and condensed when their schedules were clear. "We'd

work on up to three songs per day...at least get the melodies going. But the (writing) process would evolve over a few months," recalled Elliot. Adding to the equation was that Elliot lives in North San Diego County, 2-3 hours from Braun's house. "I was driving back and forth each day, which was about 5-6 hours of driving roundtrip. But I kind of liked it. It gave me time to listen to tracks in the car on the ride in so I knew what I wanted to do that day. At night, I'd drive home with what we worked on so I could listen to what I wanted to do or change at the next session."

While Elliot drove, Braun toiled in the studio. "Rick did so much heavy-lifting production-wise, adjusting parts and stuff. He was very dedicated to this project. He certainly went above and beyond. I'm grateful for all the work he put in," beamed Elliot in awe of his partner. Helping to adorn the tracks were some of their gifted friends such as guitarists **Chris Standing** and **Dwight Sills**, keyboardist **Gregg Karukas**, percussionist **Lenny Castro**, drummer **Ricky Lawson** and bassist **Nate Phillips**.

Kicking off the party is the groovy title track, an infectious horn-drenched romp that seems both retro and fresh. It's got a summery feel, which is why it was the first track from the collection serviced to radio. It's a combination of lots of talented musicians that was spawned from a Standing riff. Rideout provided the R&B groove for "Sweet Somethin'," and the duo decided to lay a jazzy melody on top. Braun's muted trumpet adds ambience to the laidback, seductive atmosphere. "A big thing Rick and I wanted to do was not to over-think things. We wanted to be free to try different approaches and we created an environment for the musicians who played on the record to do the same. We wanted to take chances and we wanted all the players to do so as well," revealed Elliot.

What Braun and Elliot refer to as one of the cornerstone cuts on the CD is "Curve Ball." It's a high-octane, adventurous funk track reminiscent of the **Brecker Brothers** and the fusion era co-written by Lorber. The melody counteracts the aggressive groove. The haunting melody on "The Stranger" has an air of familiarity that adds intrigue to the mystery. A hypnotic bass line supports the shadowy, atmospheric track that has the horns playing cat & mouse as they duck in and out of each other's melodies.

"The entire spirit of the record was to try everything," said Braun. So for "Da JR Funk," on impulse he borrowed a flying V rock guitar from a neighbor for Lorber to play. The track has a down home funk thing going on during the chorus while Lorber's raw guitar shards add edginess. "Que Paso" is a total departure in that this number was composed by Saisse specifically for Braun and Elliot. The gorgeous, international-flavored song has a dramatic, cinematic chorus that connects emotionally. "Better Times" is a vibrant, two-horn-led lyrical pop song armed with a lethal hook. "Down And Dirty" began with Lorber. "We didn't give any direction to the musicians. Each one brought new life to it. The song came together in bits and pieces," explained Braun.

"It's my favorite because it grooves so hard. It's got a stinky groove - just plain stinky, and I love it," exclaimed Elliot.

Rideout brought in another R&B groove for "Two Heart Tango." Once again, Braun and Elliot decided to veer towards the unexpected by choosing a Brazilian "Cha Cha" melody and adding Braun's voice to guide the song that bridges the gap between funk and Latin music. British influences abound on "Q It Up," thanks to the work of **Shilts**. Driving horns add a sense of urgency to this dialogue between instruments cloaked in a retro R&B vibe. The moody, understated "Sunday Night" traces its roots back to traditional jazz as it moves in different directions while utilizing a less predictable, alternative melody. The album concludes with a track that previously was exclusively available via the ARTizen website, the breezy exotic romance of "Sao Paulo," which reached the top 15 on the **Radio & Records** chart. It was a free bonus download from Braun's **Yours Truly** disc, but a couple of major smooth jazz radio stations added the song to CD samplers and other radio

stations picked up on it. Although Elliot is credited with penning the cut alone, he gives Braun full credit for the classy final product. “Rick made the song what it is - the arrangement, the approach. He added a great flavor and made it beautiful and intimate.”

Elliot began his recording career young while playing on songs by Motown legends **Smokey Robinson** and **The Temptations**. He was still a teenager when he toured with **Melissa Manchester**. That gig led to him spending five formative years performing with the mighty Tower of Power, who molded the impressionable musician into a passionate entertainer. He put out his first solo album in 1976 and in subsequent years, the Scotland-born, Los Angeles-raised saxophonist became a pioneering voice in contemporary jazz by consistently scoring hit after hit while building a growing legion of fans year after year through his dynamic concerts. Although he’s got an extensive arsenal of originals to pull from, Elliot stops the show each time he plays his classic signature version of “When A Man Loves A Woman.” Outside of music, Elliot co-founded a cutting-edge multimedia company (PacificNet) that served some of the giants of the corporate business, entertainment and sports industries.

Braun is a trumpeter-flugelhorn player-keyboardist who started his professional career by writing a top 20 pop hit for **REO Speedwagon** (“Here With Me”). The Allentown, Pennsylvania native has played in bands backing **Rod Stewart, Sade, Tom Petty, Tina Turner, Natalie Cole** and **Crowded House**. As a producer, he’s guided #1 hits for **David Benoit, Marc Antoine** and **Avenue Blue**. Since debuting as a solo artist in 1993, twice he has been honored as *Gavin’s* “Artist of the Year” in addition to collecting a *Gavin* “Album of the Year” trophy and “Best Producer” and “Best Brass Player” titles from the *Oasis Smooth Jazz Awards*. Recording with colleagues is nothing new for Braun, who released an album of duets with **Boney James** and recorded as a trio along with **Norman Brown** and **Kirk Whalum** as **BWB**. Up next for the prolific talent is producing and performing on **Peter White’s** Christmas album, working on his own CD and then starting Elliot’s next album. “And then the cycle starts all over again,” laughed Braun.

In addition to playing their own concert dates throughout the year, Braun and Elliot are touring the U.S. extensively with the perennially successful *Jazz Attack* line-up that co-stars White and **Jonathan Butler**. The show consists of various combinations of collaboration between the artists, something that obviously appeals to Braun and Elliot. “Richard is so creative and fun to work with. We’ve spent a lot of time together over the years and I have great respect for his work and talents. It’s been a natural progression to make an album together,” concluded Braun.

Elliot summed it up eloquently. “I played and soloed differently (on *R n R*) due to Rick’s influence and presence. That’s the magic of collaboration.” Pop in *R n R* and experience the magic for yourself.

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