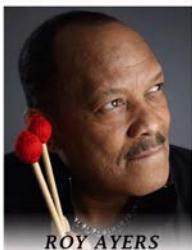


For Immediate Release:

Media Contact: Jason Nichols

E: nicholsj@festevents.org

P: 757-441-2345



Spyro Gyra, Euge Groove, Roy Ayers, Lonnie Liston Smith, Ronnie Laws, Tom Browne, Pieces of a Dream, and Najee Performing Live in Concert at the 2017 Norfolk Waterfront Jazz Festival

Hampton Roads' longest running outdoor Jazz Festival!

Norfolk, Virginia (February 7, 2017) –Norfolk Festevents announces National recording artists **Spyro Gyra, Euge Groove, Roy Ayers, Lonnie Liston Smith, Ronnie Laws, Tom Browne, Pieces of a Dream, and Najee** to appear live in concert at the 35th Annual Norfolk Waterfront Jazz Festival at Town Point Park, along the Downtown Norfolk Waterfront, Virginia. Scheduled to perform live in concert on **Friday, July 14, 2017**, are Pieces of a Dream and Najee. Scheduled to perform on **Saturday, July 15, 2017**, are Euge Groove, Spyro Gyra, Roy Ayers, Lonnie Liston Smith, Ronnie Laws, and Tom Browne. *A special guest headliner is to be announced for Friday, July 14, 2017 in the coming days.*



W. Main Street, Norfolk, VA 23510 • Phone (757) 441-2345 • Fax (757) 441-5198 • festevents.org

The 35th Annual Norfolk Waterfront Jazz Festival returns for two nights along the Downtown Norfolk Waterfront, Friday, July 14th and Saturday, July 15, 2017, 5pm-11pm each day. Hampton Roads' longest running outdoor Jazz Festival featuring legendary sounds of top National Smooth Jazz and R&B Recording Artists. In its' 35th year, this effervescent Jazz Festival is sure to be exciting with this amazing line up.

Festival Quick Facts:

Weather: In the event of severe inclement weather, the festival will be relocated to the Scope Arena at 201 E. Brambleton Ave. Norfolk, Virginia. For Scope Arena policies, please visit www.sevenvenues.com or call 757-664-6464. In the event the Jazz Festival is moved indoors, all lawn chairs, food and beverage, coolers, blankets, umbrellas and any alcohol will not be permitted. All ticket sales are final. No Refunds. Norfolk Festevents reserves the right to postpone, cancel and/or evacuate events due to adverse weather conditions.

Parking: Parking is available in several of the Downtown Norfolk garages within a short walk of the park. The fee for event parking in the downtown Norfolk garages is \$5.00

Special Notes: Lawn chairs, picnic blankets, coolers, food and non-alcoholic beverages are permitted in Town Point Park. No alcohol or glass is permitted; food and alcohol will be available for purchase during the festival.

Festival Shade tents and large umbrella area: A special area in Town Point Park is reserved for festival guests wishing to set up a shade tent or large umbrellas for shade. All umbrellas must be lowered during performances if seated near the stage; no tents or other structures are permitted in the lawn directly in front of the stage.

TICKETS: On Sale February 13, 2017!!

(All ticket sales are final. No Refunds. Norfolk Festevents reserves the right to postpone, cancel and/or evacuate events due to adverse weather conditions).

A variety of seating and ticket options are available including:

- ** An exclusive VIP seating and hospitality experience (limited to the first 200 people)
- * New Journal & Guide Reserved seating section
- * Festival lawn general admission seating.
- * Designated areas for picnicking and shade tents will be available

***In the event of severe inclement weather, the festival will be relocated inside the Scope Arena. The stage inside the Scope Arena is not visible from the VIP hospitality area. All VIP seating will be arranged like the design structure in Town Point Park.*

Tickets for the 35th Annual Norfolk Waterfront Jazz Festival will be available for purchase beginning February 3, 2017 at www.festevents.org and/or by visiting the Festevents box office located at 120 W. Main Street Norfolk, Virginia 23510.

For more information, visit www.festevents.org or call 757.441.2345.

See below for full details about the artists:

Euge Groove - Saturday, July 15. "Fear and creativity cannot live in the same room," declares free-spirited and consummate chart-topping saxophonist, composer, producer and radio host Euge Groove. "You can't bring fear into the creative process. It took me a while to get that." Euge Groove's Ying and Yang and ebb and flow approach to his artistry and life have allowed him to enjoy a career longevity that is atypical. The highly sought after musical chameleon has been called upon for his musical prowess by everyone from Rock 'N' Roll Hall of Famer Tina Turner and balladeer Luther Vandross to UK Blues Rocker Joe Cocker, Richard Marx, Tower of Power and Huey Lewis



W. Main Street, Norfolk, VA 23510 • Phone (757) 441-2345 • Fax (757) 441-5198 • festevents.org

and the News, among countless others. A road warrior, Euge Groove stays at the top of his game by maintaining a busy touring schedule. "I love live performance, which is probably pretty obvious to anyone that has seen me live," shares the charismatic saxman. "On a sonic level, I try to capture the space of a live performance when I record. Instead of going for a really 'dry' soundstage, I try to envision what the sound would be if it was playing on a theater or small venue stage."

Born Steven Eugene Grove in Hagerstown, Maryland, Euge Groove grew up in a musical home. His mother played piano and taught the Cherub choir at Christ Lutheran Church and he began his own musical pursuits at the age of seven, beginning with the piano and adding the saxophone at nine. But for Euge it was in elementary school where he discovered that music was his calling. "In fifth grade I thought I'd be in school band the rest of my life." He later discovered two saxophonists who had a profound effect on his approach to playing. "One was French classical player Marcel Mule, who really defined what the sax was supposed to sound like for me and the other was David Sanborn. He took that sound and brought it into the mainstream world," reminisces the worldly saxophonist. Through the years, Euge's love of Jazz, R&B, Gospel and Blues have all come together to inform his personalized sound. He explains, "I've listened to everyone from Grover (Washington Jr.) and (David) Sanborn to (Charlie) Parker and (John) Coltrane as well as (Michael) Brecker, (Stan) Getz, King Curtis, Junior Walker, Richard Elliott and Kirk Whalum. The thing is, the more mature we become the more those influences fuse into something new. I always listened to a lot of R&B growing up, fused that with Pop music, then with the Gospel music. Hopefully all of these influences come through in my music and I am able to create my own unique expression." A graduate of the University of Miami's School of Music, Euge launched his professional career in Miami in the mid 80s, playing in Salsa bands, top 40 club bands and doing the occasional high profile session date like Expose's "Seasons Change," a #1 Billboard AC hit. Not long after he moved to L.A. in 1987, he wrote a track for Richard Elliot's *THE POWER OF SUGGESTION* album, and Elliot recommended Euge to take over his spot in Tower of Power. Euge toured with TOP for four years, including a year backing Huey Lewis & The News. His resume grew from there to include recording, touring or performing stints with Joe Cocker, The Eurythmics, The Gap Band, Elton John, Bonnie Raitt, Aaron Neville and Richard Marx. Marx included Euge's horn on "Keep Coming Back," a #1 AC hit duet he recorded with Luther Vandross. In 1999, coming off the road after two years of touring with popular Italian singer Eros Ramazzotti and Joe Cocker, the saxophonist paved the way for his eventual solo stardom by recording some tracks of his own. Without a record label to distribute the music, Euge put his songs on the now-defunct MP3.com website, dubbing himself "Euge Groove" and downloading started almost immediately and Euge was soon topping the MP3.com Jazz chart.

Spyro Gyra - Saturday, July 15. An unlikely story of a group with humble beginnings in Buffalo, NY who has continued to reach an international audience over forty years, resulting in sales of over 10 million albums and having played over five thousand shows on five continents. They have accomplished this due to a forward-looking approach combined with the work ethic of an underdog, always challenging themselves to do something new while never resting on past success. It has proven to be a recipe for longevity for this jazz group while music has gone in and out of styles in ever shorter cycles.

Spyro Gyra are contemporary jazz icons who observed their fortieth year as a band in 2014 with shows that showcased their breakthrough *Morning Dance* album. After that year of looking back, they decided to spend 2015 concentrating on their more recent material, playing many songs from their post 2000 releases. The audience reaction was so positive to their recent material that bandleader Jay Beckenstein decided that their albums from that period deserved a little more focus. So, in order to spotlight this innovative and productive period, SpyroGyra released *The Best Of The Heads Up Years* this spring.

They released their last, their 30th, album of new material *The Rhinebeck Sessions* in 2013, which *Jazztimes* called "inspired". Travis Rogers of the Jazz Journalists Association picked it for *Jazz Album Of The Year*. *Something Else Reviews* called it "Their finest album since their early 80s heyday" and made it a Top Twenty pick for the year. George Harris of the *Jazz Weekly* enthused, "I gotta tell ya, these guys still sound GREAT."

"My hope is that our music has the same effect on the audience that it does on me," says group leader Jay Beckenstein.

"I've always felt that music, and particularly instrumental music, has this non-literal quality that lets people travel to a place where there are no words. Whether it's touching their emotions or connecting them to something that reminds them of something much bigger than themselves, there's this beauty in music that's not connected to sentences. It's very transportive. I would hope that when people hear our music or come to see us, they're able to share that with us."

Roy Edward Ayers, Jr. – Saturday, July 15. Born in Los Angeles, California on September 10, 1940. Music has always been in his genes. His mother, Ruby, was a schoolteacher and local piano instructor and his father, Roy Sr., was a sometimes-parking attendant and trombonist.

As it often happens in a household filled with love and appreciation for music, Roy began to demonstrate his musical aptitude by the tender age of five.

By then he was playing boogie tunes on the piano. He eventually turned his attention to the guitar and other instruments, including the trumpet, and drums before embracing instrument of choice, the vibraphone.

In the 1960's, Roy was an award-winning jazz vibraphonist but soon transferred into a popular R&B band leader in the 1970's and 80's. Today, the dynamic music man is an iconic figure still in great demand.

Lonnie Liston Smith – Saturday, July 15. One of contemporary music's most versatile musicians. In a career that spans some 40 years, he has been heard in a variety of context as a featured sideman for some of Jazz music' most illustrious leaders before stepping out to reveal his own original concepts as a band leader in the mid 70's. He is a keyboardist of the first rank and has influenced a generation of young players that have acknowledged his rhythmic urgency (swing), harmonic acumen and composing skills.

Lonnie was born in Richmond, Virginia into a musical family. His father was a member of the Gospel Group, "The Harmonizing Four". In 1945, Eleanor Roosevelt invited "The Harmonizing Four" to sing at the White House following the death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Lonnie remembers such gospel groups as "The Dixie Humming Birds" and "The Soul Stirrers" with Sam Cooke, being frequent visitors at his family's home.

There was a piano in the house and he began investigating it before formal instructions a few years later. It was during high school that Lonnie became infatuated with modern Jazz through hearing alto saxophonist Charlie Parker, one of the creative geniuses in music. It was not long before he was listening to Miles Davis (a future employer) and John Coltrane. Lonnie also began listening to great pianist geniuses, such as: Art Tatum, Oscar Peterson, Bud Powell, Earl "Father" Hines, Erroll Garner and the many other piano geniuses.

After graduating from Armstrong High School, Lonnie entered Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland, where he majored in music education and earned his B.S. degree. While attending Morgan State University, Lonnie became a member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity and also a member of the music fraternity, Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia.

Lonnie began performing in the Baltimore area where he became adept at backing vocalists such as Ethel Ennis and visiting dignitaries like Betty Carter. After college, Lonnie moved to New York City and began performing with the top vocalists, such as, Betty Carter and Joe Williams. Soon after, Lonnie joined Art Blakey and The Jazz Messengers and after The Jazz Messengers, he got a call to perform with drummer, Max Roach, which was unusual because Max rarely used a pianist in his ensemble. Unfortunately, his year with Roach was not documented on vinyl, but these gigs did elevate his status as one of the up and coming players on the scene. He then enjoyed a 2 year stay with Rahsaan Roland Kirk, and recorded 2 records with Rahsaan entitled, "Please Don't Cry Beautiful Edith" on Verve Records and "Here Comes the Whistleman" on Atlantic Records.

In 1973 Lonnie received the important call to join the Miles Davis ensemble. Lonnie recorded 2 CDs with Miles, "On The Corner" and "Big Fun". Lonnie said working with Miles Davis was his greatest experience and joy. Miles was a

genius on stage and off stage because Miles has produced more band leaders than any other musician in the history of creative music.

In 1974, Producer, Bob Thiele, signed Lonnie to a solo recording contract. "Astral Traveling" and "Cosmic Funk" were Lonnie's first 2 CDs. However, it was his album (CD), "Expansions" that broke Lonnie into the major leagues as a worldwide leader. The CD was a breath of fresh air in 1975 as it combined solid Jazz playing with creative crossover elements that did not dilute the music. While many of Lonnie's contemporaries were making records that were artistically bankrupt, (fusion music at this time had become big business), his CDs retained warmth and fire. He recorded several more albums in this vein, including "Visions of a New World" and "Renaissance" before he was approached by CBS. Lonnie continued to make good records for them as well, "Loveland", "Exotic Mysteries", "Song for the Children" and "Love Is The Answer".

Years later Lonnie renewed his association with Bob Thiele again, who had a distribution deal with CBS, and once again recorded well received albums, "Silhouettes", "Rejuvenation", and "Dreams of Tomorrow". Also, during this time period, Lonnie discovered a young, 16 year old bassist, Marcus Miller. Lonnie also appeared on the Jazz Explosion All Star Tours with Stanley Turrentine, Freddie Hubbard, Roy Ayers, Jean Carne, Angela Bofil, Stanley Clarke, Gato Barbieri, Tom Brown, Wayne Henderson, Jon Lucien and Ronnie Laws, and kept his audience through incessant roadwork.

In the 90's, Lonnie got involved with "Guru Jazzmataz Volume One" (Rap meets Jazz) and was discovered by an all new young audience. Lonnie also has had two hit singles with Mary J. Blige and Jay-Z. Mary J. Blige sampled Lonnie's composition "A Garden of Peace" in her Grammy winning single, "Take Me As I Am" and Jay-Z also sampled, "A Garden of Peace" in his hit sample, "Dead Presidents".

Early in Lonnie's musical career, he recognized the magical and healing power of music. Using the medium of music, he has expanded the consciousness and raised the moral values of humanity on the planet Earth. Lonnie said his greatest desire and hope in life is that the human race learns to live in peace and harmony and not make war.

Ronnie Laws – Saturday, July 15. An American jazz, blues and funk saxophonist. He is the younger brother of jazz flautist Hubert Laws. Laws is the fifth of eight children born to Hubert Laws, Sr. and Miola Luvera Donahue.

Laws attended Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas for two years. In 1972, Laws joined the fledgling group Earth, Wind & Fire, playing saxophone and flute on their album *Last Days And Time*. He left the band soon afterwards, long before they achieved their huge commercial success.

In 1976, he began his solo career with the album *Pressure Sensitive*, on which his most famous instrumental song, "Always There", was included. It became an instant jazz-funk classic, covered by numerous artists.

In 1978 he released an album called *Flame* under United Artists (UA) records and from it a 12" single was released called "All for you" with a strong vocal presence and additional tracks entitled "Let's Keep it Together" and "Nuthin' 'bout nuthin'" from other previous albums. The 12" single was his first issued in the UK as well as the US and paved the way for this format to be used for promoting artists' work at the time without the need to own the full LP.

Apart from saxophones, Laws also included vocals into his songs. Notable vocal makings include "Every Generation" (1980), "Stay Awake" (1981, included on the album *Solid Ground*) and "Mr. Nice Guy" (1983).

Laws has also recorded with numerous other artists, including Arthur Adams, Howard Hewett, Ramsey Lewis, Jeff Lorber, Hugh Masekela, Alphonse Mouzon, David Sea, and Sister Sledge.

In 1999 a tribute to Ronnie Laws' "Always There", mentioned earlier, was played by a group of musicians including Boney James, Rick Braun, Kirk Whalum and Larry Carlton performing the number at the Montreux Jazz Festival. This has been issued on DVD and is entitled *Casino Lights '99*.

More recently in June 2005 the album *Every Generation* from 1980 was at last, after continued demand, issued on CD format. The original tracks are "Young Child", "Never get back to Houston", "Every Generation", "Tomorrow", "O.T.B.A.", "Love's Victory", "Thoughts and Memories" and "As one".

Tom Browne – Saturday, July 15. Commonly referred to as "Mr. Jamaica Funk", is a jazz trumpeter who rose to prominence first through his early work with Sonny Fortune and for his #1 charting 1980 single "Funkin' For Jamaica (N.Y)" and notable dance tracks like "Thighs High".

Browne originally played piano, having taken lessons from the age of 11. Turning to the trumpet, inspired by his collection of jazz albums, his first gig was in a Queens club, The Village Door. In 1975, he landed his first professional gig with Weldon Irvine.

From here he played with Sonny Fortune and Lonnie Smith and was later introduced to Dave Grusin and Larry Rosen at GRP Records via Earl Klugh. Grusin and Rosen signed him to GRP (via Arista Records) and Browne broke onto the music scene in 1979 with a highly acclaimed instrumental jazz fusion album "Browne Sugar", although this was not released in the UK. His first real breakthrough came in 1980 with the release of "Funkin' For Jamaica", taken from his second album "Love Approach. The single hit #1 on Billboard's Hot Soul Singles for 4 weeks, and was also a UK Top 10 hit, and featured the lead vocals of Tonni Smith.

Continuing his association with producers Grusin and Rosen, his next albums were *Yours Truly* (1981), including "Fungi Mama" and "Bye Gones", and "Magic" (1982), before he signed directly to Arista. Here he progressed into an electro style of jazz with "Rockin' Radio" from a 1983 album of the same name (which also included a final GRP production "Brighter Tomorrow"). In 1984 he recorded a final Arista album *Tommy Gun*, which featured Siedah Garrett singing lead on the leading moment "Secret Fantasy" produced by Maurice Starr. Also in 1984 he recorded with Fuse One on their *Ice* album.

He also recorded with Roy Ayers on "Goree Island", taken from his *In The Dark* album. Browne moved to Malaco Records and performed a large amount of session work. In 2000, Browne re-recorded "Funkin' For Jamaica" on Jazz FM's 101 Eastbound compilation album alongside fellow jazz artist, Bob Baldwin. The track re-utilised the vocal skills of Tonni Smith (featured on the original).

Pieces of a Dream – Friday, July 14. Once upon a time, a trio of teenage jazz prodigies began turning heads in Philadelphia. Hailing from the 'City of Brotherly Love,' the all-star unit Pieces Of A Dream stands alongside an impressive lineage of musical wonders who have made Philly proud including Gamble and Huff, Patti Labelle, Grover Washington Jr. Jill Scott and The Roots. Proclaimed a "tough act to follow" by the iconic Count Basie, Pieces Of A Dream was discovered while in High School and was mentored by Mr. Magic, pioneering saxophonist Grover Washington, Jr. 2016 marks a milestone for Pieces Of A Dream as they will celebrate their 40th Anniversary. The all-star band has built an impressive legacy of their own with their melting pot of influences that have catapulted them to the top of the charts more than a few times. The band's newest release is their 21st recording, All In On Shanachie Entertainment, which beautifully illustrates why the band has stood the test of time. They made their label debut in 2013 with their CD *In the Moment*.

Founding members James Lloyd (keyboards) and Curtis Harmon (drums) both use words like "thankful," "blessed" and "grateful" to describe how they feel about their career longevity and their fans, who have continued to make it all possible. Curtis confesses, "Not many groups get to reach 40 years and 21 albums! I feel very fortunate and blessed to be in the music industry this long and to have this kind of success." James adds, "That's crazy isn't it?! Twenty-one albums and the first one came out in 1981 when I was a senior in high school, 16 years old. We were out on the road with Grover Washington, Jr. the following year and I basically grew up on the road with him. We would open for him as Pieces and then play as part of his rhythm section."

And Grover Washington, Jr. was indeed their guiding light, a mentor who took Pieces of a Dream under his wing as the first group he signed with his brandnew production company. James and Curtis were the nucleus of the band,

having played together as members of the Ada Lewis Middle School jazz ensemble along with former member bassist Cedric Napoleon. Danny Harmon, Curtis' father and a jazz musician himself, became their manager and had the guys listening to the Modern Jazz Quartet, Ahmad Jamal and Oscar Peterson as they developed their unique sound, blending their jazz roots with R&B, soul and funk. Pieces released three albums in quick succession, establishing its place in the world of smooth jazz with the CDs *Pieces Of A Dream*(1981), *WeAreOne*(1982) and *Imagine This*(1983). Those albums include some of their biggest early hits, including "Warm Weather," "Mount Airy Groove" and "Fo Fi Fo." In The Moment was *Pieces of A Dream*'s first new release for *Pieces* since the 2009 album *Soul Intent* and featured eleven tracks, ten originals and a cover of the 1942 Harry Warren/Mack Gordon jazz standard "There Will Never Be Another You."

The new single on All In is the title track and a favorite of Harmon's. "All In,' is one of those songs that was years in the making but that shows off our true funk ability." Harmon also wrote album standouts "Caribbean Nights" and "UP Til Dawn." Pianist James Lloyd states, "There is something for everyone on this album. 'Human Interface' delivers an energetic old-school feel reminiscent of the late great George Duke, while 'Dream On' is more of a sensual number and "Watch Your Step" is a grooving number for all the steppers out there!" *Pieces Of A Dream* enlists a little help from some friends on All In and is joined by Grammy nominated producer and keyboardist Chris "Big Dog" Davis (Kim Burrell, Maysa and George Clinton) and keyboardist Herman Jackson (American Idol, Aretha Franklin, Baby face, Quincy Jones, Stevie Wonder). Long time member and acclaimed bassist David Dyson (Meshell Ndegeocello, Lalah Hathaway, New Kids on the Block, Michael Franks), noted guitarist Rohn Lawrence (Will Downing, Boney James, Najee) and up and coming saxophonist Tony Watson Jr. also join the band to make a stellar ensemble.

Danny Weiss, VP of Jazz A&R for Shanachie states, "What really amazes me about *Pieces Of A Dream* is how fresh they are. They've been an iconic group for decades, yet this album has them at the very top of their game!"

Celebrating 40 years making music is no small feat and both James and Curtis are looking forward to sharing the new material with their fans. Curtis sums it up like this, "I think we made a good collage of music on All In. I think we're covering a lot of different flavors in this particular CD and a lot of people will be pleased." James adds, "I hope our fans like the album. For me personally, I'm always trying to push the boundaries of what's accepted as cool or playable. I'm not one to say 'ok that worked, let's do that again,' but rather 'that worked well and let's do something else. It's a hard line to walk, staying true to what people expect of you but being true to yourself and your creativity.' With All In, it's safe to say *Pieces of a Dream* continue to explore new territory yet remain aware of their amazing history and the core sound and style that have gotten the band this far.

Pieces fans will definitely enjoy this 'moment' and the ride.

Najee - Friday, July 14. One of contemporary jazz's true pioneers. Creating a fresh and pulsating "rhythm and jazz" dynamic in the early days of the smooth jazz format, the versatile saxophonist—whose first two recordings, 1986's Grammy nominated *Najee's Theme* and 1988's *Day By Day*, went platinum—inspired the whole urban vibe that took over the instrumental world throughout the '90s. Recording on Heads Up International since 2005, he continues to explore new creative avenues by mixing up his trademark soulful soprano with dynamic touches of flute and alto, and surrounding himself with some of the best session players and collaborators in the business.

A native of Jamaica, Queens, New York, Najee shared all of his musical dreams—and later, many professional gigs—with his brother Fareed, a guitarist who was a year younger. Their father passed away when they were very young, but their mother encouraged a deep exposure to jazz via recordings by artists as diverse as the Miles Davis Quintet, Junior Walker and Mongo Santamaria. Najee showed an early interest in the sax but a grammar school teacher steered him towards clarinet when there were no sax chairs available in the school band.

"My life and career have been shaped by what I like to call 'life defining moments,'" he says, "and the first of these came when I took a tenor sax solo in my jazz band at August Martin High School and realized that suddenly, all the girls knew my name! Fareed and I started playing professional gigs together at 15, and had a mutual support system going."

Najee began studying under the direction of Jimmy Heath, Frank Foster and Billy Taylor at Jazzmobile in Harlem, and he also studied flute with Harold Jones at the Manhattan School of Music. "Later," he adds, "Fareed and I spent a year in the music department at Bronx Community College, then auditioned and got into the New England Conservatory of Music, with me majoring as a woodwind and composition major and Fareed focused on guitar and composition. Musically, I really loved everything, from Kool & The Gang to Grover to Sanborn to Maceo Parker. I also couldn't get enough when one of my teacher's played Charlie Parker for me when I was 14."

Najee left the Conservatory after three years and moved back to New York, where he immersed himself in the club scene. One night when he was out playing straight ahead jazz, Lesette Wilson, keyboardist and musical director for Chaka Khan—who was hot at the time with her trademark hit "Ain't Nobody"—came in and loved what she heard. She called him to audition for the singer's upcoming tour, and in no time Najee found himself on the road for a year with the legendary diva, playing alto sax and flute. Najee's good fortune transferred to Fareed's career as well when Chaka's longtime guitarist Tony Maiden failed to show up for a rehearsal. Fareed plugged in and was hired to play alongside Maiden for the tour.

Najee became friends with Mel'isa Morgan, Chaka's backup singer who later asked the saxman to play on her debut album *Do You Still Love Me?* Through her, he met Charles Huggins of Hush Entertainment, who invited Najee to record his debut album through his production company, in association with EMI. "I brought him some demos that I called 'R&B with a saxophone,' having no idea of their commercial potential," Najee says. "He also liked what he heard when he came to see me play in New York with the group Change. Jazz had taken a dive in the early '80s, but there was a resurgence taking place and suddenly there was a big market for the music I was making. Charles did brilliant things in bringing me to the R&B audience."

The debut album, *Najee's Theme* – on which the saxman found his trademark voice on the soprano – was an instant phenomenon, selling gold immediately on the road to eventual platinum on the strength of the radio hits "Sweet Love" and "Betcha Don't Know." Najee toured as the opening act for popular R&B singer Freddie Jackson and, with the release of the equally successful *Day By Day* in 1988, became a bona fide celebrity. After touring as a support act for artists like Hiroshima and Bob James, Najee became a headliner in his own right. In addition to the U.S., over the years he has toured throughout Europe, Asia and Africa.

His subsequent releases, *Tokyo Blue* (1991) and *Just an Illusion* (1992), went gold and earned him Soul Train Music Awards for Best Jazz Artist in 1991 and 1993. Following *Share My World* in 1994, Najee paid brilliant homage to another one of his favorite R&B influences, Stevie Wonder, on 1995's *Najee Plays Songs From the Key of Life: A Tribute to Stevie Wonder*. He also stretched his straight-ahead jazz muscles on a tour and follow-up live recording (*Live at the Greek Theatre*, 1994) with a superband featuring Stanley Clarke, Larry Carlton and Billy Cobham. He later signed to Verve for one album, 1998's *Morning Tenderness*, which went to #1 on the contemporary jazz charts.

For Najee, the late '90s were marked by extraordinary international experiences, from performing at Nelson Mandela's birthday celebration in South Africa to playing as a special guest of President Clinton at the White House at an event honoring President Jerry Rawlings of the Republic of Ghana. Over the years, Najee has worked with numerous pop legends, from Quincy Jones to Patti Labelle and Lionel Richie, but creatively and artistically, no other career highlight has quite matched his incredible association with Prince, with whom he recorded and toured for three years at the beginning of the current decade.

"I went to one of his shows at Madison Square Garden and got word that he wanted me to come to his after party," recalls Najee. "Turns out, he was a fan of my music, and two weeks later, he called me to come to visit Minneapolis. I thought I'd be there just a few days, but I wound up staying two weeks recording on his *Rainbow Children* album. He hired me to do a six week U.S. tour, which turned into three years and five more tours! He's such an incredible icon, but I saw that he looks for fresh inspiration from other people and feeds off their energies. He's worked with some great sax players, from Maceo to Candy Dulfer, and it was a great experience for me. I learned so much from him as a performer. He's a master psychologist with his audience. He really gets to the core of people through what he does."



W. Main Street, Norfolk, VA 23510 • Phone (757) 441-2345 • Fax (757) 441-5198 • festevents.org

Najee later returned to the recording studio in 2003 to record Embrace, which featured two other longtime heroes, vibist Roy Ayers and gospel legend BeBe Winans.

He joined the Heads Up International label with the release of My Point of View in the summer of 2005. The album's critical and artistic success helped him score an NAACP Image Award in 2006 in the category of Outstanding Jazz Artist.

Rising Sun, the follow up to My Point of View, is set for release on Heads Up on August 14, 2007. Always the innovator, Najee blends various shades of straightahead as well as contemporary jazz, classic R&B and even indie rock on this new ten-song set. The result is an album that's destined to appeal to established fans of his multi-layered groove as well as listeners who are meeting the artist for the first time.

The **35th Annual Norfolk Waterfront Jazz Festival** is produced by Norfolk Festevents, Ltd. and sponsored by AT&T, the City of Norfolk, and New Journal & Guide.

Norfolk Festevents, Ltd., based in Norfolk, Virginia, is a private, not-for-profit organization dedicated to creating the most dynamic urban waterfront community in America through innovative programming and imaginative uses of its historic waterfront spaces. An extensive 10-month schedule of diverse outdoor cultural events, festivals, concerts, entertainment, holiday programs, tall ship visits, sports and recreation are presented in two popular and welcoming waterfront environments; Town Point Park located in downtown Norfolk on the banks of the Elizabeth River and Ocean View Beach Park situated on the shore line of the Chesapeake Bay. Norfolk Festevents has served as the City of Norfolk's official event marketing agency since the city's downtown waterfront revitalization initiatives began in 1982. The organization has garnered international acclaim for its advocacy for public access to waterfronts, outstanding quality programming and development of public spaces, transforming Norfolk into one of the most progressive, fun and livable waterfront communities in the country. Residents, workers, and visitors to Norfolk and the Hampton Roads region are invited to experience all the fun and excitement of the 2017 season!