

HENRY JOHNSON (Guitar)

The Chicago-born guitarist began playing at age twelve. While spending some formative time in Memphis, he started playing gospel music at age thirteen. By age fourteen, Johnson was playing in R&B groups. Although Johnson's parents brought him up hearing the music of Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Joe Williams, and other artists of that era, it was not until 1967 that Johnson was formally introduced to jazz by hearing guitarist Wes Montgomery. In 1969, Johnson and his family then moved back to Chicago where he developed a reputation on the south side as a good local jazz guitarist. In 1976, he went on the road with jazz organist Jack McDuff and was called to work with vocalist, Donny Hathaway in 1977.

In 1979, Johnson began playing with jazz pianist, Ramsey Lewis. And in 1985, jazz legend, Joe Williams added Johnson to his regular group. Johnson's musical roots run deep into gospel, blues, and jazz. His strongest and earliest influences were Kenny Burrell, George Benson, and most significantly, Wes Montgomery. While influenced by these great guitarists, Johnson also cites the music of Herbie Hancock, Oscar Peterson, Freddie Hubbard, Miles Davis, big bands, and jazz orchestras as integral forces which shaped his sound and style.

"You're The One," his recording debut for MCA/Impulse! achieved #1 status on both the Radio & Records NAC chart, and Contemporary Jazz chart for two months - a rare occurrence for a first recording. This recording also won a five star rating in Downbeat magazine, and was nominated for a Grammy. Jazz Times reviewer Diane Patrick called "You're The One" "A thoughtful piece of work which may well become a jazz guitar classic."

Johnson's follow-up recordings, "Future Excursions" and "Never Too Much" also reached the top of the charts. "New Beginnings" was Johnson's debut recording for the Heads Up International jazz label. Johnson's music has been a favorite at radio stations worldwide since the release of his very first CD, "You're the One" on MCA/Impulse! and the appeal of his music continued with the release of his second recording for Heads Up International, titled "Missing You."

In addition to his solo recording projects, Johnson has found time to record with the likes of Ramsey Lewis, vocalists, Joe Williams and Vanessa Ruben, and saxophonist Richie Cole among many others. He has performed with Nancy Wilson, Marlena Shaw, Angela Bofil, Dizzy Gillespie, the Boston Pops, Sonny Stitt, Freddie Hubbard, Grover Washington Jr., Stanley Turrentine, Dr. Billy Taylor, and organist Jimmy Smith, James Moody, David "Fathead" Newman, Terry Gibbs, Bobby Watson, Nicholas Payton, and many other great jazz artists.

Seeing the need to re-invent himself, Johnson recorded a cd live called "An Evening At Sea" from aboard the ocean liner, the QE 2 in 1999. This recording was also well received by the jazz world. Johnson's most recent group has been patterned after the hard swinging jazz groups of the '60's using the instrumentation of guitar, saxophone, organ, and drums. Johnson's latest recording on A440 Music Group is called "Organic" and features legendary vocalist Nancy Wilson. It is this powerhouse group the Organ Express, that has been exciting audiences the world over.