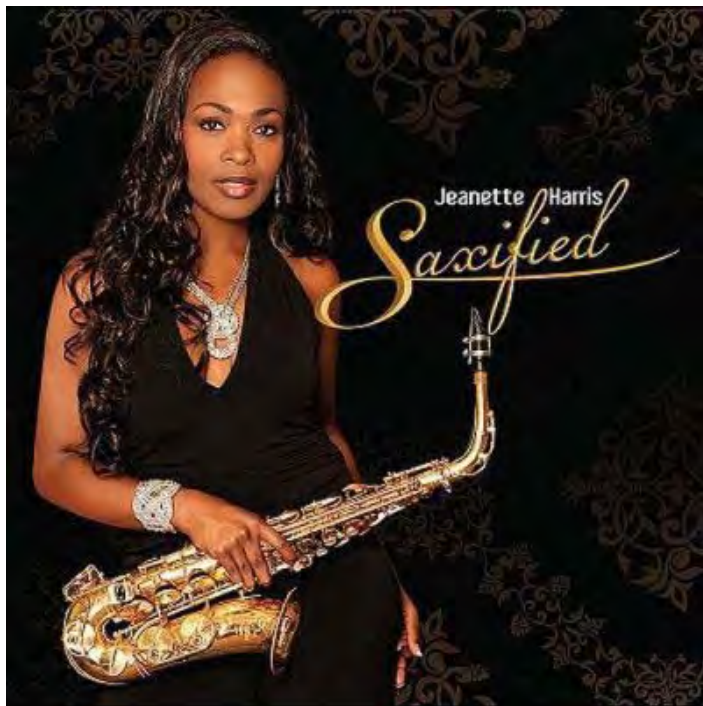


Jeanette Harris | Saxified



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Smooth jazz can be defined as a 'crossover' between the traditional tenets of jazz and the groove and sensual sounds of urban music. The style battles its critics, even including myself at given times. That aside, it is difficult to find artists that make smooth jazz as respectable as one of its proponents and founders, the late, great Grover Washington, Jr. To say that **Jeanette Harris** is synonymous with Washington would be an overstatement; what is not an overstatement is that Harris is a talented musician who does make smooth jazz much MORE than respectable. 2010's **Saxified** finds the undisputedly talented musician (who plays soprano and alto saxophones, flute, and piano on this effort) showing off her consummate talents over fourteen rock-solid cuts. She may not be synonymous with Grover Washington, Jr., but she certainly channels his tone, sensibilities, and energy throughout this superb affair.

"Chi Town" opens the album with an overtly, urban-drive groove. Here, Harris's saxophone playing accurately embodies the smooth jazz style. Harris's tone is refined and archetypal of smooth jazz. There is not much to quibble about on the opener, save for the slightest bit of over-repetition. "Down Wit It," featuring Darrell Crooks on guitar, is another strong cut, adding more of a 'funk' aspect to the cut than "Chi Town" possessed. Harris here breaks loose more than on "Chi Town," not constricting herself to a few, repetitive solo riffs. While Crook's guitar playing is only briefly featured at the forefront of the production, his playing is quite satisfying by all means.

"You Can Dance" features a ton of extra musical programming, but it is all in good taste. This version of "You Can Dance" features on background vocals by Joel Bower; a later cut features a full vocal performance. Here, lovely string patches accompany Harris's smooth playing, which outlines the melody performed in full by Bower on the later iteration. "Saxy" could serve as the musical term for "sexy" as the cut possesses a nice down-tempo feel. The production work is solid with fine programming from Andrew Dorsett solidifying the sensual, urbanized sound. Adding to the change of sound, Harris opts for the soprano sax as opposed to her mainstay alto. Subtle vocals by Joel Bowers add to the sensuality exhibited by this cut.

"People Make the World Go Round" leads a series of superb cuts. "People Make the World Go Round" contrasts the down-tempo vibe of "Saxy" opting for faster, groove-driven cut. The groove additionally contrasts prior grooves, ridding of the possibility for predictability. "People Make the World Go Round" reminds me of Grover Washington Jr.'s exceptional 1980s album Winelight. "Saxified," featuring standout Norman Brown on guitar keeps the spirit and momentum of Saxified high. The musicianship showcased by both Brown and Harris is superb, as it should be.

"2nd Nature" continues the upswing, finding Harris employing both her soprano and alto saxophones. The music programming on "2nd Nature" proves incredibly alluring as it sounds as if real horns are supporting Harris's playing as opposed to synthesized instruments. "2nd Nature" is another 'A' performance in my eyes - or better yet to my ears!

"All I Do" is as solid and enjoyable as everything else - maybe even more so given the fact it is a Stevie Wonder cover (from 1980's Hotter than July). The orchestration is cleverly recreated and Harris capably plays the melodic lines Wonder so prodigiously sung back when. "Been So Wrong," featuring Patrick Olivera on bass, is another enjoyable performance, mostly because of Olivera's 'slap-bass' and the funky ideas employed here. "Searching," composed solely by Harris finds her playing both sax and piano. Similarly on "Groovin'," Harris adds flute to that arsenal of instruments, in addition to brilliant songwriting and compositional ideas.

"Joyful" proves to be one of the most alluring cuts since "All I Do," with superb musical programming supporting Harris's playing. "You Can Dance" appears in 'all its glory' with lead vocals by Joel Bowers filling out the cut. Closing cut, the inspirational

cover of "Because He Lives" by Bill Gaither is not only appropriately placed, but serves as a brilliant closer to this exceptional effort.

Essentially, **Saxified** is superb smooth jazz effort. It would be nice to see Jeanette Harris's profile as a musician be raised significantly higher than what it is now; she is a talent "deserving wider recognition." With a beautiful tone as a saxophonist and a creative composer, Harris represents herself as a fine musician. This album marks the evidence.

Brent Faulkner

The Urban Music Scene