José James
Lean On Me: José James Celebrates Bill Withers

José James, vocals and guitar
Takeshi Ohbayashi, keyboards
Brad Allen Williams, guitar
Ben Williams, bass
Nate Smith, drums
Celebrating the eightieth birth year of the legendary R&B singer-songwriter Bill Withers, Blue Note recording artist José James presents *Lean On Me: José James Celebrates Bill Withers*. Vetted personally by Mr. Withers himself, the show is an exploration of the deep musical catalogue that touched millions of hearts and united communities worldwide. Featuring Withers’s top ten hits as well as his soul ballads and rare grooves, James brings both a deep musical appreciation and a contemporary approach to songs such as “Ain’t No Sunshine,” “Hope She’ll Be Happier” and “Just the Two of Us.” Fittingly, James has assembled a truly all-star cast of musicians: Nate Smith on drums, Ben Williams on bass, Takeshi Ohbayashi on keys and Brad Allen Williams on guitar.

José James (vocals and guitar), a Minneapolis born vocalist, has consistently delivered eclectic and alluring melodies to the public for over ten years. James blends elements of jazz, R&B and hip-hop to create the distinctive sounds that make his work unique. The *Los Angeles Times* writes, “James [is a] genre hybridist who claims both b-boys and jazz purists in his fan base... a winningly singular presence in contemporary American music. Not just singular, but magnetic.”

To date, James has released seven albums, all of which have earned him accolades worldwide from critics and music lovers alike. He has played on prestigious stages all over the world, including the Central Park Summerstage in New York, The Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, London’s Royal Festival Hall and Billboard Live Tokyo.

James’s latest musical venture, *Lean On Me: José James Celebrates Bill Withers*, pays homage to one of his personal heroes, Bill Withers. With this album, which is due out on Blue Note in September 2018, James aims to unite listeners and encourage them to champion each other’s voices and stories through Wither’s brilliant catalogue.

Takeshi Ohbayashi (keyboards), a native of Hiroshima, Japan, began playing piano at the age of two. He studied film scoring and composition at Tokyo College of Music, but it was not until he attended a jazz piano clinic during his freshman year that he found his calling in jazz. He was awarded a scholarship to renowned Berklee College of Music in Boston, where he began his studies in 2007. Following this, Ohbayashi was awarded the Best Player Award and the Audience’s Favorite Award in the 2009 Yokohama Jazz Competition. In Fall 2009, Ohbayashi was selected to be a part of the opening class of the prestigious Berklee Global Jazz Institute, led by Danilo Perez. During his time in the Berklee Global Jazz Institute, Ohbayashi performed and taught alongside world class musicians in music clinics around the world.

Program Notes

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Ohbayashi graduated from Berklee in 2011 and currently resides in New York City where he leads his own trio and co-leads the New Century Jazz Quintet with Grammy-winning drummer Ulysses Owens Jr. Ohbayashi quickly gained a reputation among world class jazz musicians in New York City as an in-demand pianist/keyboardist. Some of the notables Ohbayashi has played with are Takuya Kuroda, Terri Lyne Carrington, Hailey Niswanger, Charles Turner III and Felix Peikli.

Ohbayashi performs regularly both as a sideman and leader at New York jazz venues such as the Blue Note, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Small’s and Smoke, to name a few. Frequently on tour, Ohbayashi has traveled domestically and internationally to more than 30 different countries with a myriad of New York City-based artists. In 2016, he received first place at the Jacksonville Piano Competition, being the first Japanese pianist in history to do so. That same year, his New Century Jazz Quintet won the DCJazzPrix at the DC Jazz Festival.

In addition to his illustrious performing career, Ohbayashi is also an accomplished and reputable educator. He travels abroad to perform and teach with the tour organized by Jazz at Lincoln Center, JazzReach.

Ohbayashi has released five records as a leader. His most recent release, Manhattan, has received “Jazz Japan 2016 Album of the Year.” He recorded the Grammy-winning album Let Them Fall in Love. Williams’s organ trio album, Lamar, featuring Tyshawn Sorey and Pat Bianchi, was released to critical acclaim in 2015.

Ben Williams (bass) of New York City is an acclaimed bassist, bandleader, performer, music educator and composer who has performed with the likes of Wynton Marsalis, George Benson, Pat Metheny, David Sanborn, Chaka Kahn, Pharrell, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Terence Blanchard, Roy Hargrove, Benny Golson and Stefon Harris, to name a few. He recently completed his film debut with Don Cheadle in the Miles Davis biopic, Miles Ahead.

Williams released his sophomore album, Coming of Age, in April 2015, a collection of new works reflecting his wide-ranging musical interests as well as his growth as a musician, improviser and composer. He won his first Grammy in 2013 with the Pat Metheny Unity Band for Best Jazz Instrumental Album. In 2013 he recorded with Metheny on Kin; and in 2014 he performed 157 concerts in over 30 cities throughout the world with Metheny. In 2013 and 2015, Williams received the DownBeat magazine Critics Poll Rising Star Award for Bass. He won the 2009 Thelonious Monk International Jazz Bass Competition Award, which landed him his first record deal with Concord Records. Thereafter, he recorded and released his top-rated album State of Art in 2011 with his band Sound Effect. He was named the 2011 iTunes Breakthrough Artist of the Year in the category of jazz.

Brad Allen Williams (guitar), raised in musically fertile Memphis, Tennessee, is based in Brooklyn and is noted both for his “post-psychedelic guitar heroism” (The New York Times) and his tasteful and imaginative support of artists like José James, Bilal, Kris Bowers, Nate Smith, Cory Henry and CeCe Winans (with whom Williams, born December 1984, is a native of Washington, DC; was educated in the DC public schools, including the Duke Ellington School of the Arts; and received his bachelor of arts in music education from Michigan State University and a master of music in jazz studies at Juilliard School Conservatory.
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**Nate Smith (drums)**, since moving from Chesapeake, Virginia, to New York City in 2001, has established himself as a key player in reinvigorating the international jazz scene with his visceral, instinctive and deep-rooted style of drumming. He maintains a diverse and ample résumé that includes work with esteemed leading lights such as Dave Holland, Chris Potter, John Patitucci, Ravi Coltrane, José James, Somi and Patricia Barber, among many others. His Grammy-nominated bandleader debut, *KINFOLK: Postcards from Everywhere*, sees Smith fusing his original modern jazz compositions with R&B, pop and hip-hop. Smith lives and works in New York City.

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