

## MICHAEL LINGTON

### Soul Appeal

Forget what you think you know about Michael Lington. Now that he's gone mainstream with his career and consciousness shifting new album *Soul Appeal*, he's full steam ahead like no one's ever heard him before, blazing a fresh, innovative road for himself with a freewheeling immersion into the heart of the 60's and 70's Memphis Soul vibe. From his 1997 *self-titled* breakthrough album through 2012's star-studded *Pure*, the charismatic saxophonist has wowed and surprised his fans before. But he's never had more fun, played more loose, solo'd more intensely or improvised this expansively.

All of the beloved saxophonist's seven previous acclaimed albums, countless hit radio singles and hundreds of awe inspiring live performances over the past 15 years are now simply prelude to the fresh energy and live in the studio excitement he created at Los Angeles' legendary Sunset Sound with veteran R&B/pop producer Barry Eastmond (Anita Baker, George Benson, Billy Ocean, Yolanda Adams), Engineer Ray Bardani (Luther Vandross, Beyonce, David Sanborn) and a handpicked group of his favorite musicians. These include a core pocket of Freddie Washington (bass) and Teddy Campbell (drums), organist Shedrick Mitchell, guitarists Paul Jackson, Jr., Ray Parker, Jr., Phil Hamilton and percussionist Lenny Castro. Eastmond contributes to the retro sound with Fender Rhodes, Wurlitzer and piano.

*Soul Appeal* features nine vibrant, hip and contemporary yet drenched-in-retro-cool originals (all co-written with Eastmond) and imaginative re-workings of the King Curtis classics "In The Pocket" and a blazing, horn section infused "Memphis Soul Stew." The latter includes a playful rap by Campbell that approximates the way Curtis introduced each instrument into the mix on the original recording. *Soul Appeal* also includes two fresh vocal ballads with renowned Grammy nominated vocalists that take everyone back to the days when Sam Cooke and Wilson Pickett reigned: "Gonna Love You Tonight" (featuring Kenny Lattimore) and "Leave Me You" (co-written and sung by Ryan Shaw).

The Eastmond/Lington instrumentals on *Soul Appeal* begin with the jamming and funky, classic Stax-flavored opening title track, whose swirl of vibrant sax melody, brooding organ and sizzling brass sets the stage for what Lington proudly calls "a different kind of ride." He calls the infectious and bluesy, easy rolling "Taking Off" "the centerpiece of what we were trying to achieve, the twang of the Memphis vibe," while as its title promises, "Uptown Groove" finds Lington soaring over organ and Rhodes in a brass fired landscape James Brown could groove in.

The silky and romantic "Manhattan Nights" blends Lington's torchy sax lead with a weepy lead guitar line and solo by Phil Hamilton that's reminiscent of the great Steve Cropper's work. After another emotional and bluesy ballad, "Going Home," Lington and company swing back up for the jaunty funk-shuffle "Double Down." *Soul Appeal* wraps in a gorgeous stripped down, heart on the sleeve place, with the beautiful Eastmond-Lington piano-sax duet "Follow Your Heart." This was recorded almost as a bonus track after the sessions wrapped and everyone else had gone home.

Many instrumental contemporary jazz artists tout their latest recording as "different" or "something unique" when it's more or less a variation on their trademark thing. In the case of

*Soul Appeal*, Lington will let two legendary musical voices verify the reality that these sessions don't just rattle that cage but joyfully transcend it. Lenny Castro, whose thousands of recording credits include Sanborn, The Jacksons, Eric Clapton, George Benson and Elton John, thanked the saxman after the sessions with the words, "My soul is so musically satisfied."

The other legend paying Lington the ultimate compliment was Steve Perry of Journey, a friend of Eastmond who came to the studio to check out the first session and kept returning because he was so inspired by the recording as it unfolded. He became friends with Lington and regaled the musicians on their lunch breaks, singing Sam Cooke tunes. At one point Perry told the saxophonist, "Thanks for letting me hang out, You helped me get back my emotional compass."

That's the perfect term to describe the way Lington's musical life was changed as a teenager, when his interest in the soul-influenced contemporary jazz by David Sanborn and Grover Washington, Jr. led him down a delightful rabbit hole of discovery into the heart of American soul music. He loved it all, from Jr. Walker and King Curtis to Sam Cooke and Wilson Pickett. Up till that time, he was a straight arrow classical clarinet player playing in the Tivoli Boys Guard, a miniature queens guard and marching band comprised of kids 8-16.

"This was the music that made me want to play the sax, all of that American R&B and instrumental funk becoming part of my soul in my mid-teens," he says. "I'm not trying to discount any of my other records because I like them all, but my approach here was fresh and very different than anything I had done before. When you enter a space like this, where you're by design tracking with a live band for the first time instead of building tracks layer by layer, you don't know what's going to happen. What made this so magical was that I was there in the trenches with the band for the entire process, working out arrangements and parts as we went along. I wanted to just completely let go and let it flow all the way – which opened me up and liberated me as a player. The result might not be perfect in the conventional sense, but it's not supposed to be. This record is all about feel and vibe."

Lington, who became a U.S. citizen in 2008, has performed numerous times for the Danish royal family, including the wedding reception of Crown Prince Frederik, the country's future king. In addition, the saxophonist have done extended stints as a special guest with many other musical superstars, including Barry Manilow, Bobby Caldwell, Randy Crawford and Michael Bolton. On Bolton's tour, he played more than 300 shows in over 50 countries. One of its many highlights was performing in London's famed Royal Albert Hall and also performing and meeting former President Bill Clinton at a special show at the Kuwait embassy.

Lington also manages his own cigar company, Michael Lington Cigars ([www.michaellingtoncigars.com](http://www.michaellingtoncigars.com)), and he recently launched Lington Wines ([www.lingtonwine.com](http://www.lingtonwine.com)), his own boutique line of red and white wines out of Paso Robles on California's Central Coast. [www.michaellington.com](http://www.michaellington.com)

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