



George Benson

Songs & Stories

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‘The George Benson Sessions: The Making of *Songs and Stories*’
Online at www.georgebenson.com



At various points along George Benson’s four-decade career, he has been heralded as a jazz guitarist of unparalleled chops, a vocalist with great emotional range and sophistication or a combination of both. However, he regards himself as an entertainer in the broadest sense of the word – a singer of songs, a spinner of tales. That’s the essence, *Songs and Stories*.

“It’s a very simple equation,” he says, “In the end, it’s about the songs and the stories. That’s what keeps the music fresh for me. If you come up with a great melody and put the right lyrics to it, I’m immediately excited.”

Songs and Stories, is a collection of tunes penned by some of the most prolific and enduring songwriters of the last half-century, including James Taylor, Smokey Robinson, Lamont Dozier, Bill Withers, Donny Hathaway and several others. Some were written specifically for this new recording, while others were hand-picked by Benson for their ability to convey simple but universal truths about the human experience.

Songs and Stories was co-produced by bassist / composer **Marcus Miller**, and its core band includes Benson, Miller, keyboardist **Greg Phillinganes**, guitarist **Jubu** and drummer **John Robinson**. Together they were joined by special guests: guitarists **Lee Ritenour**, **Steve Lukather**, **Wah Wah Watson** and **Norman Brown**, vocalists **Lalah Hathaway** and **Patti Austin**, keyboardist **David Paich**, saxophonists **Tom Scott** and **Gerald Albright** along with several others. “Brother, with that team, you can do just about anything,” said Benson. “We recorded in the studio for three days straight, and everything we touched had something on it that made us all glad we were there. It was just the right mix of people and material. It became an exercise in great joy. We were happy to jump on it”. The combined talents of these writers and musicians make for a series of unforgettable tales, and Benson himself is the narrator who weaves it all together.

Songs and Stories opens with a Latin-flavoured cover of **James Taylor**’s *Don’t Let Me Be Lonely Tonight*, one of two tracks on the album recorded in Sao Paulo, Brazil, with a team of Brazilian session players. The second is the closer, a cover of *Sailing*, the 1980 pop smash by Christopher Cross where Benson conjures rich layers of atmosphere with the help of acoustic guitars and wind chimes.



Rod Temperton, author of Benson's biggest hit 'Give Me The Night' and whose credits include much of Michael Jackson's 'Thriller' contributed the spectacular tune *Family Reunion*, while **Bill Withers**, who came out of retirement to write specifically for this album, contributed the track *A Telephone Call Away* on which Benson is joined by Lalah Hathaway in a heartfelt duet.

"Every song Bill Withers touches seems to appeal to a huge audience," says Benson. "He understands the inner workings of people's hearts and minds, and it comes through in his songwriting."

One Like You, written by **Smokey Robinson**, lays it on the line with a no-holds-barred declaration of love that features guest guitar work by Lee Ritenour. "I've known Smokey since we were teenagers," says Benson. "He writes nothing but magnificent songs – simple but universal ideas that everyone can relate to, colourful stuff with great harmonies. This song is consistent with that track record."

"For all of the high-calibre musicians on hand for this recording" says Miller, "the most important guests are the songwriters. "Smokey Robinson doesn't perform on this record, but he's still a guest," he says. "Lamont Dozier is a guest. Bill Withers and James Taylor are guests. If you take great songs from writers like these, and you put them in the hands of George Benson and a great band, you'd better just get out of the way and let things happen, because the result is going to be something great."

'The George Benson Sessions: The Making of Songs and Stories' is a series of short videos taking a rare, behind-the-scenes look at the making of the album, featuring interviews with Benson and many of the cast. New clips will be posted weekly until the end of August.

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