



BRADLEY LEIGHTON *Back to the Funk* Pacific Coast Jazz

Last year I recommended flutist Bradley Leighton's JUST DOIN' OUR THANG as a superb example of "Smooth Jazz meets Cool Jazz." Now I'm excited to tell you about his newest release, BACK TO THE FUNK, where "Smooth Jazz meets Old School Funk." Every bit as enjoyable as its predecessor, it has even more tunes for Smooth Jazz radio. I've been a fan of jazz flute for many years (thanks to Herbie Mann), so this new album is especially satisfying to me. I love Bradley's playing, and I love the way percussionist/keyboardist Allan Phillips has produced it, with lively, lyrical music and superb production values. From the eight tasty originals penned by Phillips and Leighton ("Runaway," "Sunday in San Diego" and "Ready for You" are total standouts) to the three covers...Ray, Goodman, & Brown's "Special Lady," David Gates' "Make It with You," and Stevie Wonder's "Love Light in Flight." The album's a knockout, and should do extremely well for the talented artist. This Seattle native, in San Diego since 2001, once again shows us why jazz flute is one of the most sensual instruments around. For this project, he adds horns, and Fattburger's Evan Marks on guitar. **Just like JUST DOIN' OUR THANG, Bradley Leighton's BACK TO THE FUNK is loaded with inventive, inspired playing, is going to be spending a lot of time in my player this year, and my recommendation's the same as last year... Get a copy for yourself!** ~SCOTT O'BRIEN , smoothjazz.com

Bradley Leighton is in on the joke. Sporting Coke-bottle shades, white hat, a beefy fur coat and bling dangling from his neck and weighing down his fingers, the flutist pimps with the best of the 1970s funk masters on the cover of his latest smooth-groove project. Turn the CD over, though, and you'll see Leighton stripped of his gaudy accouterments. Hey, he's saying, I'm just a flute guy playing around with some funk that's inspired me.

Unlike his previous CD, on which he covered some of his favorite tunes from the past, on "Back to the Funk," Leighton offers eight originals he composed with producer and keys man Allan Phillips. But don't expect the foot-stompin', nasty funk of Sly Stone or the slap-happy bass funk of Bootsy Collins. Leighton's funk is funk-lite as popularized by Kool and the Gang and Earth Wind & Fire. **Influenced by jazz flutists such as Bobbi Humphrey and the late Herbie Mann, Leighton instead lays down light grooves that are just fine for easy listening.**

"Runaway" and "Clear Blue Skies" pump up the energy, but more in tone with the CD's mood are mellifluous tunes like "Flow," "Back to the Funk" and the best track here, "Flow." Although covers of "Special Lady" and "Make It With You" veer into mall-music territory, Leighton closes with Stevie Wonder's "Love's Light in Flight" and finally kicks it up a notch with some satisfying soloing. ~Brian Soergel, JazzTimes

ALL MUSIC GUIDE – Scott Yanow

Back to the Funk is an intentional throwback to early '70s funky jazz, the type of music performed by flutist Herbie Mann and a little later by saxophonist Grover Washington, Jr. The R&B-ish grooves are catchy if predictable and the backup band is solid, with flutist Bradley Leighton in the lead nearly all of the time. Nothing unusual happens, but Leighton plays well over the vamps, sounding enthusiastic and reasonably creative within the genre. While eight of the 11 selections are recent originals, this could very easily be an album from 1972. Fans of that era's funky music will want to pick this one up.



Bradley Leighton

'Still Doin' His Thang!'

Classically trained, Bradley Leighton's musical interests have always been diverse. As a young man, he loved big band music, particularly Maynard Ferguson, Stan Kenton and Woody Herman. Yet he also found himself drawn to the R&B sounds of Tower of Power, Earth Wind and Fire, and, the Brecker Brothers.

Although his first fascination was the player piano, he soon started playing the flute, becoming very involved in school bands. After considerable listening, and practicing, Bradley's interest in Jazz and blues led him to hanging out at after-hours clubs in his native Seattle, where he first surprised, and pleased, such local legends as T McGee, Terry Camon, Leri Carter, Billy Haddon, and Mel Washington.

Having mentors both assist and encourage Bradley, and a true love of performing, served as the catalysts for his decision to pursue a career in music. Immediately after high school, he seized an opportunity by enlisting and playing in the Army's 9th Infantry Division band at Ft. Lewis, Washington. When his talent quickly became obvious, he was appointed musical director of the jazz ensemble. A tour with the 8th Army band in Seoul, Korea soon followed. Bradley remained in Seoul after his discharge several years later to teach, and perform in the country's only Jazz bar.

But after realizing that the only place to really utilize his musical expertise was the land of his birth, Bradley returned to Seattle for more professional opportunities. By now, an accomplished musician and teacher, he spent the next fifteen years playing in rhythm and blues bands, Hammond organ trios, funk dance bands and straight-ahead jazz groups. He also taught privately, working with encouraging young musicians, just as his Seattle mentors had done for him.

At the same time, he focused on developing his own sound on the flute. His approach was born in his big band roots, where accomplished reedman took their saxophone experience to the flute. Inspired by such legends as Frank Wess and Sam Most, Bradley found that the alto flute was the best vehicle for his creativity.

Chatting recently with Bradley, and taking it from the top, I first wondered what he recalled from those days back when groove-heavy jazz-funk was all the rage, along with bellbottoms, platform shoes, fur coats and big hats?! *"Truthfully not much. I was around ten years-old and my mother only played two kinds of music around the house: country AND western. When I was a teen (late 70's), it was the disco era and I was really into it (The Commodores, Earth, Wind & Fire, Parliament Funkadelic, Lakeside, LTD, etc.). Later, I went back and discovered the roots of jazz-funk of the late '60's early '70's."*

BRADLEY LEIGHTON



BACK TO THE
FUNK

Your new album title 'Back To The Funk' tells it like it is, but how far back would have been too far back?! "I don't think I went back far enough. One reviewer even described the album as "funk-light." He might be right..."

If there was one track on this new album that truly encapsulated Bradley Leighton at his musical and lyrical finest, which one would it be? "If I ever record a project that captures me at my "musical and lyrical finest," it means that I can stop performing and just hand everybody a CD and say, "Here it is. I'm done." Since that will never happen, you have to phrase the question in a different way. I think the Stevie tune showed a lot of what I can do both lyrically and musically: smooth melody with a great tone and a nice improvised section. It's a really good cut."

For those that will listen to your wonderful new album, please explain how you managed to include your alto flute gracefully above the horns and rhythmic R&B base without it

sounding staged? *"The one thing most flutists will agree on when they hear me is that I have a very powerful sound, even on the alto flute, which is supposed to be very "mellow." I can match the intensity, articulation and styling of the other horns quite naturally. It's part of what I'm trying to do in the way of showing people that the flute can be used in a wide variety of settings."*

What made the three covers that you chose (Wonder, RG&B, and Bread) worthy of some new coverage from your good self? *"They were all great tunes to begin with and I'd never heard the Ray, Goodman & Brown or the Bread songs covered before. "Lovelight" has been covered by a couple people, but I felt that perhaps I could do a better job...or at least a little different."*

Since you debuted in 2003 with 'Groove Yard,' I'm wondering how you have changed as a musician in terms of this new album? *"It's not so much that I've changed. It's that with each project I do, I try to cover a different musical style or angle. I hope I'm still developing as a player. I know I've still got a lot of work to do before I'm truly happy with my playing."*

In early 2006 you became a Yamaha Performing Artist. Please tell us more about just what that means *"Basically it means that I endorse their instruments in exchange for help getting money for clinics and educational programs that I do. They also give me a pretty deal on new instruments ;)"*

OK, come on, if you and Kenny G. had a flute Vs. saxophone face-off, who would be able to musically last the longest, puff and spit wise?! *"If Kenny wasn't allowed to circular breathe, which is very difficult to do on the flute and something I'm still trying to perfect, then I'd blow him away. I can hold my breath for 2 minutes easily and can play a single note for almost that long. But you are talking about two very different ways of producing sound - flute as opposed to sax. It takes much more air to produce sound on a flute. The only thing Kenny can do better than me is golf. He has a ridiculously low handicap compared to my 12, but I'm working on that, too!"*

What '80s (and possibly cheesy!) pop song would you love to cover today if asked ... and why?! *"It would be 'Muskrat Love' by Captain & Tenille. Don't ask me why!"*

Lastly, I like Penguins ... do you? *"I think everyone looks great in a tux. Does that count?!"*

Interviewed by Russell A. Trunk

If you would like to win an **AUTOGRAPHED** copy of Bradley's brand new CD, just answer this easy question: In the last five years, Bradley Leighton decided to start making his own recordings, and performing with his own group. In 2001, Bradley relocated to which city and in 2003, released his first solo CD, "Groove Yard," with "Just Doing Our Thang," the follow-up that arrived this spring?!

Send me your answers and if you're correct you'll be in the running to win one of these great new and **AUTOGRAPHED** CDs! Just send us an e:mail here before May 15th with your answer and the subject title **'BRADLEY LEIGHTON SIGNED CDS'** to: rollingout@rollingout.com

Pacific Coast Jazz

**As the title suggests, Bradley Leighton takes us back to the time when jazz and funk made perfect bedfellows by blending his harmonious alto flute into these caked-on grooves. But it's not so much pimplicious as it is straight up delicious. With plenty of bass and strings, Leighton knows how to lay the thing down. It'll make you dance, it'll make you prance. You'll be boppin' to this groove way down in the seat of your pants. -b.m.w.
rollingout.com**

Sunday Republican, Springfield, MA 2/12/06

Back in the 1970's, jazz and rock flute players were everywhere. Whether it was Herbie Mann, Hubert Laws, Ian Anderson or Andy Kulberg, the musicians who played the instrument best were scoring significant commercial and artistic success.

But outside of the classical world, flute has fallen out of fashion during the past decade. Still, there are some players who are helping bring the instrument back to the forefront. Bradley is one of the best.

With an understated style, impeccable tone and a smart approach to alto flute, Leighton turns in a thoroughly enjoyable workout on his appropriate titled third album, 'Back to the Funk.'

While he's technically an exceptional player, he's not a showboat, and that's what makes cuts like the groove-filled title track and the cover of Stevie Wonder's "Love Light in Flight," work so well. Along with five originals, there are a couple of distinctive arrangements of two other well known songs: a cool cover of Bread's "Make It With You," and the mostly lower octave run through Ray, Goodman and Brown's soulful "Special Ladie."

Kansas City Star, 2/9/06

***1/2

Smooth jazz alto flutist Bradley Leighton wanted to get back to the 1970's jazz and funk he grew up listening to for his latest album. He reached his destination with the able direction of producer-arranger Allan Phillips.

Phillips wrote the lead-off track, "Runaway," which cements the CD's sound with Leighton's mellow, round tone and a Steely Dan "Black Cow" hooklet. The title track and "Clear Blue Skies," both co-written by Phillips and Leighton, further the association with that iconic '70's band with brass and woodwind background riffs that could have been written by Becker and Fagen themselves. Other pluses on "Clear Blue Skies": a nice sax entrance from session man John Rekevics, a slap-bass riff (what's a '70s nod without clap-bass?) by Cecil McBee Jr., and a breakout piano solo Phillips provides.

Besides some songs of the era – Bread's "Make It With You," Stevie Wonder's "Love Light in Flight" – other enhancements are apt too: Moogish synth sounds, Echo-plex-like delays, guitarist Evan Marks' slinky-string style.

Smooth jazz fans, take note: As Valentine's Day approaches, a song to spin is "Special Lady," for its sensuous, silk-swirl groove. - -- Robert Folsom/The Star

CD Release Event For Bradley Leighton's Back To The Funk In Renton, WA, Sun. March 5



Email:

Url:

Sound:

Sunday, March 5, 2006 from 6-10 pm PT

Jubilante' Jazz Club

305 Burnett Avenue South, Renton, WA

Alto flutist Leighton fondly recalls the halcyon days of groove-heavy jazz-funk with a modern edge on *Back to the Funk*. The album, his third, features booty-shaking funk, seductive R&B, chill jazz nuances, and lilting pop hooks produced by Allan Phillips. Presently gaining radio airplay is "Runaway," a driving feel-good joint boasting a full horn section and a fiery exchange between Leighton's scorching alto flute and a sweaty, bellowing sax.

Having released two critically-acclaimed albums that delved into straight-ahead jazz with occasional splashes of Latin rhythms or R&B grooves, Leighton wanted to fully indulge his passion for jazz-funk. He co-penned five tracks for *Back to the Funk* that belies some of his musical influences: the Brecker Brothers, Earth, Wind & Fire, and Tower of Power. Leighton also set out to prove that in the contemporary jazz world dominated by guitars and saxes, the flute can also be soulful and funky. His alto flute gracefully leaps above the muscular horn arrangements and rhythmic R&B base to deliver eloquent jazz-pop statements. In addition to the original material, the artist covers classics by Stevie Wonder, Bread, and Ray, Goodman & Brown. Real guitar, piano, bass, drums, sax, trumpet and trombone give the album production a live, organic sound. To bring the album to life at this concert event, Leighton will be backed by a talented group of local jazz-funk musicians.

Leighton debuted in 2003 with a collection of jazz standards on the *Groove Yard* CD. Last year's *Just Doin' Our Thang* straddles the line between traditional and contemporary jazz. It consists of fresh interpretations of standards along with four original compositions that find Leighton backed by a Hammond B3 organ trio. The album was hailed by such respected outlets as *JazzTimes*, *Audiophile*, *All About Jazz*, *All Music Guide*, and the *San Diego Reader* and was nominated for "Best Jazz Album of the Year" by the San Diego Music Awards.

Please consider Bradley Leighton for a concert advance feature, preview, interview, performance and/or review. Kindly let us know your needs for previewing and/or covering this event. Thanks for your support.

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Smooth jazz-funk! Real instruments! Seductive, painless grooves! Bradley's Leighton's sonorous alto flute brings back the seventies, when the likes of Maynard Ferguson, Earth Wind and Fire, Stevie Wonder and Boz Skaggs merged jazz and funk into an easygoing blend that softened many a hard heart (and helped remove many a reluctant bra). You'll have to shake your own earth, but if you're in the mood for smoothitude, this collaboration between Leighton and writer-arranger [Allan Phillips](#) could be just the thing.

The disc's one weakness lies in the fact that the 21st-century ear is accustomed to more modern - or at least more interesting - beats. It's possible to lose oneself in Leighton and Phillips's tasty horn arrangements, the former's gorgeous flute tone and genteel bop touches, and the simple rhythms, but it's also possible to wish for grooves that could tickle today's jumpy sensibilities. However, if any of this description tickles your own fancy, it's worth seeing for yourself.



Jon Sobel is a computer professional, musician, and small-time concert promoter in New York City. He reviews music and theater on a regular basis for Blogcritics, and occasionally comments on politics, world affairs, and life in New York City. His band, [Whisperado](#), can be criticized at will.

BRADLEY LEIGHTON

Back to the Funk
(Pacific Coast Jazz)

Reaching back to the 1970s, flutist Bradley Leighton and his band of contemporary artists recalls the fresh aroma that we've inherited from groups such as Earth, Wind and Fire, Kool and the Gang, The Commodores, and The Emotions. Mesmerizing backbeats, programmed drum rhythms, wah-wah synthesizers and flowing horn melodies weave with the leader's deep-throated alto flute for a significantly vibrant effect. Leighton's horn section works well with him in a spot-on performance that features expertly synchronized melodic lines.

The album's theme, naturally, removes all sense of spontaneity from the session. It's a retrospective album that simply looks back with fond regards at a musical chapter from our recent past. While most of the songs are originals by Leighton and/or pianist Allan Phillips, the mood's the same. Platform shows, gold neckwear, polyester disco suits, flared trousers and rough cut hairstyles all went together with the music of that era to form a distinctive memory. "Special Lady," by The Moments, made a particular impression that has lasted.

Same for Stevie Wonder's "Love Light in Flight," both of which are included here. These songs carry powerful memories, and Leighton's soulful flute brings them around clearly. Bread's "Make it With You" is another example. The flutist hands this one over with soulful pleasure. While Leighton's session carries only memories of a bygone era, it succeeds in reminding us that music remains the lifeblood of what inspires us every day. ~Jim Santella, LA Jazz Scene

10/18/2005

FLUTIST BRADLEY LEIGHTON GOES 'BACK TO THE FUNK'

Smooth jazz flutist **Bradley Leighton** is preparing to release his third album, titled *Back To The Funk*, on January 17th. The album focuses on '70s jazz funk-inspired tunes, with five tracks co-written by Leighton with producer/arranger **Allan Phillips**, including the lead-off single, "Runaway." Leighton also takes on **Bread's** classic "Want To Make It With You," **Stevie Wonder's** "Love Light In Flight," and **Ray, Goodman & Brown's** "Special Lady."

- The Seattle native stated, "With today's contemporary jazz scene dominated by guitars and saxes, this was sort of a proof-of-concept project in that I wanted to integrate the flute into the (contemporary jazz) format and make it funky. One of the key elements was to play the seldom-used alto flute, which sounds larger, richer and mellower in tone."
- Leighton debuted in 2003 with the album *Groove Yard*, a collection of jazz standards, and followed up with *Doin' Our Own Thang*, which was released earlier this year and featured traditional tunes backed by an organ trio.
- Smooth jazz fans traveling on United Airlines in November and December can hear selected tracks from *Back To The Funk* on the in-flight programming. Leighton will also be featured on the Air Jamaica Jazz & Blues Festival program in Montego Bay this January.
- For more info, go to bradleyleighton.com.

~**Launch Radio Networks** (national radio syndicate)

BRADLEY LEIGHTON 'BACK TO THE FUNK' (PACIFIC COAST JAZZ)



I must confess that this album surprised me, given the publicity-hype machine. On his third release, the Seattle-born, San Diego-based Leighton concentrates on alto flute just for a change of pace. While he won't make you forget Hubert Laws -- think Aretha Franklin's "Day Dreaming" -- in this case change proves very, very good, with Leighton's fluid playing throughout. Add solid, old-school production from keyboardist Allan Phillips (albeit with too much drum programming for my taste) and you do indeed get a feel for the 1970s, thus the title.

The atmospheric "Flow" does exactly that, with a very simple melody and chord changes and Leighton using some effects during his solo, sounding as though he's playing under water. The title track offers an organic groove with Rhodes piano from Phillips and a live horn section. Fattburger guitarist Evan Marks offers pretty fills during "Soul Moon."

If it's a smooth jazz album, you're required to include a cover of a classic soul ballad. Ray, Goodman & Brown's "Special Lady," with overdubbed flutes and chord substitutions at crucial moments, fits the bill. In Phillips' hands, the Bread chestnut "Make It With You" becomes mid-tempo funk with horns and synth clavinet.

My only serious complaint is the lack of a good, romantic ballad -- except for the boring "Midnight Affairs," everything sounds the same in vibe and tempo. Furthermore, I would not have chosen Stevie Wonder's "Love Light in Flight," the closer, primarily because fellow flutist Dave Valentin had already covered it two decades ago in the same, original key.

-- Rick Nowlin, *Post-Gazette* staff writer February 2nd **Pittsburgh (PA) Post-Gazette**

The Flutesmith, Vol. 3, Issue 1

By Martin Jones

Remember the soulful, funky sounds of groups like Tower of Power, and Earth Wind and Fire? If you recall the magic of that music, then I am sure that you will love the new CD on the Pacific Coast Jazz label by Yamaha recording artist, Bradley Leighton, entitled "Back to the Funk." This CD, both fresh and nostalgic, will have you finger-popping and grooving down memory lane to the hip and funky sounds of days gone by.

Bradley Leighton is a classically trained flutist with diverse musical interests and roots in jazz and R&B. His early musical influences included big bands like Stan Kenton's and Maynard Ferguson's as well as R&B groups such as those mentioned above. A popular player, educator and clinician on the West Coast scene for many years, Bradley released his first solo CD, "Groove Yard," in 2003 to rave reviews. He followed that recording with "Just Doin' Our Thang," a rich, lusty collection of pop and R&B tunes backed by a Hammond B-3 organ. This January he released "Back to the Funk" showcasing a stellar rhythm section and a hopping horn section that is arguably his best CD yet.

A unique aspect of "Back to the Funk" is that Bradley recorded the entire CD on Alto Flute, the perfect vehicle for his soulful, grooving phrases. Keyboardist, Allan Phillips, wrote the opening track "Runaway," as well as two other tracks, "Flow" and "Ready for You." He also co-wrote five other tunes on the CD with Leighton, including the title track. On all of these tasty cuts, the band lays down a hip and funky groove allowing Bradley's alto flute to soar and sing. Two of my favorites, "Clear Blue Skies" and "Sunday in San Diego," will surely get you dancing in your seat. The hip and mellow R&B ballads "Flow," "Midnight Affairs" and "Soul Moon" are destined to become smooth jazz standards.

In addition to these great originals, Leighton plays masterful renditions of pop classics, "Special Lady" and "Make It With You." The latter, a seventies chart-buster for the group, Bread, displays Leighton's unmistakable talent for ballads. By the final track, the Stevie Wonder classic "Love Light in Flight," I couldn't resist any longer and soon had my alto flute out and was jamming along. You can pick up a copy of this great new CD on Bradley's website at www.bradleyleighton.com.