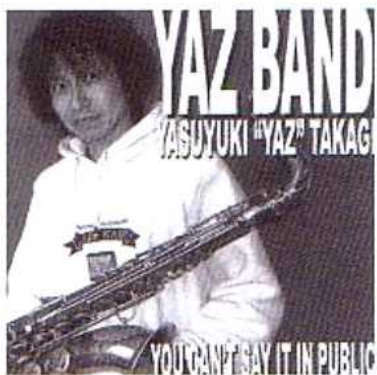


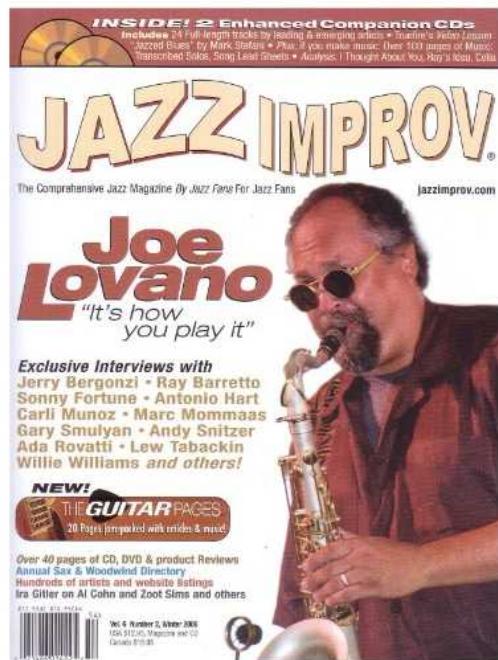
By Jim Santella



“Yaz” Yasuyuki Takagi

YOU CAN'T SAY IT IN PUBLIC—Web: www.yazband.com. *You Can't Say It in Public; First and Goal; I Wish; Thirty; Sweet Smell of Love; Low Down; Yaz in the House; Dolphin Dance; Thirty, Reprise.*

PERSONNEL: Yasuyuki “Yaz” Takagi, tenor saxophone; Eric Smith, keyboards; Eiji Obata, Takeshi Hiwarari, guitar; Sly Gerald, Iyasu Nagata, bass; Dave Dawson, Shinya Miyamoto, Tomoaki Kanno, drums.



“Jazz Improv” Magazine Winter Issue of 2006

The Yaz Band delivers a satisfying contemporary program through its rhythmic jazz/rock adventures as well as through its pleasant smooth jazz wanderings. Tenor saxophonist Yaz Takagi likes to light fires with his up-tempo forays, and then soothe gently with his contrasting slow burns. Emotions flare throughout the session. A graduate of Japan's Kochi University, the band's leader moved to New York in 1992, knowing that jazz is to be found around every corner. His career path included busking for subway crowds, which gave the artist plenty of exposure. Smooth jazz keyboardist/composer/producer Eric Smith liked what he heard at Penn Station, and that chance meeting led to a firm partnership which has blossomed.

Recalling the energy and spirit of Eddie Harris, Takagi rollicks over rhythmic backbeats, thundering electric bass, colorful keyboards and a sizzling guitar harmony to portray contemporary jazz in a passionate state. His compositions evoke the emotions that one draws from traveling the world and meeting one's audience up-close and personal. His fresh, in-your-face musical statements let the music speak candidly. Stevie Wonder's “I Wish” moves up-tempo and funky on a throbbing foundation created by bassist Sly Gerald. Takagi tackles the issue with a thrilling cry that includes a hip call and response relationship between his tenor and Eric Smith's keyboards. Like singers, they bring their instruments alive with bared emotions.

“Low Down,” a Boz Scaggs tune, simmers gently with a smooth jazz outlook that places the band on mellow ground. Takagi keeps the fires burning, however, with passionate improvisation that colors the band's interpretation with class. Herbie Hancock's “Dolphin Dance” pales somewhat through Takagi's floating ballad interpretation, while most of the program moves anxiously with rhythmic energy. Much of the saxophonist's session drives like “Thirty,” which explodes with animated funk, giving the band a hearty outlook that combines contemporary sounds with powerful improvised conversation.