

Boney James – Futuresoul (2015)

Written by bluesever

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01. Drumline 02. Vinyl 03. A Little Attitude 04. Watchu Gon Do About It? 05. Either Way 06. Hand In Hand 07. Fortuneteller 08. The Moment 09. Futuresoul 10. Far From Home
Boney James - Leader, Saxophone, Piano Darrell Smith - Keyboard Bass Lenny Castro - Percussion Vinnie Colaiuta - Drums Phil Davis - Keyboards Dwayne Smith - Bass Stokley - Vocals Alex AI - Bass Dwele - Keyboards Rob Bacon - Guitar Marquis Hill - Trumpet Craig Brockman - Keyboards Nutty P Beats - Synthesizer Omari Williams - Drums, Toms Tim Carmon - Hammond B3, Piano Jarius Mozee - Guitar, Keyboards, Bass Gerald McCauley - Electric Piano, Synthaxe

A studio and stage veteran with an enviable talent for composition and finesse on the tenor sax, Boney James' musical dexterity has carried him far beyond the realm of contemporary jazz. Ever since his 1992 debut, he's become a stylistic chameleon of sorts, tweaking a pop ditty here or weaving in Latin-flavored grooves there with a dash of funk....or smoothing it all out to flip it into a new genre altogether. While almost anyone with enough persistence can learn to play the sax, few have been able to finesse it to the point of gold-selling albums, NAACP and Grammy noms, a skill set that fans will remain in awe of and further appreciate hearing on his fifth CD for Concord, futuresoul.

Departing slightly from 2013's *The Beat*, futuresoul feels leaner and more urbanized than its predecessor, omitting covers this time around for songs written or co-written by James and flush with modern-edged, retro-fitted grooves. Boney wields his sax the way a skilled singer would convey a melody, adding verve, angst and other emotional undercurrents: some numbers serve up familiar echoes from R&B's not-too-distant-past, such as the (1980s-era) Janet Jackson-like chorus on the saucy, come-hither ballad, "Whatcha' Gon Do About It," as well as on "A Little Attitude," a mid tempo romp with decisive bass, glib keys and sax notes from James that that bob and weave like gossipy, animated conversation. Boney's "The Moment," co-written with Phil Davis, opens with anticipation and slow-boils into ecstasy, while "Far From Home" feels both soothing and somber, thanks to its languid pace and the lilting twists and turns by each plaintive

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note.

It's actually hard to quantify anything from Boney James as a 'better than' or a 'best of', but his prowess is especially magnified when paired up with equally-versatile players. The title track is one standout, co-created with Andwele Gardner (AKA Dwele) and combining James' supple sax tones alongside neo-soul-styled keyboards with a cool hip-hop cadence that multiplies its swagger and grit. Another exhilarating merger, "Either Way," was composed with Mint Condition's front man Stokley Williams; it may seem like an odd pairing on the surface, but instead of the men's disciplines clashing against one another, Williams' vocals interact with, mimic and even feed off of Boney's notes, stretching the range of his distinctive tenor into richer and more resonant dimensions than he would likely encounter with conventional R&B: "You need to tell me either way (say you will), can no longer be afraid (say you won't)/You need to say it either way (how you feel), gotta tell me if you will or you won't, will you stay."

Energetic, innovative and always willing to push past his comfort zone, Boney James endowed futuresoul with hints of influence from his formative years (Bobby Caldwell, Grover Washington), previous tour mates (the late Teena Marie, The Isley Brothers, Morris Day) and peers (Rick Braun), all while retaining his signature flair as a producer, composer and instrumentalist. Its polish will enthrall those who are just getting familiar with Boney, but if you are already a fan of his previous fourteen albums, there's no doubt that futuresoul will be a nice addition to the rest. Highly Recommended. ---Melody Charles, soultracks.com

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