



Sean Jones Biography

During the course of Sean Jones' burgeoning career beginning with his Mack Avenue Records debut in 2004, *Eternal Journey*, the trumpeter/bandleader has embarked on a series of quests, passionately plumbing the depths of different wellsprings of his life as a musician. His first album, recorded when he was 24, was his awakening, "my first step out into the recording world," Jones says. That was followed by more steps as well as leaps, with the theme of personal navigation at the center of his vision. In the process, Jones has developed into one of jazz's top young trumpeters, known for both his lyrical fluidity and high-tier technical facility. "The idea of being on a journey has been in line with all my albums," he says. "My second album, *Gemini*, explored both sides of my musical loves, R&B and jazz. I expanded that with *Roots*, where I revisited my youth and paid tribute to gospel. And then on *Kaleidoscope*, I created a collage of sounds, exploring different timbres by enlisting vocalists to be collaborators."

On Jones' fifth album, *The Search Within*, the venture continues, but this time the focus turns inward. "This is a journey inside my soul that's taken place over the past 10 years," Jones says. "It's an assessment of where I am in the present as well as how I've learned from my mistakes and triumphs as a way of looking into the future. This album goes very deep for me. It's a spiritual and sonic journey for me."

Along for the ride is a superb band (a group of "unsung heroes," Jones says) that includes Orrin Evans on piano and Fender Rhodes, saxophonists Brian Hogans (alto) and Walter Smith (tenor), bassist Luques Curtis and drummer Obed Calvaire, all of whom have been mainstays in Jones' band. "If it ain't broke, why fix it?" Jones says when asked about the group's personnel consistency. Special guests include Gregoire Maret on harmonica, Erika Von Kleist on flute, Kahlil Bell on percussion and vocalist Carolyn Perteete, who Jones introduced on *Kaleidoscope*.

The Search Within strikes a decidedly reflective posture even though Jones delivers a stylistic range of expression, from straight-up swing to down-home groove to lyrical balladry. The title song serves as the theme on the album. A segment of the tune opens the album as a prelude, another part appears midway as an interlude and the third section closes the disc as a postlude. (The tune appears in its entirety as a digital exclusive.) "The Search Within' sets the mood for the album," says Jones. "I wrote it while sitting at the piano, reflecting on my life. I started out playing a set of chords, then figured out the melody later. The first part is reflection, the second part is like looking at the mirror and being surprised at how deeply chaotic things can be in your life, and the third part is this sense of resignation and reflection." Jones adds with a laugh, "By the end it's also about saying, OK, let's move on now. I'm tired of looking at myself."

After the pensive prelude, Jones buoys the proceedings with "Transitions," a bright, swinging tune with the leader's blaring, frenzied trumpet lines and exhilarating alto sax-trumpet interplay. "This tune is designed to jar you out of a free-floating experience," Jones says. "It represents how it feels when you're going through a transition, how you segue with a chaotic kind of feeling



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from one experience to another. In the middle section I wanted to give that sense of being on a rollercoaster ride where it's like you're floating in the air."

The balladic beauty, "The Ambitious Violet," is one of two songs Jones composed inspired by poet/philosopher Khalil Gibran. The poem tells the story of a violet that wishes to be a rose. It gets its wish but is destroyed by a storm that sweeps through the garden, ruining everything except the violets. "It's about how you'd rather spend one day as a towering rose than all your days as a violet," Jones explains. "It's about wanting more. That's part of my story-coming from a small town but wanting more, whatever it takes." The second Gibran-inspired piece is "The Storm," a parable of a young innocent whose purity of love gets crushed by society. The main character retreats to a cave and relates his story and the wisdom he has found during a fierce storm. The tune itself is turbulent, fueled by Calvaire's drum tumult.

In between the two tunes Jones delivers the graceful melody "Life Cycles," playing a luscious tone on flugelhorn. It was inspired by a conversation with a friend about life being a series of cycles. "The two of us talking about this made me feel good, kind of like how it feels when you drive down the highway and just allow your thoughts to flow," Jones says. "It's a pretty simple tune that I wrote out and later turned into a song with a samba feel to it." Featured on the tune are Von Kleist and Maret.

The waltz, "Letter of Resignation," is a song co-written by Jones and Perteete, who penned the lyrics. "Carolyn is just amazing," says Jones. "Her voice is so pure, she's a great lyricist and she's a one-take wonder. That's all it takes when she sings a song." The tune is about the painful recognition that love isn't always reciprocated. "You love someone, but they'll never love you back in the same way you long for," says Jones. "So, you're resigned to this, accepting that the romance isn't going to be that utopia you were hoping for." While Perteete gives voice to the resignation, Jones' trumpet plays the sentiment.

The groove-steeped tune on the album is "Summer's Spring," composed by alto saxist Hogans who wrote it, Jones says, "during a transition in a relationship between summer and spring." Jones again plays flugelhorn and delivers sumptuous harmonies with Hogans on the piece that also includes Evans playing the Fender Rhodes. "We wanted a groove feel," says Jones. "The tune felt more organic that way. We wanted the groove to pop."

That piece is followed by another Jones reflection, titled appropriately "Sunday Reflections," that was written while he was traveling from New York (where he was playing in the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra as the big band's lead trumpeter) to Pittsburgh (where he is the Professor of Jazz Studies at Duquesne University). He superimposed an R&B melody over the swinging feel he first created. Swing opens the door to whimsy on the playful, time-changing "Sean's Jones Comes Down" that jazz elder Frank Foster wrote for the youngster. "I met Frank



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in Cleveland once and I asked him tons of questions about New York,” Jones says. “Frank joked with me that I was jonesing for the city.”

The end song, “Love’s Lullaby,” that comes before the thematic postlude was originally written by Jones for a Pittsburgh dance ensemble. It opens with a passionate trumpet solo and features moving trumpet-flute interplay. “It’s probably my favorite song on the album,” Jones says. “It describes a lovers’ evening. It’s filled with emotion, but it’s also spiritual. And it also expresses love’s extremes, from the lowest lows to the highest heights. Erika and I were trying to do something different with our instruments, to give the feeling of a bird or butterfly, to present that oooh feeling.”

A compelling view into the inner life of Jones, *The Search Within* advances the rising-star career of the young trumpeter who turned 30 last May. Remarkably this is Jones’ fifth album for Mack Avenue, which has afforded him the opportunity to pursue his musical journeys. “Mack Avenue is one of the great jazz labels,” he says. “They understand artists and their need to express themselves without the burdens of the business. In a pure sense, they make it possible for me to bring my vision to life.”