

## WALLACE RONEY

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Grammy Award Winner, Wallace Roney is heralded as an "improviser who loves complicated almost mathematical lines and who performs with catlike grace" by the New York Times, trumpeter, composer and bandleader Wallace Roney is one of the most exciting and innovative musicians on the creative music scene. His consummate artistry and eagerness to explore and transcend musical boundaries has led him to collaborate and has been an integral part of the band with Art Blakey, Elvin Jones, Philly Joe Jones, Walter Davis Jr., Herbie Hancock, Tony Williams, Jay McShann, David Murray, and McCoy Tyner; as well as a featured as a soloist with Ornette Coleman, Sonny Rollins, Curtis Fuller, Stevie Wonder, Randy Weston, Carole King, Joni Mitchell, and Dizzy Gillespie, to name a few.

Praised by Time Magazine for his "amber tone and patient and considered phrasing," Wallace Roney has recorded over a dozen albums as a leader. Each recording illuminates the dynamic trumpeter's keen compositional chops and versatility as a bandleader and composer. It is rare to find a musician who can superbly execute and breathe new life into such juxtaposed musicians as Miles Davis, Kenny Dorham, Al Green, and Slick Rick. Roney's most recent CD is the HighNote recording *Mystikal*. AllAboutJazz.com says, "Mystikal continues his path towards combining past and present with, most importantly, a clear eye on the future." He is also featured on Meshell Ndegeocello's Grammy Nominated "Dance of the Infidel."

Wallace Roney earned the admiration and respect of his colleagues and his elders since age 16, when he walked into a NYC night club and sat in – while his High School was in NYC on a field trip. He was one of the most popular jazz sidemen in the music industry early into his professional career and is one of the few musicians in his generation who learned and perfected his craft directly from alliances with Jazz Masters.

Wallace Roney was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on May 25, 1960. By the age of five, he had picked up his first trumpet; at seven, his father bought him his first horn. His grandmother made sure that he had lessons; Diagnosed as having "perfect pitch" Roney began studying with Polish born – Philadelphia Orchestra's 30-year veteran Trumpeter Sigmund Hering; at 12, at the recommendation of Hering and Leopold Stokowski, Wallace performed with the Philadelphia Brass Ensemble at the Philadelphia Settlement Music School. In the early '70s he moved with his father and siblings to Washington, D.C., where he was enrolled in the Duke Ellington School for the Performing Arts. He developed a love for Miles Davis, wearing out his 45 RPM record of "Filles de Kilimanjaro" and practicing the master's solos while still in his teens. Upon graduation, Roney declined an opportunity to attend the prestigious Juilliard School, choosing Howard University instead. In 1979 he joined pianist Abdullah Ibrahim's big band for a summer European tour; he toured Europe again in 1980, with Art Blakey. He returned to Boston in 1981, attending the Berklee School of Music until he read in the Village Voice

that Marsalis was leaving Blakey's Jazz Messengers. Roney wanted his position. He knew the Messengers would be playing a stint at the Bottom Line in New York City, so for Roney there was only one thing to do: sell everything. "My television, my comic books, school books, my trumpet," he told James McBride of the Washington Post. "I had to get to New York that day."

While he did get a job touring with Blakey for a few months, followed by a year-long job with Chico Freeman, Roney also spent years scrounging for work. He lived frugally, sleeping on the floors of friends' apartments and generally "wearing out my welcome," he recalled to writer James McBride [Washington Post]. In 1983 his future began to look brighter—at least temporarily. While taking part in a tribute to Miles Davis at the Bottom Line in Manhattan, he actually got to meet his idol. "He [Davis] asked me what kind of trumpet I had," Roney told Time, "and I told him none. So he gave me one of his." Throughout two dismal years in '84 and '85 he was forced to play in Latin dance and reception bands. The New York clubs, once a prominent part of the jazz scene, had mostly disappeared. The skies began to clear in 1986 when Roney received two calls—within one month—to tour with two jazz legends: drummers Tony Williams and Art Blakey.

Roney recorded his debut, *Verses*, for Muse in 1987. He also became a central part of the Tony Williams Quintet, touring and recording with the group until it broke up in the early '90s. For Roney, 1991 and 1992 proved to be watershed years. First, he received an invitation from Miles Davis to play at his side during the 1991 Montreux Jazz Festival. "I was soloing on 'Springsville,'" Roney told Zan Stewart of the Los Angeles Times, "and after I finished, he [Davis] tapped me on the arm and said, 'Play this tomorrow on the gig.'" The music was later issued as *Miles and Quincy, Live at Montreux*, won a Grammy Award, and let the jazz world know that Roney had arrived. It led to an invitation to tour with Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter, Ron Carter, and Tony Williams in the Miles Davis Tribute Band in 1992 and to his involvement in a recreation of the "Re-Birth of the Cool" with Gerry Mulligan. Following Miles' passing Roney toured with the original members of Miles Davis' famed quintet; Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter, Wayne Shorter and Tony Williams. In 2006, Hancock, the Davis family, and VH-1 invited Roney to celebrate Miles' induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame during an internationally televised event.

While these opportunities certainly raised Roney's profile, they also led to a certain typecasting. The tone and color of Roney's horn has often—perhaps too often—been compared to Miles Davis's. Other jazz musicians have faced similar dilemmas: Sonny Stitt was labeled as another Charlie Parker, John Faddis as another Dizzy Gillespie. "I'm never going to run from Miles," Roney told Fred Shuster of *Down Beat*. "But writers don't have to introduce me and my music to the audience in the context of Miles every single time." To better understand Roney's music, one has to listen to it against the backdrop of the musical innovations that took place in jazz during the mid 1960s. With the style generally referred to as post-bop, a number of musicians began inserting open structures and new chord progressions into their music. They utilized unusual time signatures, allowing drummers and bass players to take prominent roles. This shift

allowed talented musicians like Ron Carter and Tony Williams to come forward and form their own bands. While these innovations had endless possibilities for exploration, many musicians moved on as fusion began to dominate the jazz scene in the late '60s. From early in Roney's career, he has sought out musicians who have deep roots in hard-bop and post-bop. Roney has simply made the choice, as many of the young lions did, to return to that golden era of the mid '60s in order to further explore its myriad ideas.

In 1994 Roney received a multiple album contract from Warner Bros. Misterios, his debut for the label, found him stretching boundaries by including Brazilian rhythms and strings. He maintained a busy touring schedule, playing dates at the Village Vanguard in New York, Scullers in Boston, and the Jazz Showcase in Chicago. He also traveled to Italy, France, and Portugal for a number of summer festivals. Between recording dates and touring he found time to marry his longtime musical partner, pianist Geri Allen, on May 12, 1995. On 1997's Village, and even more so on 2000's No Room for Argument, Roney led the new revolution of jazz/bop/urban mix incorporating ideas from late-'60s fusion. These albums include synthesizers and electric pianos along with saxophone, piano, and trumpet, creating a spacious and layered sound. "We are trying to play in a way that will open up the music," he told Roberta Penn of the Seattle Post Intelligencer concerning his current experiments. Roney's musical presentations on Prototype [Title of which is from Outcast's Andre 3000's song] to Mystikal shows his continued progression. His willingness to push boundaries and surround himself with the best contemporary jazz musicians guarantees that Wallace Roney will continue to be a fresh and vital artist.

Wallace Roney currently maintains a busy schedule touring the world with his sextet.

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***For the Record . . .***

Wallace Roney holds the distinction of being the only trumpet player Davis ever personally mentored.

Awards:

2006 – Benny Golson Jazz Master Award

1996 – Grammy Award

1991 – Grammy Award

1990 - Down Beat Critic's Poll for Best Trumpeter to Watch, 1990

1979 - Named Best Young Jazz Musician of the Year by Down Beat