

# Ronny Smith

Contemporary Jazz Guitarist

## NEW ALBUM **COASTAL SUNSET**

Like many musicians dealing with the impact of the pandemic-related lockdowns and sudden loss of their normal schedules, Ronny Smith had a lot of career adjustments to make in 2020. Yet as the Maryland-based veteran guitarist boldly notes on the packaging for his latest album **Coastal Sunset** – a multi-faceted collection marking two decades since the release of his debut *Long Time Comin'* – his sense of disarray extended into more personal territory.

Within a nine-month span, he lost both of his parents and his niece. As it has been for all his life, both as a military musician and recording artist/performer, music was the one thing that sustained him. Sometimes it's the only way to get in touch with and share those deeper feelings. As he writes, "I tried to not to express my feelings in words but through song. For example, 'For You' is dedicated to my parents in a way I couldn't put in words, so I did it through song." Those discovering Smith for the first time via their invitation to enjoy his intimate and soulful **Coastal Sunset** will quickly notice two elements that have been mainstays throughout his career – an inimitable, infectious sense of groove, and an array of eclectic styles – which on the current project run from in the pocket classic styled urban jazz/funk to gospel, raw, edgy blues, tropical jazz and even a bit of straight-ahead jazz swing. Two of his early albums were titled *Got Groove* (2006) and *Just Groovin'* (2009), and the track "City Groove" – from his 2013 release *Can't Stop Now* – hit #1 on Billboard's BDS New and Active smooth jazz chart and ultimately reached #25 on the Billboard BDS Top 30.

As for the diversity and overall genre-transcendence that has long driven his artistry, Smith has been told over the years by radio promoters that he's a "tweener" – an artist who falls between jazz and the R&B flavored urban jazz that dominates smooth jazz playlists. "These kinds of responses to my music aren't going to change the essence of who I am as a guitarist and composer," he says. "I don't want to be one of those guys who writes music just to fit in but that takes away from my vision as an artist. In my mind, artists should be able to express themselves the way they want and not compromise just to score a #1 hit." Smith credits his desire to showcase a more expansive palette of musical tastes to the 35 years he performed in U.S. Army bands, including four years of active duty and 31 years of part time service. He explains that in the military band system, soldiers can be assigned (even at the same time) to play in jazz combos, rock bands and country groups, and have to learn all types of repertoire for ceremonies, concerts, banquets, embassy receptions and any events involving military associated dignitaries.

In addition to playing guitar for small ensembles, pop and jazz groups, Smith also displayed his clarinet skills in the Army's symphonic concert and ceremonial bands. His first stop was the Army's school of music. He stayed there four months and then immediately played with bands all over Germany (Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Heidelberg). Throughout his career, Smith played everywhere from Nijmegen, Holland to La Paz, Bolivia.

"What's that they say about being a reflection of your surroundings?" Smith says. "I'm grateful for all the exposure and opportunities the Army gave me to play and record so many different kinds of music. While raising my family, I worked government jobs for years, but I can see a direct line between the dedication, discipline and attention to detail it takes to be a successful Army musician, and the hard work it takes to be a successful recording artist and live performer."

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## ON STAGE

For many years as a popular regional performer, Ronny Smith's energetic vibe and traditional meets contemporary, blues and gospel spiced approach to standards and original composition have instantly captivated audiences and helped him form a powerful connection to them. Having headlined hundreds of his own gigs and sharing the stage with such artists as the Marvelettes, Bobby Durham and Donald Byrd – in addition to opening for high profile artists like Phil Perry at The Gordon Center in Baltimore – the guitarist is a master at creating moods and atmospheres. Whether he's playing churches, jazz clubs, or larger venues, his game plan is to share his growing catalog of original songs with the audience and "just get people into what I'm doing, whether it's through something that's kind of funky, melodic or mellow. I basically try to influence the crowd with some of the rhythms they're used to but with different melodies. It's fun pushing the envelope."

Over the years, Smith has played everywhere from The Chesapeake Arts Center (Baltimore), Twins Jazz Club (DC), and Jazz at Meade Memorial Episcopal (Alexandria) to popular series like Appalachian Regional Commission Concert Series (DC), The Hill Chapel Jazz Concerts Series (New Market, MD), Downtown Baltimore Harbor Concert Series and Crown Plaza Hampton Jazz Series in Hampton VA. As venues begin opening up, he is scheduled to play the Harve de Grace (Maryland) Jazz & Blues Festival As venues begin opening up, post-covid, he is scheduled to play the Harve de Grace Jazz & Blues Festival in Maryland.

## NOTABLE LIVE PERFORMANCES

Appalachian Regional Commission Concert Series - Washington, DC  
Jazz at Meade Memorial Episcopal - Alexandria, VA  
The Hill Chapel Jazz Concerts Series - New Market, MD  
Elk Run Jazz Festival - Mount Airy, MD  
Twins Jazz Club - Washington, DC  
The Gordon Center - Owings Mills MD (opened for Phil Perry)  
Chesapeake Arts Center – Baltimore, MD  
Ronald Reagan Bldg Concert Series - Washington, DC  
Quarry Lake Fall Festival - Pikesville, MD  
Dover Downs – Dover, DE  
Crown Plaza Hampton Jazz Series – Hampton, VA  
Blue Dolphin Seafood Bar & Grill – Gambrills, MD  
Arts Festival - Solomons, MD  
Maryland Seafood Festival - Annapolis, MD  
Tacoma Park Jazz Festival - Tacoma Park, MD

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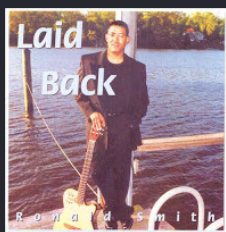
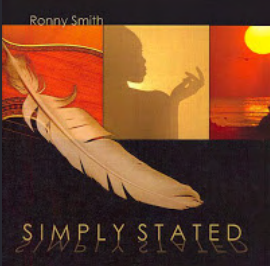
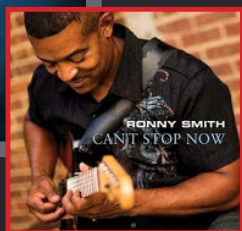
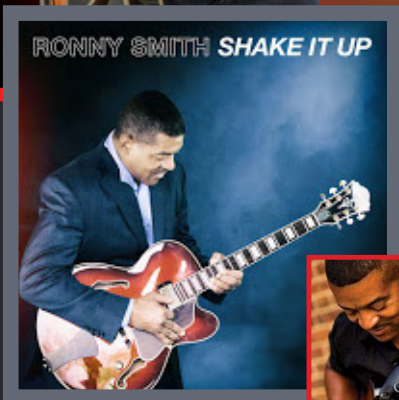
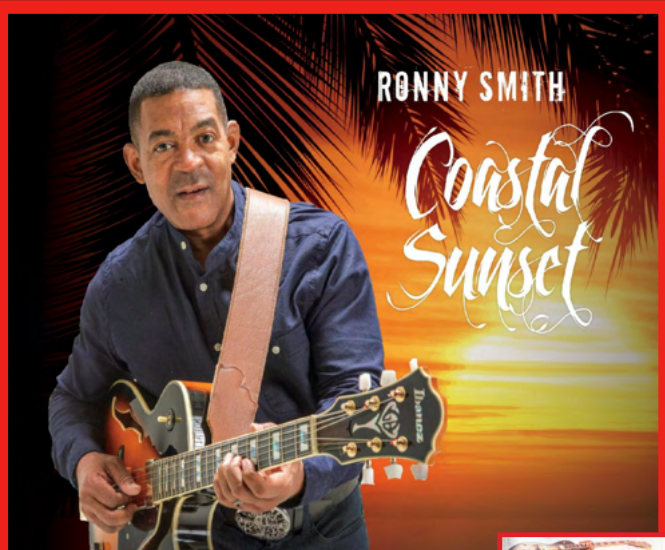
### MUSIC

Renowned jazz journalist and author Scott Yanow wrote, "Guitarist Ronny Smith's mellow tone, subtle creativity and ability to groove over catchy rhythms have made him an increasingly popular force in contemporary jazz." Smith brings all those vibrant elements and more to the 10 tracks of *Coastal Sunset*, an album whose dreamy title and chill cover art only capture one aspect of the multitude of musical vibes on the collection. He may have been called a "tweener" in the past, but there's nothing "tween" about the slammin', jangling guitar funk of the infectious first single "String of Hearts," which has all the requisites of an adventurous urban jazz hit – a classic pocket groove, a slick, buoyant electric guitar melody and sizzling, soaring horn textures (fueled by the Terminus horns of Richard Sherrington (Trombone), Justin Powell (Trumpet) and Umcolisi Terrel (Sax)).

As a composer/producer, one of Smith's trademarks is creating conversation pieces and "question and answer" dynamics with other instruments. He engages in this exciting approach with veteran SoCal based saxophonist and flutist John Rekevics on the high spirited, mid-tempo, finger snap groove driven "Who Dat Said" (which features a swirl of horn and strings), the sultry and balmy, easy flowing romance "Coastal Sunset" (a whimsical conversation between guitars, sax and flute) and the coolly strutting, high falutin' bluesy funk jam "Feelin' Froggy." Other gems that showcase different aspects of his musical passions include the explosive and freewheeling raw blues/scratchy hip-hop/jazz swing hybrid "Blues Like This" (why not mix three genres at once?), the spirited and beachy romp "Island Maiden" (which syncs with the spirit of the title track and album title) and the closer, a free-floating, atmospheric symphonic soul piece perfectly titled "Love and Happiness."

### THE EARLY YEARS

Ronny Smith's earliest musical memories find him in his family basement listening to, learning from and emulating George Benson's iconic hit "Breezin'." From there, he got into Larry Carlton, Earl Klugh, Brecker Brothers and Joe Pass. Smith cites one of his greatest influences as two-time Grammy nominated guitar legend Pat Martino, whom Smith was able to take private lessons from upon an introduction by his jazz guitar teacher Larry Waldridge while attending Morgan State University (Baltimore). While studying there for his Music Education degree, Smith also had the opportunity to play in the jazz band at the University of Maryland. Dr. George Ross, one of the instructors at the U of Maryland, had been a guest soloist with the Commodores in the U.S. Navy Jazz Band, and suggested that Smith audition for a military band. The guitarist auditioned for the Navy band during his senior year at the University of Maryland (where he had transferred) and joined immediately after graduation. Throughout his multi-faceted career, Smith has recorded with some of the top session musicians in Nashville as well as California, including Gary Lunn (Peter Cetera), Pat Coil (Michael McDonald), Craig Nelson (Ben Tankard), and Dan Needham (Euge Groove), Scott Martin and Stan Martin (Quincy Jones) and Andy Martin (Gordon Goodwin's Big Phat Band).



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## REVIEW

"If you're a fan of all styles of instrumental music and admire musicians who are true innovators and adventurers – and if you feel there's more to musical success than simply hitting big on the smooth jazz charts – then Ronny Smith is your kind of guy. The veteran guitarist may have been labeled a "tweener" by smooth jazz radio programmers for not being one thing or another over the years, but his expansive artistry and incredible spirit of eclecticism has led him to build a loyal following on his own terms, expressing music the way the muse inspires him. The title of his latest brilliant work **Coastal Sunset** may inspire thoughts of happy, spirited tropical music – and there's certainly a little of that for you to enjoy as an initial invitation. But don't get so caught up in the breezy balminess that you can't enjoy his deeper expressions and his latest freewheeling fun with the groove – most notably on tunes like "Feelin Froggy," the wild hybrid "Blues Like This" and that wild lead single "String of Hearts" which frankly ain't no tweener and will be lighting up the urban jazz charts for months to come."

– Jonathan Widran, *The JW Vibe*

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