

Created by: Debra C. Argen

## Yellowjackets Interview - Twenty Five Years!

Luxury Experience interviews the [Yellowjackets](#) as they celebrate their 25th anniversary.

The Yellowjackets, Russell Ferrante (acoustic piano, synthesizers), Jimmy Haslip (electric bass), Bob Mintzer (tenor saxophone, EWI) and Marcus Baylor (drums) have much to celebrate this year; the band celebrated their 25th anniversary and they just released their much-awaited CD/DVD, *Yellowjackets Twenty Five*, which Edward F. Nesta reviews in the **Music Scene** section (see **Yellowjackets - Twenty Five**).

Edward and I caught up with the Yellowjackets in November 2005 at Ronnie Scott's in London, and when Jimmy told us about their upcoming CD, we couldn't wait to hear it. Fast-forward to July 2006, CD/DVD received, listened to, DVD watched, and we couldn't believe how spectacular this anniversary CD/DVD turned out.



On July 29, 2006, I spoke with Jimmy Haslip and Marcus Baylor before they played a gig in Los Angeles, looking back at the last 25 years.

LEM:

Jimmy, congratulations on celebrating 25 years! How has the Yellowjackets music changed over the years?

Jimmy:

It's been an ongoing progression with us. We started out as a different band in 1981, with the guitar as the main voice, (Robben Ford, 1981-1982, who was more blues), changed to alto sax (Marc Russo, 1983-1990, who was into R&B), and to tenor sax in 1990 when Bob Mintzer, (traditional jazz genre) joined the band. Marcus Baylor joined the band in 2000 (replacing Peter Erskine on drums, 1998-1999).

The first 10 years we had 3 changes of personnel and a lot of sound change, how we wrote and thought about the music. With Robben we were first a Blues, R&B sound, with Mark we moved to R&B and then ethnic, and with Bob, we moved into a more traditional sound without losing sight of our roots. Each of their influences are very much a part of the equation.

In 25 years the band has really changed, but the fact remains that as artists we continue to push the envelope, composing, learning more, listening to different kinds of music, combined with personal life changes all thrown in the pot, sets the stage for a lot of changes, and how you view the world. When I joined the band I was 29 going on 30.

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LEM:

You look great; did you find the fountain of youth?

Jimmy:

Music is a form of a fountain of youth, it keeps you motivated and creatively inspired.

LEM:

When relationships can be so tenuous, what do you credit as the secret to the longevity of the band?  
(Original members Russell and Jimmy, 25 years, Bob, 16 years and Marcus, 6 years)

Jimmy:

We have a real family oriented atmosphere in this group. We even have a strong relationship with band alumni. Russell and I still play with Robben Ford on occasion, play gigs with Mark Russo, and Robben, Russell and I played a reunion gig with Ricky Lawson (1981 -1986). The band that exists now is very close, and we are able to beat the odds. We have a nice chemistry, are very good at creatively inspiring each other. We have experienced a lot of deep personal things, from family crises, to just having spaghetti together, and that helps build strong relationships. We are really fortunate in that we can write the music that we want and record it, and are unusual in that, which keeps us inspired. Also, no one is chained to the group. As long as we are considerate of the Jackets' schedule, we are all free to work on other projects.

LEM:

What do the band members do in the off time?

Jimmy:

Bob Mintzer has his big band, Russell has his own projects, Marcus plays with Scofield, and I am working on a solo album now. We go off and experience different entities, which we bring back to the band. We write new music for the projects, and there is a lot going on, both individually and collectively.

LEM:

Marcus, you are the newest member of the band. What is your favorite place to play?

Marcus:

I like to play venues where the crowd is energetic and in tune with what we are doing, their energy brings out that energy in me. The more intimate the venue, the better. I especially enjoyed playing at The New Morning Club in Paris where we recorded our live CD, Yellowjackets Twenty Five.

LEM:

What do you do in your free time?

Marcus:

I am a Christian guy, and my wife and I go to church and interact, because it is a blessing. I also play with Kenny Garrett and John Scofield, and I just produced my wife, Jane Baylor's CD. Jane sang on the Yellowjackets' Altered State and Time Squared CDs.

LEM:

Any upcoming venues?

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Jimmy:

On the West Coast we are playing at the Monterey Jazz Festival in California, September 14-15, 2006, and we will be in NY in November at Birdland.

LEM:

There you have it; here's to the next 25 years! May you continue to enjoy the musical journey!

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