

Created by: Debra C, Argen

Jeff 'Tain' Watts - Interview

[Jeff "Tain" Watts](#) takes time from his demanding schedule to talk with Luxury Experience Magazine about his latest CD, [Folk's Songs](#), by Tain & the Ebonix.

LEM:



Jeff, I would like to congratulate you on your latest CD, *Folks' Songs*, which I had been waiting for what seems like an eternity. There were talks about a CD forthcoming when I met you at Ronnie Scott's in London in 2005 when you dropped in to say hello to your friends, the Yellowjackets, and ended up sitting in and playing with them. When I saw you play at the Village Vanguard in New York in January 2006, you promised that you were working on a new CD, and finally on April 19, 2007, I had the opportunity to hear your new work at the CD release party at the Cutting Room in New York. The wait was definitely worth it!

What was your inspiration for *Folk's Songs*?

Jeff:

I had accumulated a lot of music that was dedicated to people, and I thought that I would use that as the theme.

LEM:

The cover photo of *Folk's Songs* shows an adorable young boy sitting in a chair? Is that you? What was the inspiration to use family photos for this CD?

Jeff:

Yes, the photo is of me from a family reunion in St. Louis when I was about 3 or 4 years old. The picture is on a wall in my place, and one day my girlfriend was drawn to this photo and decided to use it for the cover art of the CD.

LEM:

You started playing drums at 10 years old you, studied at Duquesne University, and at Berklee School of Music in Boston. What intrigued you about playing the drums and creating a career as a musician? Are any of your family members musicians?

Jeff:

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There are really no musicians in my family except for a cousin who played in bands. I started playing drums as a school activity, and the teachers kept encouraging me. I did not choose music, but rather it chose me.

LEM:

Wow. With your career, the teacher that kept encouraging you to be a musician must be patting himself or herself on the back. You have, without a doubt, a most impressive resume. You met Branford Marsalis at Berklee School of Music, and parlayed that experience into playing with Wynton Marsalis from 1981 - 1988, and joining Branford Marsalis in 1989, and are the only musician to play on every Grammy Award winning jazz record by both Wynton (1986, 1987, 1988) and Branford (1993, 2001).

You played with George Benson, Harry Connick, Jr., and McCoy Tyner. You have four solo albums with the Jeff "Tain" Watts Quartet, played on countless other projects, recorded and toured with some of the best including Danilo Perez, Sonny Rollins, Michael Brecker, Betty Carter, Kenny Kirkland, Alice Coltrane, and Ravi Coltrane, and so many more.

You played on the Jay Leno Show for 3 years, and even worked as an actor in Spike Lee's 1990 film, **Mo' Better Blues**, with Denzel Washington, Samuel L. Jackson, and Wesley Snipes, playing the role of "Rhythm Jones."

What was it like working as an actor on **Mo' Better Blues**like?

Jeff:

The movie experience was kind of surreal. We recorded the soundtrack for **Mo' Better Blues** before the movie was shot. A few months after we recorded the soundtrack, I was at a Knicks game and Spike Lee comes over from center court to ask me if I could teach an actor to look like he was a drummer, since the drums are such a physical part of the scenes. I told him that I could, but he never told me that he was interviewing actors for the role (Rhythm Jones) in New York. Months later, Branford Marsalis was working at a club in Chicago and Spike Lee came backstage to talk to him and Kenny Kirkland, I do not know where I was at the time, maybe upstairs, and Spike told Branford that he had auditioned actors in New York and Chicago and still had not found an actor for Rhythm Jones. Branford told him that he should ask me. I met with Spike in New York, read dialogue, and got the gig. It was a really cool group: Sam (Samuel L. Jackson), Wes (Wesley Snipes), and the Turturo brothers. Wes would stop by my place every day and pick me up on the way to the studio.

LEM:

Is there anything that you have not done, that you would like to do?

Jeff:

I do not know. I just really want to get more solo work. Music has taken me a lot of places, and I really cannot complain.

LEM:

Growing up, who inspired you musically?

Jeff:

As a drummer, I usually looked at other drummers but I also liked James Brown; Earth, Wind & Fire; George Clinton; the Doobie Brothers; and Jimi Hendrix. Growing up I played the classics, so I like Bach, too.

LEM:

What music do you listen to now?

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Jeff:

I like to listen to a lot of older stuff. For jazz I like Duke Ellington and John Coltrane. For newer stuff I like Meshell N'Degeocello, Bjork, Prince, Outkast, a lot of classical music, and world music from Africa and Cuba.

LEM:

Your schedule has you playing gigs around the world. What are some of your favorite cities to play in and why?

Jeff:

I am drawn to larger cities, so I like to play in London, Paris, and Prague. I also like Rio and Tokyo. Right now I am drawn to Spain, even the smaller cities because of the great food and the nice people.

LEM:

If you could play with any musicians living or dead, and create a fantasy band, whom would you like to play with?

Jeff:

That's a good question. I guess I would like to play with John Coltrane, bring in Charles Mingus on Bass, Kenny Kirkland on piano, add Thelonius Monk, and throw in Jimi Hendrix on guitar. I do not know how it would work, but it would be cool.

LEM:

That would be a cool band with you leading it up! What is next?

Jeff:

I am playing in New York with Branford Marsalis, and then touring with my band, Jeff "Tain" Watts Quartet in late July 2007 in Amsterdam, London, and Edinburgh.

I am also composing songs for my next CD, which should be released in the Spring.

LEM:

I think that line about a CD forthcoming sounds vaguely familiar ...

Jeff:

No, really, the CD should be released sometime next Spring.

LEM:

Jeff, I will look forward to that. Thanks for taking the time to speak with me. I will see you at your next gig somewhere around the world, and in the meantime, listening to the long awaited CD, ***Folk's Songs***.

Read the review of **Folk's Songs** in the **Music Scene**. The **Folks' Songs** CD is available online at www.CdBaby.com and www.Amazon.com. Visit Jeff "Tain" Watts website: www.Tainish.com for upcoming music dates.

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