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## THE VERVEMUSICGROUP

### DAVID BENOIT RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW

Composer, pianist and three-time GRAMMY® nominee **David Benoit** has made an indelible mark on contemporary jazz. He pioneered the popular smooth jazz sound in the '80s, and continues to attract fans, critical acclaim and the most coveted awards in the music industry with his straight-ahead jazz recordings, his television and film scores, and his classical compositions. In June 2003, Benoit was named Keyboardist of the Year in the 4th Annual National Smooth Jazz Awards, the third time he's claimed this top honor. With the release of ***Right Here, Right Now***, his 15<sup>th</sup> CD on the venerable GRP label and his 23<sup>rd</sup> recording as leader, Benoit writes another chapter in his remarkable musical career.

"This record is still smooth jazz," says Benoit, "but I wanted to stretch things a bit this time, do something a little different." Case in point: his inspired choice for opening cut, Herbie Hancock's classically funky "Watermelon Man," which he flavors with an unmistakable Ramsey Lewis retro-60s piano feel. "I was surprised no one had covered this tune in a long while," he says, adding that producer and trumpet player **Rick Braun's** arrangement "turned into a very fun jam for all of us during the recording session. It's really funky and sets the tone for the whole CD. That retro-60s sound, say of the Jazz Crusaders, was my 'growing-up music,' what I call funky jazz or even jazz rock. We had fun and a lot of the piano solos are first takes. The whole record has a loose feel to it, and I'm really happy about that."

Inviting Braun to produce ***Right Here, Right Now*** was "an obvious choice," says Benoit. "We've known each other a long time, work really well together, and he's got good musical taste." Braun co-produced Benoit's previous two GRP releases, ***Fuzzy Logic*** (2001) and ***Professional Dreamer*** (1999), which included his GRAMMY® nominated tune, "Dad's Room".

The title cut on this release, "Right Here, Right Now," possesses all the hallmarks of a Benoit classic: urban-feel, open and clear piano sounds, funky jamming and strong blowing. He and Braun are joined by special guests Wayne Bergeron (trumpet), Nick Lane (trombone), Randy Jacobs (guitar), Luis Conte (percussion), and, on drums, Benoit's long-time friend Bud Harner.

"Don't Let Me Be Lonely Tonight," James Taylor's familiar musical entreaty, receives a lushly intoned live jazz treatment accompanied by a 22-piece string section, evidence of Benoit's growing influence in the field of orchestral composing and arranging. "I've always wanted to do a James Taylor tune, and this one is among my favorites," he says. In "Le Grand," co-written with Mitchel

Forman, he juxtaposes a haunting melody against a steady rhythmic pocket for another gorgeous tip of the hat, this time to pianist Michel Legrand.

Benoit features two up and coming smooth jazz musicians, Brian Culbertson (trombone) and Euge Groove (saxophone) on the rhythmic "Jellybeans and Chocolate," titled with his daughter, June, in mind. The first time Benoit heard Norah Jones sing Jesse Harris's multiple-GRAMMY®-winning tune "Don't Know Why" on the radio, he was impressed by its bold acoustic nature. Here, he says, he "wanted to play it introspectively, with acoustic upright bass and drums and brushes, keeping it very simple, staying true to its beauty."

"Swingin' Waikiki," Benoit's bossa nova-inflected homage to Hawaii, features his touring band – long-time guitarist Pat Kelley, tenor saxophonist Andy Suzuki, bassist Dean Taba and drummer Jeff Olson. Their talents are also foremost on Benoit's set-closers, "Wistful Thinking," which opens with an odd-time 7/4 bam, and "Quiet Room," a tune he wrote just after his father's passing. "I wanted to feature my live band, the guys I've been working with for the past two years," says Benoit. "I love the way we play together, it just feels very natural and free."

Benoit's GRP recordings reflect his affinity for a range of jazz-inflected styles, from contemporary pop to straight-ahead bebop, orchestral and hip-hop. Among the highlights of his extensive discography are ***Every Step of the Way*** (1988), nominated for a GRAMMY® in the Best Jazz Fusion category; *Waiting for Spring* (1989), which topped *Billboard's* traditional jazz chart for eight weeks; and *Letter to Evan* (1992), a heartfelt tribute to the late jazz piano giant, **Bill Evans**. A charter member of **The Rippingtons**, Benoit reunited with the Ripp's leader, **Russ Freeman**, on the 1994 hit *The Benoit/Freeman Project*, and often participates in the popular GRP All-Star Big Band Projects.

Following his 2000 GRP release, *Here's to You, Charlie Brown: 50 Great Years!*, Benoit developed an entire live musical tribute to **Charles Schulz's** beloved comic strip, PEANUTS™. The show featured a full orchestra, arranged and conducted by Benoit, performing a variety of music, including the memorable melodies composed by the late pianist **Vince Guaraldi** for the classic PEANUTS™ TV specials. Benoit composed and performed his own classical piece for piano and orchestra, "The Peanuts Gallery," commissioned by Carnegie Hall, and brought the show to venues throughout the United States. This well-known facet of Benoit's musical personality comes to the forefront once again in December 2003 when he tours the U.S. with **Al Jarreau** and **Melissa Manchester** in a multi-media musical review of the popular PEANUTS™ songbook and other hits popularized by the three headlining artists. And, once again inspired by the lovable PEANUTS™ characters, Benoit is scoring a new one-hour ABC-TV special for Paramount, "I Want a Dog for Christmas, Charlie Brown," slated to air in December 2003.

Benoit became musical director for the Asia America Symphony Orchestra in Palos Verdes, CA, in 2001 and has developed the orchestra's programming, conducted concerts, built an "East meets West" musical concept and, most recently, created the Asia America Youth Orchestra for 11 – 18 year olds. "We play all kinds of music, and it gives these talented young musicians an

opportunity to launch their careers. Many of them have not had the chance to play with a live orchestra before, so it's a very exciting and meaningful challenge for all of us." This year, the Youth Honor Orchestra held its first annual competition, "Composition for Orchestra:" the winner premiered their composition in April and received a cash scholarship from the Asia-America Symphony Association.

As Benoit continues to develop his interest in orchestral music, including conducting such eminent orchestras as the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the symphonies of London, Nuremberg, San Francisco, Atlanta, San Antonio and San Jose, his musical talents have become apparent to a whole new audience of fans. He recently conducted the performance of his first piano concerto, "The Centaur and the Sphinx," featuring the distinguished pianist **Frederic Chiu** and the Asia-America Symphony Orchestra. His acclaimed symphonic piece, "Kobe," was performed this year by the Berkeley Symphony, under the baton of **Kent Nagano**, conductor and music director for the Los Angeles Opera.

Just as in Benoit's tune "Third Encounter," which features a hypnotic pulse suggesting anything might appear on the road ahead, Benoit's open to musical adventures. "I usually have at least one tune like this on my recordings," he says of the cut, which conjures a lonely stretch of road and an alien encounter." There's nothing alien about **Right Here, Right Now** however: it's pure Benoit - musically curious, multi-directional, yet always very infectious.

***Right Here, Right Now* [B0000597-02] will be released on CD October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2003.**

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