

# GREGORY JAMES

It is often said that art and commerce don't mix, but that's just one of the many myths that Gregory James has broken down during his musical odyssey. The guitarist has recorded ten albums and been invited to perform alongside such musicians as McCoy Tyner, Sergio Mendes, Ray Charles, Max Roach, Mark Isham, and Steve Smith's Vital Information. Gregory James' music celebrates, and sonically connects, the two cities that have most shaped him, and in the words of *Downbeat* magazine, "Bridges the gap between musical adventure and mass appeal."

Born in San Francisco, James began studying guitar with David LeRoy Smith at the age of 11, and by 15 he was jamming in some of The City's finest after-hours joints with the likes of Amandio Cabral, Eddie Duran, and Vince Guaraldi. While studying with the great Brazilian guitarist, Bola Sete, Gregory James was listening to The Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, Charles Lloyd and Kenny Burrell, and beginning to experiment with fusion.

In the 1970's he left San Francisco to dive into the New York jazz scene, and was soon on the bandstand with such players as Bobby Scott and Chico Hamilton. He was signed to New York's Inner City Records label, and released the debut of the Gregory James Quartet, *Alicia*, in 1978, featuring bassist Andre St. James, drummer Randy Merritt, saxman Barry Shulman, and percussionist Baba Daru. After two years of touring and playing the New York scene he resettled in San Francisco and joined saxman Shulman in the punk-jazz quartet Video Rouge.

In 1982 James returned to instrumental music, forming the Rogue Records label. He recorded two jazz-rock albums with his electric quartet, *Madagascar* and *Alphabet Town*, and a duet album, *Tibet*, with Shulman. James' genre-bending creativity won praise on the pages of *Guitar Player*.

To satisfy his growing interest in world musics, James began studying flamenco guitar with Jason McGuire, and put away his electric axe for an acclaimed duet with bassist Kai Eckhardt, *The Search*. The album *Ananda* followed, a world jazz mélange that blends nylon-stringed, electric and MIDI guitars with the beautiful brass and woodwind tones of Ron Miles and Paul McCandless (Oregon), backed by a rhythm section of Marc and Paul Van Wageningen and Peter Michael Escovedo. James then brought in Yellowjackets saxophonist Mark Russo to collaborate on the radio-friendly album, *Traveler*.

By 2001's *Reincarnation* album, James was playing some saz, incorporating violinist Jenny Scheinman, turntablist DJ Fly, the spoken word of Craig Easley and Catie Murphy and talking drum of Rasaki Aladokun atop an already rich musical landscape. *Come To Me*, produced by Benny Reitveld (Miles Davis, Santana) in 2003, is perhaps the most complete realization of James' flamenco-jazz stylings with elements from hip-hop, classical, funk, rock and world beat and a guest list including Karl Perrazo and Raul Rekow of Santana, keyboardist Peter Horvath, Rita Thies, Alex Murzyn and Baron Shul on woodwinds, and DJ Fly, among the crew.

Gregory James' most recent album, *Samsara*, is a momentary return to gentler times. It's a quartet date featuring bassist Jonathan Herrera, drummer Deszon Claiborne, and longtime saxman Baron Shul, highlighted by a delightful take on The Beatles' "And I Love Her."

Besides performing with his San Francisco-based quartet, Gregory James recently began recording with producer Cookie Marenco on The Valence Project, along with a growing cast of musical characters that includes drummer/programmer Brain (Primus, Tom Waits), bassists Jon Herrera and Kai Eckhardt, and vocalists Melissa Reese and Deborah Charles. Fans of Bill Laswell's Material will be excited by these exotic and emphatic sounds. As always with Gregory James – stay tuned!