



The James Taylor Quartet

and The Rochester Cathedral Choir

‘The Rochester Mass’

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THE JAMES TAYLOR QUARTET TO RELEASE WORLD’S FIRST JAZZ-FUNK MASS

The James Taylor Quartet and The Rochester Cathedral Choir will release a truly unique and innovative album through Cherry Red Records on December 4th 2015: The Rochester Mass.

The notion of a Catholic mass being sung in conjunction with The James Taylor Quartet might sound bizarre, but there is some rationale behind the thinking and the music, which continues Taylor’s exploration of jazz and classical music first examined in the JTQ’s 2013 album ‘Closer To The Moon’.

Taylor says, “Putting aside the spiritual aspect and just looking at the music, which is influenced massively by the French impressionist movement, which is very jazzy and soulful, I’ve been getting massively into the sound of cathedral choirs, with two sets of sopranos and an alto. I wanted to blend that as a sound resource with the JTQ.”

Living close to Rochester Cathedral, Taylor started to attend evensong during his Father’s battle with Alzheimer’s, “The deterioration of my Father’s condition was very painful for me to watch. Sadly, in the end, he passed away and I completely immersed myself in religious choral music as a means of coping with all of that, and the music entered my soul. I wanted to take that incredible sound and mix it with what we do to make something which is hopefully new and challenging. It’s a completely unique listening experience.”

The catalyst for the project was Taylor being asked to play a concert at Rochester Cathedral: “For me, Rochester Cathedral is the most beautiful building in the world, so I couldn’t resist. I said I’d like to use the pipe organ and the choir, so I wrote something for them which became the piece ‘Kyrie’. The choir sang the very basic lyrics and it really worked. We wanted to pursue that weird juxtaposition of funk and soul with a very ecclesiastical sound.”

The project didn’t lend itself to the trademark JTQ Hammond organ sound, though, so Taylor shifted to his Fender Rhodes and composed a mass using all the different aspects of the Latin text - the Kyrie, the Benedictus, the Sanctus, the Gloria - with Taylor dividing each in half and writing a classical intro followed by a jazzy, funky Part 2.

Taylor also want to introduce aspects of classic rock bands, such as The Who and Deep Purple, and move it towards the French impressionistic aspect, finding a way to fuse angelic, spiritual sounds with more profane, secular rock ‘n’ roll. “The big challenge for us is that we love classical music but can see why it’s virtually impenetrable to our kind of audience, so we wanted to take those beautiful choral and orchestral sounds and somehow bring our groove to that. With the mass, we’re blending things and trying to pull together fairly disparate musical ideas with a view to creating something new. It’s been exciting, and people’s reaction to it has been fascinating.”

The band is the usual James Taylor Quartet – James Taylor (Hammond Organ), Pat Illingworth (Drums), *Mark Cox* (Guitar), Andrew McKinney (Bass) – expanded to an eight piece, complimented by Nick Smart (Flugelhorn), Gareth Lockrane (flute), Rob Townsend (sax & bass clarinet) and Ralph Wylde (orchestral percussion).

Taylor said, “The band are attempting to support a choral sound, which is completely overlooked because of its context; you’re only going to hear that music in church, where it’s all about religion, which is a complete turn-off for many people. So my sense was that this incredibly spiritual sound needed reframing and decontextualizing, and hopefully the album sheds a new light on something which is a 1500 year-old part of British music heritage in which there have been no new developments of any note for hundreds of years.

The band had to make lots of adaptations in order to fit their sound around the choir’s. Equally the choir and choir master, Scott Farrell, had to tailor what they do to The JTQ’s sound. Taylor said, “I was worried it might sound stiff but it grooved, which is when we knew we could make it work.”

The band were booked for a gig with the choir at Rochester Cathedral three years ago, and Taylor subsequently wrote more material for them and started performing it at both The Queen Elizabeth Hall in London and at the cathedral. Taylor said, “Every time we did a show with the choir the band would start playing and then we’d hear his ridiculously beautiful sound wafting over the top. With each gig we’d develop what we were doing and hone it.”

Taylor then spent four months writing the mass to represent the collaboration’s juxtapositions. Once written, rehearsed and gigged-in, Taylor knew they were ready to record it, which they did at Angel Studio 1 in just six hours. “It was all we could afford,” said Taylor.

Taylor says the Rochester Mass project has broadened his whole musical outlook. “Gigs and clubs are my church, but when we played the mass in Rochester Cathedral the audience got up and started to boogie and treated the cathedral as a nightclub. They were rocking out! At the centre of it was a sense of community; I’m from Rochester, it’s about Rochester, the kids in the choir are all from Rochester, so this is our little bit of regional identity, which is why I called it The Rochester Mass... but it can pertain to anywhere.”

www.jamestaylorquartet.co.uk / <https://www.facebook.com/OfficialJTQ>

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For further information please contact Dave Clarke: + 44 (0) 7966 557774 / dave@planetearthpublicity.com / [@PlanetEarthDC](https://www.instagram.com/PlanetEarthDC)