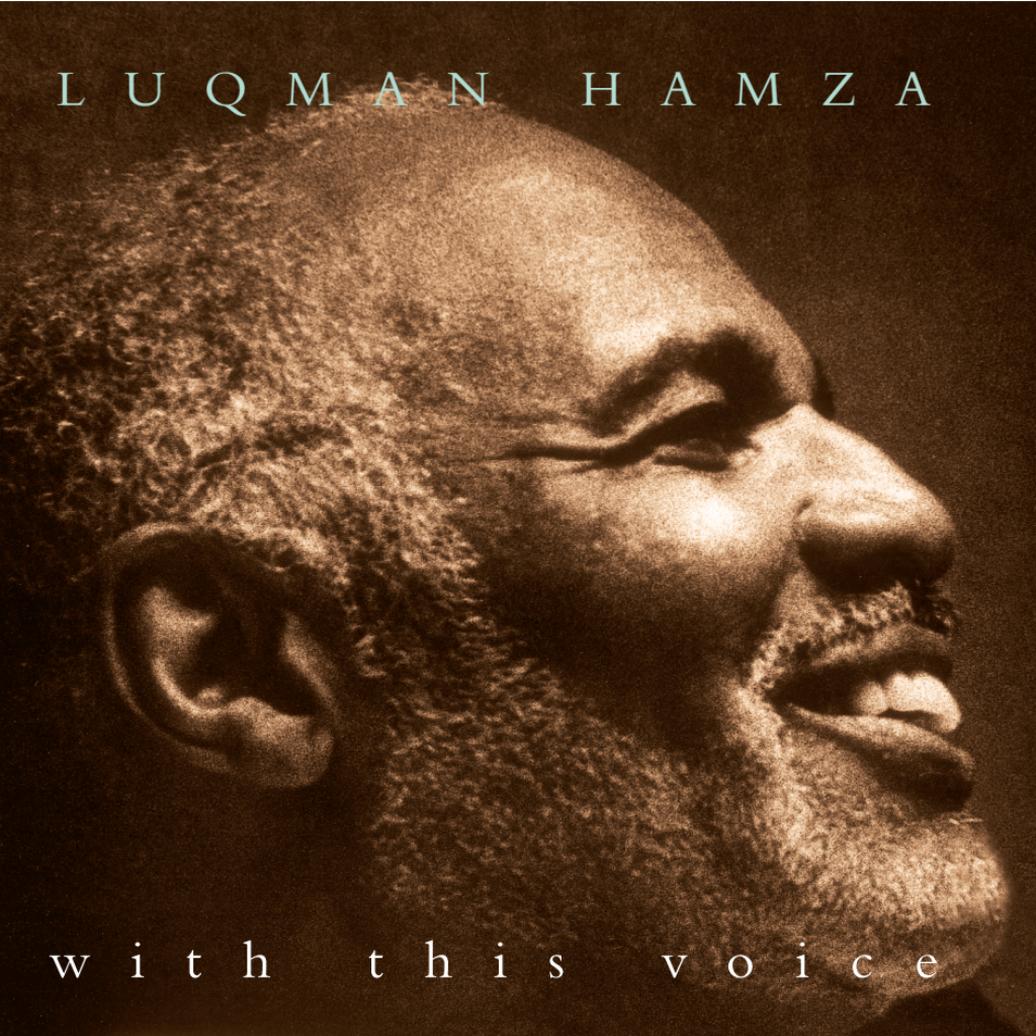


L U Q M A N H A M Z A



w i t h t h i s v o i c e

1. **Born To Be Blue** (R.Wells-M. Torme) Jewell Music, ASCAP 4:42
2. **Feeling Good** (L. Bricusse-A. Newley) Musical Comedy Productions, ASCAP 6:08
3. **My One And Only Love** (Guy Wood) Colgems EMI, ASCAP 4:21
4. **Never Let Me Go** (R. Evans-J. Livingston) Famous Music, ASCAP 3:21
5. **Weaver Of Dreams** (J. Elliott-V. Young) Chappell & Co., ASCAP 2:53
6. **Until The Real Thing Comes Along** (R. Cotrill) Cotrill Music, BMI 4:21
7. **Blue Moon** (R. Rodgers-L. Hart) EMI Robbins Music, ASCAP 3:28
8. **My Funny Valentine** (R. Rodgers-L. Hart) Chappell & Co., ASCAP 4:41
9. **Don't Get Around Much Anymore** (Ellington-Russell) Estate of Mercer Ellington, ASCAP 3:20
10. **Laura** (J. Mercer-D. Raskin) Mercer Music, ASCAP 4:08
11. **What Does It Take** (J. Burke-J. Van Heusen) Music Sales Corp., ASCAP 4:01
12. **Just One Of Those Things** (Cole Porter) Harms Inc., ASCAP 5:16
13. **With These Hands** (B. Davis-A. Silver) Cromwell Music, ASCAP 4:11

Audiophile bonus track:

14. **Smoke Gets In Your Eyes** (O. Harbach-J. Kern) Universal Polygram, ASCAP 3:06

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If this isn't it, it will have to do until the real thing comes along. That's the lyric but it doesn't hold here. Luqman Hamza is the real thing. If he isn't "the last of the balladeers" as he bills himself, he's one of the treasured few remaining who "went to school on" Nat King Cole, Charles Brown and Billy Eckstine as a teen. But Luqman, formerly known as Larry Cummings, was never a copyist. He wrapped his clear tenor voice in a suave and romantic persona all his own (set off by his movements on the ivories). He forged his own path as a singer of love songs. Fifty years later, he is still miraculously fresh and at the top of his powers, living in his native Kansas City, and very much in love.

Sit with Luqman Hamza for a few minutes and he'll share with you his intriguing world of jazz ballads and love songs. The music of his world revealed to him by osmosis living in Kansas City during its musical heyday. Luqman grew up in the midst of Kansas City's 18th and Vine jazz night club district, so it's no wonder young Luqman watched, and listened to many local to national music luminaries.

"I'd see Charlie Parker walking down the street. I'd see Joe Turner walking down the street. I used to hang outside the doors of the great jazz clubs and listen to the music."

"At that time singers such as Charles Brown, Nat King Cole, and Bill Kenny of the Inkspots had a suave way of presenting themselves, both in song and style. I'd see them perform and they were immaculate from head to toe. I studied how they'd listen to each other. Nobody got in anybody's way. Then you had the vocal on top. That's a lot goin' on. Everything's tryin' to complement the singer and he's tryin' to complement what's happenin'. Phrasing was so important – The voice became an instrument like a horn."

"Billy Eckstine was like a school for me. Well, half a dozen guys in his band were from right here in K.C. John Jackson, you would hear him play alto and you would think that it was Charlie Parker. In '41 and '42, the two of them were in Jay McShann's band along with another friend of mine, trumpeter Freddie Culliver. Freddie wrote Southern Fried, which was made popular by Charlie Barnet during the time he had Billie Holiday singin' with his band. He was one of the guys helping

me as I was trying to get myself started. There were others like the late tenor sax man Jimmy Keith and Maurice Wheeler, a fine alto player who also happened to be a nephew of Sleepy Hickock, Charlie Parker's favorite piano player from around here. Jimmy Keith worked with big band leader Harlan Leonard and did the arrangement for Myra Taylor's *The Spider and the Fly*.

Along with friends Lucky Wesley, and at various times, Eddie Saunders, Chuck Rowen, Reco Kemp and James Beasley, Luqman formed an Inkspots type harmony group known as the *The Five Aces* in the mid '40s. His childhood friend, Sonny Kenner, also sang and backed the Aces on guitar. A 1948 Municipal Auditorium appearance with Bob Hope and then a regular fifteen-minute Sunday program on radio station KIMO made the group locally famous. Club gigs increased when they graduated from high school.

When the group broke up in 1951, Luqman started sitting in at fabled venues like *The Orchid Room* where Dinah Washington and Billie Holiday played; and at *The Boulevard Room* where, at 21, he joined in an all night jam with a Ray Charles and was also onstage with a young Miles Davis. A long association with Consolidated Orchestras of America booking agents Johnny Tumino and Chet Stemps began in 1950 and gave him enough work to pursue music fulltime. With his own trio, featuring a Dizzy Gillespie and Dinah Washington alum, drummer Teddy Stewart, Luqman played *Tootie's Mayfair*, a club where high profilers like Sarah Vaughan, Charlie Parker and Billie Holiday were often booked and *The Embers Lounge*. In 1953, he co-wrote **When You Surrender** and recorded it for the local Damon label, which was later bought out by Decca. He recorded a number of other songs for that label including **Madonna**, which featured Jay McShann on organ.

Also in 1953 he played at the famed *Glass Bar, St. Louis*' top jazz club at that time. That work led to a long standing engagement at another St. Louis club, *The Toast of the Town*, which regularly featured jazz greats Jimmy Forrest, Grant Green, and Peanuts Whalum (uncle of

contemporary recording artist, Kirk Whalum). A few years later, he arrived in Chicago "with a dollar and a quarter in my pocket and a half a tank of gas" With the help of both Joe Glazer at Associated Bookings, and arranger/bass player Johnny Pate, he got work right away at *The Black Orchid* on the north side.

In 1959, A & R man Jack Tracy took Luqman to Chess Records' jazz division, Argo Records for whom he recorded a number of 45's over the course of the next couple years. Throughout the 60's Luqman worked at big name venues and piano bars all over the Chicago loop and Rush St., among them *The Playboy Club*, *The Bismarck Hotel*, *Flames East* and *The Bistro*, and on the South Side, *Roberts Show Lounge*. Additionally he played a number of the infamous Hugh Hefner house parties and toured throughout southern Canada.

"After I'd leave my North Side Playboy gig, I'd go to the South Side to catch the sounds of Miles, Nancy Wilson, Dizz, Cannonball, Horace Silver, Gene Ammons, Dexter Gordon, John Coltrane or Sonny Stitt. Nothin' but the best."

In 1971 he returned to his Kansas City home and took up a decade long stint at the *Kansas City Playboy Club*, but he sees the dozen years he spent in Chicago as the best and most stimulating chapter in his musical life. "Everything just turned to magic." Throughout the '70s and '80s he played other top K.C. venues while raising his family.

St. Louis became home base in the early '90s and when he returned to K.C. he met Kathe Kaul, long active in the K.C. music scene and co-founder of the *Kansas City's Blues and Jazz Festival*. Kaul pushed for Hamza's re-emergence in the late '90s, put him in a series of high profile engagements, and stirred up a storm of media attention.

But in the limelight, it's all Luqman, the master stylist, the undaunted, undiluted romantic; seemingly untouched by the years, unphased either by life's disillusionments or by the endless tumble of coarse musical fads.

Joining him on **With This Voice** are his lifelong friend and bandmate from the *Five Aces*, Clarence "Sonny" Kenner.

(Luqman has been best man at all seven of Sonny's weddings!) His adroitly sensitive guitar fills are the perfect bridges from and to Luqman's voice. (Stan Kenton band alum) Kim Park breathes soulful color on sax and flute, following love's unpredictable course as lyrics and melody sketches it out. Drummer Tommy Ruskin's gentle shimmers and splashes on cymbals are always just right. Likewise Tyrone Clark's acoustic bass is an unobtrusive frame for Luqman's relaxed piano and vocals.

Luqman Hamza retrieves more than a dozen remarkable selections from his bottomless songbag, some close to many listeners hearts for years, others lesser known but of equal vintage and no less enchanting. Together they form a seamless odyssey in which the moods and lessons and stories of love are thoughtfully examined.

Born To Be Blue washes the listener in wistfulness, in love lost but fondly remembered: *When I met you my world was bright and sunny / When you left left the curtain fell / I'd like to laugh but nothing strikes me funny / Now my world's a faded pastel.* **Feeling Good** lifts wistfulness to elation. Dragonflies and butterflies, sunshine and scent of pine all reflect the joy of the singer. Musically it's a gently swinging bossa nova. Kim Park's flute sailing effortlessly. **My One and Only Love** not only keeps that joy. It explodes with it! — as the thought moves from nature to the unimaginable gift that passionate love is. *The shadows fall and spread their mystic charms / In the hush of night while you're in my arms. / I feel your lips so warm and tender, my one and only love.* **Weaver of Dreams** turns the coin over. Storms unleashed by unexpected love are at least as frightening as they are enchanting. They frequently leave the loverstruck party pleading, as anyone who's been there knows. *Because of one caress, my world was overturned / At the very start all my bridges burned / By my flaming heart / You'd never leave me, would you? / You couldn't hurt me, could you? / Never let me go.*

The guy tries to impress the girl, even offering to tear the stars out of the sky for her, in the venerable **Until the Real**

Thing Comes Along. Made famous by Pha Terrell with Andy Kirk's band before the war, and by Frank Sinatra and others after the war, this song was the audiophile edition extra cut on Jay McShann's 1999 *Groove Note* release. **What a Wonderful World.** Excellent tenor sax by Ahmad Aladeen. (Jay's bringing Luqman to that session was also *Groove Note's* fortuitous introduction to him. Hats off to Jay!)

Two Rogers and Hart gems are fit side by side here. **Blue Moon** wishes, at a finger-snapping tempo, for that "love of my own"; and **My Funny Valentine** celebrates its arrival plaintively as my favorite work of art. "Duke Ellington and Nat King Cole are represented well with **Don't Get Around Much Anymore** and **Laura**, the plight of missing a lover awfully, and of looking for her in misty lights and passing trains. Those lucky enough to have the audiophile edition of this CD also have a bonus track, the 3 AM bartender-and-me favorite **When Smoke Gets in Your Eyes**.

The real closer and summary of love's lessons this time around is the stunning **With These Hands**, a vow to the beloved done with piano and voice only. *With this heart I will sing for you / Long after the stars have lost their glow... / and I'll never let you go.*

We beg you, Luqman. Please don't.

— John Anthony Brisbin





Executive Production by: *Ying Tan and Sebastian Koh*
Produced by: *Joe Harley*
Recorded by: *Michael C. Ross at Airborne Audio Productions, Kansas City, MO*
on June 7 and 8, 2000
Assistant Engineers: *Isaac Moreno and Don Miller*
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Cover and liner photos: *T. Michael Stanley*
Design and Art Direction: *James Lizardi*

Luqman Hamza: vocals and piano
Sonny Kenner: guitar
Kim Park: alto sax and flute
Tyrone Clark: bass
Tommy Ruskin: drums

Personnel on Until The Real Thing Comes Along
(recorded May 3, 1999 at Airborne Audio Productions):

Luqman Hamza: vocals and piano
Gerald Spait: bass
Todd Strait: drums
Ahmad Alaadeen: tenor sax
Sonny Kenner: guitar

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