



**Drummer and Composer JEFF 'TAIN' WATTS
(Mo' Better Blues, Tonight Show Band)
Releases His Fifth CD as a Leader, *Watts*
On Dark Key Music, February 3**

**His Most Ambitious Project to Date, *Watts* Features
An All-Star Lineup of Branford Marsalis, Terence Blanchard and Christian McBride**

Blessed with complexity, power and imagination, Pittsburgh-born, Brooklyn-based drummer/composer/bandleader **Jeff “Tain” Watts** burst onto the scene in the eighties with Wynton and Branford Marsalis. He has since distinguished himself as the most influential and innovative drummer of his generation, as a valued sideman and recording artist, with four recordings as a leader.

His new CD, simply entitled **Watts** – the follow-up to his 2007 release, **Folk’s Songs** on his own **Dark Key Music** label – with tenor saxophonist **Branford Marsalis**, trumpeter **Terence Blanchard** and bassist **Christian McBride** – is an excellent twenty-first century example of percussion and politics, swing and sarcasm, and improvisation and irony. The title of the CD refers to the leader’s last name, and it also corresponds with the CD cover shot of the famous Watts Towers, which is the symbol of the notorious mid-sixties Los Angeles race riots, and the hometown of the mercurial bassist/composer Charles Mingus.

“I started to write things for more than one lead voice and that kind of led me into doing a predominantly piano-less record.” Watts says. “I wanted to hear these musicians in that setting, with more room to roam. I was inspired by [the record] **Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus** – that piano-less quartet. The more research I did, I just liked where he was coming from. I grew up during the Civil Rights Movement. I remember the riots in Pittsburgh, in Watts, and around the country when I wasn’t even listening to jazz. I heard that feeling through the music of Curtis Mayfield, James Brown, Hendrix and Sly Stone. Mingus’ pieces represented the jazz expression of a vibration that was going on in art, and the United States, in general.”

All of the tracks on this CD were composed by Watts, and many of them bop and weave with Mingus’ vivid vibe, most notably on a nightmarish, Faustian opus called “The Devil’s Ringtone.” “It’s kind of an extension and update of “Fables of Faubus [a rebuke of Arkansas Governor Orval E. Faubus’ resistance to school desegregation from **Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus**]” says Watts. The vocal version features a Texas-twanged client, placing a call on behalf of his boss “Mr. W.” to a “Mr. Devlin,” asking him to lend his hellish expertise toward resolving a situation. The conversation is followed by a Dante’s Inferno of screams, with some ebullient Crescent City strains from Marsalis and Blanchard. “Once Devlin gets into his thing, and a certain amount to torture takes place, I wanted to have something similar to what happens at the conclusion of a New Orleans funeral, which is that second line type of thing, expressed in a more demonic way,” Watts says.

With Marsalis’ serpentine-fired sax, Blanchard’s towering trumpet tones, and McBride’s Afro-blue basslines, Watts and company provide more soulful syncopations with social commentary on the rest of the CD’s selections that move and groove in 4/4 burnout tempos, angular melodies, Latin tinges, and intense, percussion discussions: “Dancin’ 4 Chicken” is a stinging, infectious, blues-meets-Hee-Haw

number derived from Watts' audience dialog that takes aim at a hated African-American archetype: the Uncle Tom. "I'd [say] 'hey, you know, who do you think is an Uncle Tom these days?' And a lot of times, people would get silent," says Watts. "It took a lot for people to actually indict somebody for tomming in this day and age. I kind of get a vibe like the way the times are, it's kind of hard to accuse somebody of being a complete sellout, because it seems like a lot of people feel obliged to play the game to get something down the road."

"Return of the Jitney Man" is Watts' shout-out to his father, and is the latest installment of jitney songs made famous by fellow Pittsburghers Earl "Fatha" Hines and Billy Eckstine. "Brekky with Drecky," is a dedication to the late saxophonist Michael Brecker, based on Ornette Coleman's "Turnaround", which Watts remembers was one of Michael's favorite tunes to play. "Wry Köln" – which first appeared on Watts' *Citizen Tain* CD – is another Coleman-coded composition, a tribute to Coleman's drum feature "T&T" from the Atlantic LP, *Ornette*. Thelonious Monk's "Trinkle Tinkle" is re-interpreted in Wattsonian fashion as the swinging "Dingle-Dangle." The bouncy backbeat and danceable DNA of "Katrina James," is inspired by the loss of James Brown in addition to the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina and it's inhumane aftermath. "M'Buzai" named for a friend of Watts, is a moving and architectural drum solo – an intensely propulsive and personal elegy to Max Roach and Elvin Jones. And "Owed..." is the CD's lone keyboard track, a song of gratitude showcasing the beautiful tone and touch of up-and-coming guest pianist **Lawrence Fields**, who Watts first discovered in St. Louis as a teen.

Born on January 20, 1960, Watts studied classical percussion at Pittsburgh's Duquesne University, and transferred to Berklee School of Music in Boston in 1979 to study jazz, where he met Branford Marsalis, Kevin Eubanks, and Greg Osby. He joined Wynton Marsalis' Quartet in 1981, left in 1988, and joined Branford's group the next year. In 1990 Watts starred in Spike Lee's Film **Mo' Better Blues**, after which, along with Kenny Kirkland and Branford, moved to California to work in the Tonight Show band for three years. Watts moved back to New York in 1995 and while recording and touring with Marsalis' group, recorded over 120 recordings as a sideman, working with the best and brightest artists on the scene including George Benson, Harry Connick Jr, Kenny Garrett, Michael Brecker, Steve Coleman, Geri Allen, Ravi and Alice Coltrane, McCoy Tyner, Kenny Kirkland, and George Cables.. His debut recording as a leader, **Citizen Tain** featured Kenny Kirkland, Kenny Garrett, Branford and Wynton Marsalis (Sony, 1999), followed by *Bar Talk* (Sony, 2002), and *Detained: Live at the Blue Note* (Half Note, 2004). *Folk's Songs* (Dark Key Music, 2007), was the first CD released on his own imprint.

Which brings us to **Watts**: a recording of sepia syncopations and social commentary, propelled by a master of rhythm and tune. "A lot of my compositions kind of start from an idea or concept and grow into something that I don't expect. I'm into the way tunes take on a life of their own and I'm learning to not get in the way of where the tune wants to go. More and more I am enjoying composition as much as playing. All good music has a common ground, whether it's Beethoven, Ellington or Prince... It's all good. I'm just trying to be musical."

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