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JEFFREY OSBORNE

"It's like a dream come true, something I'm sure every lead singer in a band must think about doing at some point in his career. You can believe that it's a great feeling." Those words are just one way Jeffrey Osborne describes life as a solo musical entity. For 10 years the singer/songwriter augmented LTD, one of pop/R&B's more distinctive self-contained aggregations. Now on his own, Osborne has christened soloism with *Jeffrey Osborne*, his shimmering self-titled debut album for A&M, an ambitious project that virtually insures Osborne a special place among pop music's leading male vocalists.

"It was a natural evolution," Osborne says of his departure from the band. "I can never repay those nine individuals for what I learned while I was with them, but it came to a point where I couldn't grow. I had to advance, and leaving the band was the only way I could do it." Once free, Osborne began sifting through the various contract offers. Many of them were inviting, but none totally fit the standards he had set for his career as a solo artist. "The problem," he says, "was that no one recognized me as an individual. Record companies were telling me that after being with such a large band, my marketability was almost nil." A&M, who'd witnessed Osborne's ability firsthand with LTD, saw things differently. They pitched him a deal and a year of in-depth negotiations later, Osborne had re-signed with the label, his professional musical base since 1973, when LTD came to A&M.

Osborne began nurturing his considerable vocal chops early on as a child in his native Providence, Rhode Island, where he used to listen to the likes of Stevie Wonder, Aretha Franklin and Sarah Vaughan. However, as the son of a trumpet player, he was more interested in mastering an instrument than his voice (after all, his brother Billy, who would also become a member of LTD, could hold his own on piano and organ), and took on the drums. In fact, it wasn't until long after Osborne joined LTD that the band discovered he could sing, and put him out front. As the band's vocal centerpiece and one of its key songwriters, Osborne led LTD through such hits as "Love Ballad," "Back In Love" and "Shine On," among other gold and platinum successes. He initially made the decision to leave the group in 1979, but in the interest of the band, stayed on until '81, after their *Shine On* LP.

Osborne was stringent in setting the criteria for the producer of his first album. As his manager Jack Nelson put it, "Jeffrey wanted someone who was more than just musically competent; he wanted someone acquainted with the *mechanics* of music and its production." Enter George Duke, who in addition to producing a string of chart records for himself and artists like Seawind, Dee Dee Bridgewater, and Raul De Souza, supplied A Taste Of Honey with a million-selling number one pop single with his revitalizing production of "Sukiyaki" and teamed with bassist Stanley Clarke as the *Clarke/Duke Project* to come up with the ballad "Sweet Baby," which reached the Top 10 on pop charts. Osborne says he knew Duke was the man for the job from their very first meeting. "More than anything, I wanted the opportunity to record some of my songs the way I heard them in my head, as opposed to someone re-working the material," says Osborne. "George was willing to listen to my ideas and views. Actually, he ended up giving me as much control as I would have had producing the record on my own."

From there, Osborne and Duke went into Duke's Hollywood home studio with first-string sessioners like Louis Johnson, Tony Maiden, Steve Ferrone, David "Hawk" Wolinski and Mike Sembello and emerged with *Jeffrey Osborne*, a state-of-the-art ten-song production—eight of them written or co-written by Osborne—that is as commercially accessible as it is musically substantial. The LP covers all bases: After the mid-tempo sway of "Eenie Meenie" captures your heart, the raucous "Who You Talking To" and "Ready For Your Love" will work you into a funkified frenzy. And then there are the tracks "Congratulations" and "Wings Of Love," two sparkling exercises in the art of pop balladry, but most of all, there is the overwhelming presence of Osborne himself. During *Jeffrey Osborne*, his vocals soar over these tracks with the power and grace of an eagle. The consummate vocalist, Osborne makes all of this work sound easy.

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"This album is probably one of the finest things I've ever done," Osborne says. "I could feel myself singing a lot better — a lot cleaner. And the songs here are not just grooves, they're melodic, structured songs. I'm totally satisfied with the results." As for the future, Osborne is jumping in, feet first. There are tours to plan, more songs to sing, and equally important, more songs to write. "That is something that I'm really concentrating on — songwriting. Now that people realize I am a writer as well, they're requesting songs from me, and that's great. I simply intend to cover all bases; this is only the beginning."