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## BROTHERS JOHNSON

**I**n just five years, the Brothers Johnson have accomplished what most acts dream about. *Look Out For #1*, their debut album, and all albums since—*Right On Time*, *Blam* and *Light Up The Night*—have all achieved platinum status, selling well over one million copies each. As if clear-cut financial success wasn't enough, the duo went out and pulled down a Grammy award, developed themselves into one of the most exciting live acts on the international circuit, all the while helping to engineer the kind of bass and guitar interplay that has become one of the most popular music trends of the eighties.

It is the Johnsons' exclusive past that makes *Winners*, their new album, probably the most significant link in the chain—the record debuts the Brothers, for the first time as producers. "We decided to do it ourselves when it became apparent that Quincy Jones, our producer from the beginning, had more projects than he could get to," comments George Johnson, regarding the move. "The three of us sat down and Quincy said, 'you guys see the position I'm in, all these projects backed up; think you can handle it yourselves?' We just decided to go for it."

Both George and Louis agree that a wealth of knowledge was attained under Jones' guiding hand, but with *Winners*, more than ever before, the emphasis is on musical growth and expansion. "The album still has the basic Brothers Johnson sound," says Louis Johnson. "For instance, Side A is the Brothers everybody knows, but Side B is the surprise. The public has never heard us play like this before. Being musicians, we had to break away and do new things, otherwise you just become stagnant. Being able to stretch out is really one of the biggest joys of producing ourselves. This one's different."

Indeed. The album's opener, "The Real Thing," is traditional Brothers Johnson at their best—the strong melody over that trademarked stalking groove. Turn the record over though, and you've got diversification like "In The Way," a sassy South American-ish tune contributed by the group Toto; the jerky, pounding funk of "I Want You" and the unquestionably straight-ahead rock 'n roll of the saucy "Hot Mama." *Winners*, explain the Brothers, simply reflects the many musical styles that have influenced them. "'Caught Up,' our decidedly jazz track of the album, was originally written years ago," says Louis, "but, so was 'Hot Mama.' Our influences have always run the gamut, and it's only natural that the music we create be the same way."

George and Louis jumped into the task of creating *Winners* with anxious, open eyes. They'd discovered, over a span of four bestselling albums that the key to a smooth session was having good songs in hand before even booking studio time, but they had to learn about other aspects of production as they went along. "There were a lot of things to think about," declares George. "Once, the tape machine broke down during a session and we had to deal with it. Then, we had to surround ourselves with musicians whom we could communicate ideas to and who could come up with what we wanted. The guys from Toto (who play on some of the tracks) were great to work with. Louis brought in arranger David Diggs, whom he'd worked with in the past and Jack Puig, who is a great engineer and a nice guy. As a result, this album is the quickest album we've ever recorded (two months) and also the cheapest."

*Winners* concentrates on the unique sense of rhythm and dynamics the Brothers developed as a result of accompanying each other on guitar and bass from childhood. The dazzling horns and string arrangements that grace previous Brothers Johnson endeavors are there, but so is a demanding presence of rhythm that has been played down on past projects. "On our other albums," says Louis, "the strings and horns are usually way out there. The rhythm section is the pulse of the whole thing, so with this album we brought the guitars and drums up so you can feel the power and the drive."

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Since the completion of *Winners* the Brothers Johnson have begun charting their course as producers of projects outside their own organization. Louis produced a Christian music concept called *Passage* that includes his wife Valerie and Brothers Johnson percussionist Richard Heath, while George contemplates the production offers that have come his way. And of course, they also plan projects to be produced as a team: "It's just a matter of finding the right act," says George. "Right now we're busy concentrating on ourselves. I'm already writing songs for our next album."

*Winners*—perfect title for an album from a duo that clearly knows the meaning of the word.