**BIO**

Incredible how it’s been over ten years since **Jua Howard** was making quite a name for himself in neo-soul circles, crooning in velvety tenor tones reminiscent of Luther Vandross and Donny Hathaway in clubs from New York City to London. “Anticipation”, his 2007 self-released debut CD of mostly original mid-tempo tunes and ballads, was picking up play on Smooth Jazz and R&B stations. Yet Jua, who uses only his first name professionally (Swahili for “sun”), was having second thoughts about his musical direction. The Chicago-born singer says, “With the R&B neo-soul scene, everything started to sound the same.”

While living in the Washington D.C. area and working for Howard University, Jua gigged as a background vocalist with the legendary Blackbyrds, the band best-known for such 1970s hits as “Walking in Rhythm” and “Happy Music.” “Jazz was clearly a big part of their foundation,” he says of the Blackbyrds.

“Singing with them made me think seriously about pursuing a career in jazz.”

During the summer of 2009, Jua moved to the San Francisco area and enrolled at Berkeley’s Jazzschool Institute, now known as the California Jazz Conservatory. As one of the inaugural students in their Jazz Vocals program, he became the first recipient of the Conservatory’s **Mark Murphy Vocal Jazz Scholarship**, named for veteran poll-winning singer Murphy. Jua also studied privately with vocal coach Raz Kennedy, formerly of Bobby McFerrin’s “Voicestra”, while there.

Melding his earlier musical accomplishments in vocal ensembles, both classical and gospel, and of those in neo-soul and R&B, **Jua** has developed a distinctive, emotion-gripping approach to vocal Jazz that’s quite wonderfully his own.

**Jua** notes “Jazz, which is based on improvisation, is about being a part of an ensemble and everyone communicating with each other to get the musical statement across,”; he adds ”Even though I’m standing in front, I’m just one of the instruments telling a story to the audience. It’s not about me. It’s about the story. It’s about the music and paying respect and credence to the music.”

His evolutionary emergence as a Jazz vocal stylist is clearly evidenced in Jua’s sophomore recorded and inaugural Jazz project “*Colors of Life*”, released in 2014. The 10-song CD features four original compositions along with standards from Sam Rivers, Abbey Lincoln, Bob Dorough, Yip Harburg, Bill Withers, James Williams and Pamela Baskin-Watson.

Produced by the late **Onaje Allan Gumbs**, veteran New York pianist, arranger, and producer noted for his work with Norman Connors, Nat Adderley, Woody Shaw, and many others, the album showcases **Jua** in the empathetic company of guitarist **Shan Kenner**, bassist **Gregory M. Jones**, drummer **Vince Ector**, percussionist **Gary Fritz**, and tenor and soprano saxophonist **Roger Byam**. Three of the original compositions featured on the album were written in collaboration with Jua’s former Jazzschool instructor, pianist **Matt Clark**.

Currently residing on the East Coast, Jua continues songwriting, performing and working on his next project.