

Samy Thiébault Crests the Wave

After *Caribbean Stories*, *Symphonic Tales* and *Awé*, the celebrated tenor saxophonist reveals his new single, “In Waves” – and sounds the October 2024 arrival of his tenth album of the same name.

This time, Samy Thiébault pulls us into the heart of the ocean. One of the most unique saxophonists working on the French jazz scene, Samy is also a passionate surfer and great lover of the sea. Samy’s travels to Guadeloupe, the Fiji Islands and the Pacific Southwest led to encounters with ocean communities. He returned with a majestic new body of work freely melding elevation, allegory and the fantastical realm. Recorded at six locations around the world during a tour that took him to Cayenne, Jakarta and Manila, *In Waves* is the vision of an accomplished artist sensitive to sound, nature and humanism. This newest album contains multitudes, and it seems that Thiébault – ardent admirer of Coltrane and Pharoah Sanders – has chosen a powerful, infinite wave to be his guiding force.

“I’ve always been a surfer.” But it was in 2016, while in Bali for a concert, that Samy Thiébault reconnected with his passion. “I hadn’t surfed in many years because music had taken over”, the Ivory Coast native said. “When I returned to the waves, it was like a high. It became necessary.” Then, during a rough patch, Samy read *In Waves*, AJ Dungo’s graphic novel of grief, resilience and surfing in the face of his partner’s death. The tenor saxophonist, who grew up on the Atlantic shores of France, came to realize the potential of making art from an attachment to the ocean, finding deeper spiritual and social connections there. It was the start of a long labor. With his saxophone and microphones slung over his shoulder, he went in search of ocean people: women and men of today who, along with their music, nourish a near-magical relationship with the sea.

“In Waves” is the first, eponymous single from the album, and it touches upon everything Samy Thiébault set out to do. Guided by a group he describes as the best he’s ever had, the musician is ready to plunge into the water. The group is made up of Marine Thibault (programming, turntables and flutes), Léonardo Montana (piano, keyboards), Arnaud Dolmen (drums) and Damien Varaillon (double bass). What we hear first on the single is the continuous, calm murmur of the waves. Fine, sun-bleached sand, wild nature and verdant green, turquoise water and the hatchings of foam. This is an island in the Pacific South, but we could be anywhere humans live in communion with the ocean. The flute sets the scene and the beat picks up to meet the ocean’s swell. The cymbals are like reefs. It’s hard to find a center of gravity in all of it. It floats, moves, carried by the current. The saxophone dives in, and, at the heart of the wave, the mind wanders.

Samy met Armelle Cippe and her chorus in Cayenne, French Guyana. He also contacted Cynthia Abraham, originally from Guadeloupe, who navigates among languages and makes them her own. What are they singing? “Na pua ri ki te va ka.” It’s Polynesian for “this is my boat”, explains Samy. “It’s a ritual saying used by indigenous people of the South Pacific before they set sail. It asks the ocean for protection – protection of their boat, but more broadly, for the ocean itself to serve as their craft. And some surfers have also adopted the expression.” At this point in the track, we’re struck by the powerful vibrato of François Ladrezeau, pulpiter and captain, the undisputed guardian of Gwo Ka music from Guadeloupe. “A moi donné grand océan!” And, in a single breath, he sends Samy to the crest of the wave. A tenor sax solo is played on the summit, with deep lows and many sinuous curves. “When you go into the water, you’re at the border between human and nature. There’s a total abandon of the self, a kind of forgetting.”

The sea’s color has changed. The boat has disappeared behind the endless horizon. In a major key, the kindly ocean will care for its crew. But where do we go next? We’ll find out in October on *In Waves*, the album. (Release date October XX, Gaya Music).