

# José James bridges jazz, hip-hop and more

The gifted singer-songwriter and his trio perform Saturday at The Loft @ UC San Diego



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By [George Varga \(/staff/george-varga/\)](#) | 7 a.m. March 30, 2016



The Minneapolis-born Jose James has developed an intriguing stylistic synthesis. *Janette Beckman*

Singer-songwriter José James is a musical sponge who seems to have few limits on how much he can absorb.

Jazz, soul, hip-hop, pop — whatever the style, this Minneapolis-born son of a Panamanian jazz saxophonist seems to have soaked in an enormous amount in his 38 years. While he is still refining his genre-leaping approach and adding contours to his artistic identity, he has developed an intriguing stylistic synthesis.

At times, what results suggests he could be the missing link — or, at least, the connective sonic tissue — between Johnny Hartman, D’Angelo, Joe Williams, Bill Withers, Gil Scott-Heron, J Dilla, Marvin Gaye and Billie Holiday, whose legacy James salutes on his 2015 Blue Note Records album “Yesterday I Had the Blues.”

His warm, rich, baritone voice and oh-so-supple phrasing are inviting in any setting. If he sometimes sounds a little stiff when delivering a jazz classic that predates his birth, he just as often is able to dig down deep to make an old chestnut his own and give it a subtle new twist.

Almost without exception, James champions taste, understatement and carefully calibrated dynamic control over the bluster and shallow vocal showboating so many other vocalists favor these days. He is equally comfortable singing with McCoy Tyner, Robert Glasper and Kris Bowers, to cite three notable pianists with whom James has collaborated.

His Saturday concert at the Loft @ UC San Diego will include selections from “Yesterday I Had the Blues” and a preview of his next album, the socially and politically inspired “Love in a Time of Madness.”

James will be accompanied by keyboardist Takeshi Ohbayashi, bassist/harmony singer Solomon Dorsey and drummer Nate Smith, best known for his work with former Miles Davis band bass great Dave Holland. Expect a memorable performance that should appeal to jazz, soul and hip-hop fans alike.

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