

JD ALLEN CHARLIE HUNTER GREGG AUGUST RUDY ROYSTON
AMERICANA VOL.2



- 1 UP SOUTH 6:30
- 2 THIS WORLD IS A MEAN WORLD 5:45
(PUBLIC DOMAIN)
- 3 THE WERK SONG 4:47
- 4 HAMMER AND HOE 4:21
- 5 YOU DON'T KNOW ME 5:05
(EDDY ARNOLD-CINDY WALKER) MUAC MUSIC/BMI
- 6 JACKIE AND JOHNNY 3:24
- 7 MICKEY AND MALLORY 3:28
- 8 A MOUTHFUL OF FOREVERS 3:35
- 9 THE BATTLE OF BLAIR MOUNTAIN 3:47
- 10 IRENE (MOTHER) 3:31 
- 11 DOWN SOUTH 3:51

ALL COMPOSITIONS BY JD ALLEN (HOUSE OF EUGENE/BMI) UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

JD ALLEN TENOR SAXOPHONE CHARLIE HUNTER GUITAR (EXCEPT TRACKS 6-8)
GREGG AUGUST BASS RUDY ROYSTON DRUMS

PRODUCED BY JD ALLEN EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: BARNEY FIELDS
RECORDED AT SAMURAI HOTEL RECORDING STUDIO, ASTORIA, NY, JANUARY 26, 2022
ENGINEERED, MIXED AND MASTERED BY MIKE MARCIANO
PHOTOGRAPHY: JOHN MAROLAKOS DESIGN: REBECCA MEEK PR: KIM SMITH

JD ALLEN PLAYS A YANAGISAWA TENOR SAXOPHONE, *10 SYOS TENOR MOUTHPIECE AND D'ADDARIO SELECT JAZZ REEDS

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"If you really want to learn about a person, check out their bookshelf and the music that they listen to," says saxophonist and composer JD Allen. "People can get together and find common ground safely in the arts. Outside of that, it's a bit of a challenge."

Although personal, the music heard on *Americana, Vol. 2* encapsulates a universal spirit based in roots and reflection. It is an undiluted sound delivering a common touch across boundaries in an era of uncertainty, anxiety, and recovery.

"What we're doing isn't as much about getting listeners to be amazed by song structures," Allen explains. "It's more about the feeling that you get when you hear these lines and having something that you can hum to yourself and remember away from the music. Reaching this requires us to sit with the aspect of simplicity to find the discipline and courage to play from it."

Allen's most recent albums and performances bear witness that he is now one of the great communicators on the tenor saxophone. A few days before the musicians entered Samurai Hotel Studios in Astoria, Queens, Allen sketched out original tunes and arrangements for quartet along with three brief meditations for trio. At the session, he played and directed the music with an urgency in the tradition of many of the music's principal heroes and legendary figures. As a result, the music's ethos spread from the band members in the tracking room to the friends and engineers gathered in the control room; and accordingly, will extend to the listeners.

Allen's cohorts on *Americana, Vol. 2* are comprised of old and new friends. Longtime trio collaborators, bassist Gregg August and drummer Rudy Royston, share a 15-year history with Allen and they sound out emphatically. On eight of the album's selections, the trio expands to a quartet with the addition of new friend and guitarist Charlie Hunter.

"When Charlie plays the blues, I believe him," Allen says. "His music brings light to me as a listener. When we met, we found out that we grew up in different areas of the country, but our experiences happen to be very similar. That's *Americana* right there. I wanted that on this record, and Charlie certainly fit the bill."

"Gregg and Rudy and I have played together for years, and we've had a number of conversations and experiences," says Allen. "Through our similarities and differences, we've been able to remain good friends and our brotherhood is evidence of democracy in action."

A diverse collection of muses have inspired Allen's latest work. One inspiration is the plight of Southern Black sharecroppers and their early to mid-1900's exodus to the North and Midwest. Acknowledged as The Great Migration, nearly six million Black Americans were a part of this journey over a 60-year period.

In that number was Allen's maternal great grandfather, The Rev. Eugene Ross. The clergyman and sharecropper, along with his wife Irene, traveled from Mississippi to Detroit, Michigan

which became home for subsequent generations of Ross' family. As citizens like Ross integrated the Midwest, they withstood the backlash of bigotry and found themselves as central figures in the new working class.

Allen's research also led him to author Robin D.G. Kelly's *Hammer and Hoe* - a book that spotlights a gutsy delegation of struggling Black farmers that remained in the South and sought alliances in the 1930's with a small group of white counterparts. Twenty years later, other Black families who remained in the South would organize around democracy to lead the country in the struggle for human and civil rights.

These timeless inspirations are musically echoed on the album via new originals such as "Hammer and Hoe," "Irene (Mother)," and the album's thematic bookends "Up South" (a nickname for Detroit, Michigan) and "Down South" (a reference to Mississippi).

"Another area where we share common ground in our society centers around labor," Allen says. "Sharecropping in the Deep South is certainly one story, but we also want to remember those that have sacrificed and given their lives in pursuit of fair wages and working conditions. The Battle of Blair Mountain in 1921 was the biggest armed resistance after the Civil War, and it's another inspiration for me."

Allen's tunes "The Werk Song," and "The Battle of Blair Mountain," are melodies that memorialize these events. The results bubble over with deep and guttural utterances. Additionally, Allen's band turns in amazingly lyrical performances on the folk tune "This World Is a Mean World" and on the Walker-Arnold standard "You Don't Know Me" echoing the original sentiments found in both songs' stanzas.

"We're still fighting for understanding and to get away from the effects of people like Henry Ford who were largely instrumental in segregating music and assigning the 'race records' categories to divide music along color lines," Allen explains. "To that end, unionizing and forming action-based coalitions are things that need to be talked about from a labor standpoint and from an artist's standpoint as well."

The sax-bass-drums trio musings that appear midway into the album, "Jackie and Johnny," "Mickey and Mallory," and "A Mouthful of Forever," provide a sonic snapshot of the in-between spaces and pauses wherein lies the struggle for true progress.

In its candor and immediacy *Americana, Vol. 2* reveals the plight of a generation moving from a pre-pandemic callousness, inhabiting the liminal spaces, and journeying to post-pandemic possibilities of empathy and respect.

"We can certainly get to a better place together," Allen says. "To do that, we're going to have to pool our creativity, our resources, and call on the best of our traditions as methods for our transformation."

— GREG BRYANT

