

JESSIE ALLEN COOPER SHARES “CLASSICS”

As a devout and endlessly curious student of history, Jessie Allen Cooper can't help but be inspired by his iconic ancestor Benjamin Franklin, a Founding Father (and guy on the “Benji,” the \$100 bill!) whose grand list of accomplishments and inventions include the lightning rod, bifocals, Franklin Stove, the Library Company, Philadelphia's first fire department and the University of Pennsylvania. Closing in on a stylistically eclectic 40- year career as a recording artist, the multi-talented producer, composer, saxophonist and harmonica player has long used music as his vehicle to, like Franklin in his time, add something meaningful, positive and enduring to our culture and help make our society a better place to live.

An AllMusic review of his 2008 album Let's Connect perfectly captured the dynamic, freewheeling nature of Jessie's musical aesthetic: “Tapping into the spirit of Franklin, he invents his own transcendent genre in spots, mixing, for instance his sensual bluesy sax with edgy harmonica in a soundscape that blends soulful smooth jazz with chill atmospheres.” Ensembling from project to project with some of Los Angeles' top session musicians, Jessie's popular radio friendly excursions into funky and soulful smooth jazz and New Age music (the latter starting with his classic 1987 collection Soft Wave on Sona Gaia/Narada) are merely the foundation of a musical journey that has included artful excursions with environmental sounds, world music, techno-dance and blues/rock.

On his latest collection, the perfectly titled Classics, Jessie presents a dynamic set of compelling highlights of his expansive, ever-evolving artistry via 10 hand-selected tracks from throughout his career, covering a time span from 1983's Heaven Sent (which was released on digital in 2004) through Let's Connect in the late 2000s. Incredibly, “In the Mountains,” a dreamy, intoxicating soprano sax and kalimba duet with late kalimba player Buddy Kithara (featuring a beautiful soundscape of nature sounds), from Heaven Sent, continues to receive regular airplay on Sirius/XM's Spa channel.

“Through every moment and emotion in my life, music has kept me moving forward,” Jessie says. “Without music, the world would be an entirely different place and most likely filled with unhappy people. From a strictly marketing standpoint, my stylistic diversity has been an issue throughout my career, but if you look at most artists, from actors to musicians, who are super creative, they all love to explore new territory. It's like learning to mix paints or cooking with various spices. I love learning how different elements blend together without worrying about trying to be one specific type of artist.

“Much more important than the way others want to categorize me is the impact it has on individuals – whether I'm being told by couples that mine was the first music their baby ever heard or playing concerts for veterans dealing with PTSD and other physical and mental health issues,” he adds. “When you're given the ability to write a song, the best thing you can do is share it with others to lift them up. Many of my best songs actually come to me in dreams, and it's a unique process to go from that realm into writing it down as it came to me and then gathering the right musicians to record it.”

In addition to “In the Mountains,” which offers a glimpse of Jessie finding his early artistic expression, the nine other tracks on Classics capture vibes from his different creative eras. The three tracks from 1992’s Moment in Time – “Sun Talk,” “Amazon” and “As the Sea Whispers” – showcase his sensual and funky soprano sax in the service of infectious melodic smooth jazz mixed with exciting touches of exotica. “Sun Talk” has a tropical energy, while “Amazon” transports us to an adventurous South American soundscape with the help of guitarist Ricardo Silveira. “As the Sea Whispers” is a dreamy ballad which also showcases Jessie’s dynamic harmonica playing.

A little over ten years later, one of Jessie’s most prolific periods included Sound Travels (2004), Pacific Lounge (2005) and Let’s Connect. These projects are powerfully represented on the Classics album by the old school soul-jazz and funk jam “Full Moon”; the graceful and passionate ballad “Song For You,” the closing track on the album inspired by a dear female friend; the lush piano/sax ballad “Inside a Dream” featuring Tim Ponzek and Jessie on both soprano and tenor; the tender, meditative piano/sax duet “St. Patrick”; the high energy, sax and harmonica driven Latin fired romp “Rio Del Soul,” featuring an intense percussion solo by former Rippingtons member Steve Reid; and “Let’s Connect,” another spirited sax and harmonica showcase (this time with Jessie’s deep and sensual, Grover Washington-esque tenor sound) with a tight urban jazz pocket groove. A native of Everett, Washington, Cooper tried out numerous different instruments before a Deep Purple and John Mayall concert in his teens inspired him to play the harmonica. He sang and played harmonica in bands throughout his high school years. He picked up the sax at 19, citing his chief influences as Grover Washington Jr., Spyro Gyra, Paul Desmond and Paul Butterfield. He began playing with numerous local groups and toured with the popular show band Aurora for a while before moving to Southern California in the early 80s.

While pursuing his musical career, his background as a carpenter and visual artist prompted him to start a picture framing business in Santa Monica that specializes in fine art picture framing. J. Cooper Picture Framing is a thriving business to this day, and Jessie has framed the likes of Ansel Adams, Rembrandt and Picasso for hundreds of celebrities, collectors, galleries, artists and museums (including LACMA, MOCA and Skirball Museum) for over 35 years.

“It has been a true blessing to be able to share my framing talents and music with the world for so many years,” Jessie says. “Sometimes, it feels as though these creative expressions are coming from somewhere beyond me in the universe, and my goal is always to go deep enough into my spirit to pull the greatest source of inspiration out.”

Bio written by Jonathan Widran, JWVibe.com

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