

HEAVEN SENT

Music for Health, Heart and Soul Progression
The Music of Jessie Allen Cooper

by Anja-Leigh Russell

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The term "new age" music has been used for many years to describe music which seems to fit into a category of its own. It would be easy to assume that the composers of this music also fit into a unique category. What they have in common is a *conscious awareness* that their music is created, developed, recorded and given to the public to make a positive contribution to the listeners of the world . . . and to the planet itself.

Jessie Allen Cooper, the 30-year-old producer and composer of a new album entitled **Heaven Sent** is a person who consciously creates his music to make a difference. And it is this conscious and loving effort which may help to break the barriers to bring new age music to the forefront.

Although his background includes an intense musical interest and study of jazz, rock, classical and blues, he has produced a unique musical creation which does not recognizably fit into any of these categories.

Actually, **Heaven Sent** was originally recorded for Jessie's personal enjoyment, and friends liked it so much he decided to put it on the market. It is an uncomplicated recording using only two instruments—soprano saxophone and kalimba—to which the sounds of nature are added. And yet the blending of sounds are so intriguing and compatible that the simplicity becomes relaxing and seems to take the listener to a new dimension.

The recording was made at Western Washington University in the state of Washington. Jessie, who plays soprano saxophone (among other instruments), and his partner at the time, Buddy Kithara, who plays the kalimba, liked to experiment with sound in spatial environments. They used to walk through a particular hallway to get to classes and were intrigued by the sound qualities present there. One afternoon, their recording session with another group was cancelled. Already geared up to record, they decided to go to this hallway and record something of their own. It was a momentous decision.

"I really felt the music was 'heaven sent' because as we played, the music was just given to us. It flowed out in such an easy way. Not only to us, but to whoever would become the listener."

Jessie kept that original recording for a couple of years feeling there was a missing element to it. Then one evening, when he was discussing this unsolved dilemma with composer/friend Lester Abrams (co-author of "Minute By Minute" recorded by the Doobie Brothers, and recipient of a Grammy for the arrangement of "What a Fool Believes"), something inside of him said, "Add nature." He remembers that moment as a "new birth in my life" when he realized he had the foresight to envision and create additional components around certain pieces, add

different elements together and devise an entirely new form.

Although music and nature albums already exist on the market, what makes **Heaven Sent** unique is that it's a conceptual album; it's like going on a journey. With **Heaven Sent**, the person's imagination is allowed to go wherever it wants depending upon the listener's mood. *You* become the pilot and **Heaven Sent** provides the means to take you on a fanciful journey.

"When I saw how to blend the music Buddy and I had created with the natural sounds of the ocean, birds, a rainstorm, and the sounds in a country night, I envisioned the album as creating a day, a night, and another day. It starts on the first morning two blocks away from the ocean. It takes about two minutes to walk the distance to the beach. For the two blocks, the listener hears various natural sounds suggestive of a walk toward the ocean. As you get closer and closer, the sound of the ocean becomes louder. When we finally close that distance and arrive on the beach, we find two musicians improvising on their instruments.

"From that beach scene, the kalimba solo moves the listener into a mood suggestive of being in an open field during the day. After a time, the two musicians again join and continue to play into the night. The next day, we are in the mountains. We hear the birds and the water from a stream and also experience a rainstorm. From there, the rest of the album takes us on a journey following the water back down the mountain and returning to the ocean."

Even though Jessie relates to this particular storyline, he is quick to explain that the listener is not bound to this story. The music is more of a mood-creator and allows the listener the freedom to move with his or her own moods.

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Jessie's journey began on March 23, 1954 when he was born to Lucille and Clair Cooper. He is the oldest of three brothers whose father left when he was five years old and died when he was 13. According to Jessie, not having a real strong father figure helped him to develop the artistic side of himself.

"My brother and I were really into music at a young age. We both had paper routes and every penny we made we bought the latest 45 rpm record. I think music came more naturally because I didn't have a father there trying to make me be some person he thought I should be. My mother just loved us and told us we could be whatever we were willing to work for. I think a lot of people have complexes because they've never really followed their own

dreams."

At the age of 15, Jessie realized that music was going to be the main focus in his life. He picked up the harmonica after being inspired by John Mayall, and then went on to develop a passion for the saxophone. He deepened his study of jazz improvisation and composition with Scott Reeves at Western Washington State University. Hours were spent practicing and listening to music and now he feels that the time was well-spent.

"Everyone told me that if I practiced a lot of hours every day, I would be a hot musician when I grew up. I'm really glad I put in those hours when I was younger. But being a good musician is more than practicing long hours everyday. There comes a time when practicing the art becomes the way of life and you realize that being a good musician and feeling the music when you are playing is something you have inside of you. At this point in my career, I have come to realize that being a good musician is often creating music that is accepted into the market place."

With all the long hours spent forming his foundation as a musician, he now finds that he's best at producing and is turning his attention to many other projects.

One project that has the potential of further launching **Heaven Sent** into public awareness is a half-hour television program entitled **The Magic of Music**. Produced and directed by Rachel Cosmic, a graduate student from Loyola Marymount University, the program will also feature Robert Moog (the inventor of the first commercial synthesizer), Herbie Hancock (1984 Grammy award winner, jazz musician and pioneer of digital recording), and Frank Serafine (sound designer for "Tron," "Star Trek," and many other movies). **Heaven Sent** is being used to set off the mood of the show and Jessie helped produce his segment.

Also in the works are a couple of movie soundtracks of which the titles cannot be released because they are still under negotiation. All this adds up to a very busy young musician!

Since childhood, Jessie has been concerned with the environment and it seems only natural that the sounds of nature are becoming so important in his work. Over the last few years, there has been an international grassroots movement to save the seas of the world and heighten public sensitivity to the plight of not only the sea creatures but of the seas themselves.

Using music to harmonize the natural sounds of the seas, Jessie is planning the production and distribution of a commercial LP record featuring distinctive sounds of such mammals as whales, seals, sea lions, dolphins and porpoises.

"I'm researching and listening to the sounds of

sea mammals and beginning to envision what other sounds would compliment their natural sounds. I want to create an awareness that there is a mystical beauty in the experience of these animals as well as a definite urgency to protect them from abuse. In many ways, the problems of the world are due to ignorance and perhaps my music can help educate people in a positive way."

This type of attitude reflects the love and concern of a person who has a very direct mission—that of sharing his music and making a positive contribution to the planet.

"**Heaven Sent** is being used in a lot of different ways," says Jessie, "and that's very gratifying to me." He relates the story of some friends who just had a baby and one of the first things their baby heard upon her arrival in the world was **Heaven Sent**. "If I died tomorrow, my purpose would have been served—to a certain degree. This music is being used for positive things like birthing, massage, rolfing, relaxation exercises, meditation, and to reduce rush hour stress. That is such a trip for me!"

Jessie's gratitude is apparent in his conversations and added to this is a firm belief in a higher consciousness.

"I feel I have a direct connection to God, and everyday, as much as I can, I thank God for what I have. When I compose, I know God is there because the music is right there for me. Many of my compositions have come to me just as I'm waking from sleep. I know I'm inspired more than the conscious mind can reveal and sleep brings out those parts of the mind."

Friends are also important to this sensitive musician. Jessie believes in and is inspired by his close associates. He likes to surround himself with "the best" and he gives as freely as he allows himself to be given to . . . whether it's carrots or strawberries from his beloved garden or money or time to help out a friend.

"I'm really a people-oriented person. People have a lot to offer each other and we have so much more to draw from when we're around other people."

In addition to his love of people, Jessie is also an art lover. Entering his world is entering the world of an artist. A professional picture framer, the walls of his home are covered with treasured art. The rest of his living space is filled with musical equipment, saxophones, harmonicas, keyboard, percussion odds and ends, amplifiers, tape decks, microphones, and prints ready to be framed.

He explains himself this way: "I have two totally different sides of my personality. I have a visual side and a listening side. One part of me needs to create things with my hands, look at, see and actually touch the finished project. The other part is sensitive to and needs to create sound. For me, it's very



important to keep both sides alive.”

As he explains these two sides to his character, his thoughts wander back to another time and he remembers a period when he repressed the visual side of his art and totally dedicated every spare ounce of energy to his music. Then, one year at Christmas, he lacked the funds to send greeting cards and decided to make them himself.

“I started using my hands again and it was almost a shock to remember that part of myself. Now I make sure to keep both those parts alive and active within me.”

There are many more parts of Jessie Allen Cooper and the good news about that is it will be reflected in the music he has yet to compose and the projects he will produce. For Jessie is also a dreamer, and it takes a dreamer to envision the impossible and then start to make it happen. And in his dreams are included the music to entertain and soothe the people he so dearly loves. Those people are all of us, and we will be the lucky recipients of his gifts.

Heaven Sent, music for health, heart and soul progression. To hear a sample, call 213/392-7784. To order, send check or money order to: Cooper Sound Waves, P.O. Box 5190, Santa Monica, CA 90405-0190.