

The Spirit of Venice, California

A Collection of Venice Street Musicians

The Spirit of Venice on Hen House Studios is the brainchild of former street performer HARLAN STEINBERGER. He lived in Venice for ten years and during that time became friends with, played with supported and encouraged each one of these performers. The Venice artists named him the Prince of Venice for his unwavering effort in putting this collection together. Harlan's primary motivation for compiling this CD was to be able to walk onto the boardwalk and hand each street musician a check from the sales of the record. This, for him, would be the ultimate pleasure. The reason the performers allowed themselves to be recorded was to pay homage to the Spirit of Venice, which has helped keep them, and the thriving music seen on the Boardwalk stay alive. True, many of them had to turn to the streets for survival, but none of these people are thieves, criminals or drug addicts. They are honest people trying to make a living doing what they love to do most.

SONNY has been living in Venice since 1969. The locals have labeled him the undisputed King of Venice. Sonny was the ghost writer for the Jimi Hendrix song, Purple Haze. Janis Joplin saw Sonny perform the song in a San Francisco coffee bar and approached him because she was so knocked out by it. Sonny wrote the song out on a napkin for Janis who passed it onto Jimi, who later made it one of his signature themes. Sonny was not turned on by the city life of San Francisco and headed south to Venice Beach. He became friends with other Venice locals, such as THE DOORS, and spent many hours jamming with them on the Boardwalk. The lure of Hollywood and the thought of fame and fortune has never interested Sonny. He believes that the unity of the Venice street musicians is what makes the Boardwalk so special. Every year the authorities try to do away with the performers and every year the performers rise victorious. He still, to this day lives on the beach, and can often be seen pushing his "house" around, his dreadlocked hair wrapped distinctly in his multi-colored beret, his unique hand painted guitar strapped over his shoulder.

ALEXANDER BERNARD is a British born singer, who came to Venice via Jamaica. He fronted the band MANAZART and BRAVE NEW WORLD, which he formed by meeting the members on the Boardwalk and surrounding areas. They had no rehearsal space, so they would meet on the Boardwalk and practice there. Alexander was inspired to write ECLIPSE MY SOUL, when he was in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, for the total eclipse of the sun in 1991. Alexander recently passed away and his ashes were dispersed in the Pacific Ocean.

HARRY PERRY and Venice Beach go hand and hand. The white-turbaned rollerskating guitarist, who sings in a language only he can understand, is quite possibly the most famous Boardwalk performer. His image has appeared in many movies set here in Venice. Also, a mural, with Harry's character as the main focus, has been painted on a large wall on the Boardwalk. It features his standard white attire, elbow and kneepads to go with his rollerskates, and a mini amplifier strapped to his hip so that his "guitar

wizardry" can be heard by all. Harry's spoken word piece on the album is all that he symbolizes...freedom to do whatever you want, whenever you want, however you want.

PETER DAMIAN slept in his car for the first year and a half of being in California before a cop directed him to Venice Beach to perform on the Boardwalk. Upon arrival he created the STREET SMART, which is the band that he leads. They perform mainly on the Boardwalk, and the only constant member in the band is Peter. It is basically a loose band that gets together to jam for the pure enjoyment of playing endless hours of music on the beach. The time when the band truly happens is when they get together to play at sunset and bid the day farewell. Peter believes that "people should have a guitar in their closet, instead of a rifle under their bed."

DR. GEEK is the gentle giant of Venice Beach. Dubbed *The Spontaneous Rapper*, he can keep you entertained for hours with his ad-lib raps. Dressed in his trademark sombrero, he carries a huge beat-box, which actually seems small in comparison to his body size. He approaches anyone on the Boardwalk and raps in rhyme, about anything that enters his quick mind.

DAISY is an eighty plus year old woman who was attracted to perform on the Boardwalk by the friendly atmosphere in Venice. She is an extremely religious woman, who up until the recording of her song had never played an original tune. With the help of the producer, she wrote the song, I'M LISTENING, specifically for this album. She is a gospel singer and blues guitarist supreme, inspired by Mahalia Jackson and all the old great "guitar ticklers of the delta blues." When not attending the church, she might be singing to her vegetables and flowers that she grows in her garden. Often she can be found sitting on one of the numerous benches on the Boardwalk, guitar in hand singing the blues and the gospel that she says, "helps keep me alive." Daisy has been performing on the Boardwalk for over twelve years and says, "I am still looking to catch me a boyfriend on the Boardwalk."

TOMMY JORDAN is a multi-instrumentalist, who is famous for blowing his homemade Tibetan horn on the Boardwalk. In the 1980s Tommy was a driving force in organizing the Anti-Apartheid jams on Venice Beach. He believes that Venice is a place where people can come together to make a change, which is why he decided to make Venice the place to hold these jams. He also is a founding member of the highly acclaimed band GEGGY TAH.

TAUMBU is an internationally known musician, who has performed on countless recordings and at numerous live concerts. He professes that the best music that he has ever made has been created on the Venice Boardwalk. Taumbu, who plays the flute on the album, is primarily a percussionist who loves to set up his congas at sunset, to play for the Spirit of Venice, while his wife dances the sun down.

LIMPOPO is a traditional Russian folk band with a difference. The band's four members were street performers in Moscow. The only drawback was that the police would never

permit the public to donate money to the street performers. The band moved to Venice approximately so they could at least earn a bit of money for their performances. The hardest adjustment that they have had to make is remembering the words to their songs, which are still sung in Russian, with all the many distractions that the Boardwalk holds.

SWAMI X is the Venice Beach mystic man and astrologer. He has told fortunes and given lectures on astrology and mysticism for over twenty years on the Boardwalk.

JAIME SEGAL, known as the Rock n' Roll Princess of Venice, dropped out of school at sixteen and decided to make Venice Beach her palace. She began jammin' with and forming many bands on the Boardwalk. In 1987 she won the Yamaha Soundcheck Award for best band and best vocalist. As a result she went on to perform in Japan. Jaime then recorded with such talents as Ian McGlaglin, Richard Perry and Desmond Child.

SLAVIN' DAVID has lived in Venice all of his life. He has been playing music on the Boardwalk almost as long as he can remember. David is notorious for holding all-star jams on the Boardwalk. In the sixties, Ray Manzarak used to join him in the band, and was so impressed with David that he took him to the studio to record. The glitz of Hollywood was not what Slavin' David was after; he missed the spontaneity and freedom of the Boardwalk. Slavin' David believes that commercialism is killing Venice, but that the unity of the street performer will keep the Spirit alive, "cos street performers don't walk away easy."

UNCLE BILL is touted as the first person to ever perform on the Venice Boardwalk. He first came to the Boardwalk in 1946, and claims never to have been mistreated there. The guitarist, taught Janis Joplin to sing the blues, and is credited in the liner notes of her record. Uncle Bill won the Spirit of Venice Award, which was presented to him on his 80th birthday at the Venice Art Walk. Uncle Bill recently passed away and with him goes an important part of Venice history.

WADADA was drawn to Venice Beach mystically, while driving from Washington DC to New York. That was twenty years ago. During this time he formed the reggae band Inner Secrets, and has toured worldwide with them. Wadada claims Venice Beach to be a "workshop of life, where you come together to put your stuff together." He believes that this bonding will help to create world peace. Wadada has spent a lot of time lately touring Africa where he has acquired quite a following.

JAMES AND GREG have the reputation of being the hardest working musicians on the Boardwalk. They spend seven days a week playing their music, which was born on the street. Based in the blues, these musicians keep crowds enthralled for hours, and if the occasional harp player or guitarist happens to walk by, they're welcome to sit and jam on a song, or even spend the entire afternoon.

TED HAWKINS In 1986, he had a number two hit on the British Music Charts with his song, Watch Your Step. Ted spent many years touring extensively in Europe, where he

reached celebrity status. He had a unique style of guitar playing; he changed chords wearing a glove. After signing a major record deal and releasing a couple more records, Ted passed away and his voice that was like silk mixed with sandpaper will be missed.

TIBOR JANKAY supplied the cover art for the album. Jankay is a former Hungarian national who escaped from a train headed for a concentration camp during WW II. Ironically, he dug his way out of the train with a sculptor's chisel, and was the only survivor of 6000 people. As a teenager in Budapest, he attended The Fine Arts Academy. He then went on to do his post graduate studies in Paris where he rubbed shoulders with Pablo Picasso, the highlight of my life," he claims. While in Paris, he also met and studied with another one of his idols, Henri Matisse. Tibor came to the United States in 1948, and obtained a position in the art department at Pepperdine University in Malibu. He eventually became Chairman of the Art Department and remained in his prestigious position for twenty-seven years. "I enjoy teaching because I like the new generation, and I am inspired by the new generation." Tibor loved Venice, and although he returned to his mother country on numerous occasions, he said "there is no place in the world that I would rather be living than in Venice, California." Tibor passed away at the age of 94.

"WHY AM I SO ATTRACTED TO VENICE BEACH?" questions the producer of this record. "After careful consideration, I have discovered that the answer to this question is found within the spirit that lives there." It is for this reason that this album is entitled The Spirit of Venice. The music contained there is as diverse as the people found at Venice Beach. It captures the essence, the animation, the magic, even the vibe of all that is the Boardwalk.

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