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VETERAN JAZZ PIANIST ERNEST TURNER RELEASES “MY AMERICANA” **A FRESH LOOK AT THE “AFRICAN-AMERICAN SONGBOOK”** **AVAILABLE APRIL 30, 2019**

Driven by his lifelong mantra “searching for the ever-elusive musical truth,” pianist **ERNEST TURNER**’s multi-faceted journey has taken him from his hometown of Durham, North Carolina – where he began taking piano lessons from his mom at age 4 – to years of heavy university jazz studies and performances in New Orleans before returning back home to establish a thriving career in Durham’s active jazz scene.

Several years after being part of the quartet on two of saxophonist Steven Riley’s albums on the famed SteepleChase label, Turner steps into the spotlight as a recording artist for the first time on his solo debut album **MY AMERICANA**.

The alternately subtle and crackling ensemble energy the pianist creates with his trio of bassist **LANCE SCOTT** and drummer **JON CURRY** is an extension of several years of freewheeling weekly jam sessions at local hotspots, where they also developed some of the album’s material.

True to his foundational mantra, Turner brings a fascinating multi-faceted career as a sideman and live bandleader to his emergence as a solo artist. His 20-year career has included performances with a plethora of renowned jazz artists, including John Ellis, Frank Foster, the New Orleans Jazz Orchestra, the Heath Brothers, Ron Blake, the late Paul Jeffrey, Nnenna Freelon, and Christian Scott, among many others.

Expanding into the pop and soul arenas, Turner has also worked with Russian pop sensation Alsou, soul singer Carolyn Malachi and John Legend (on his recent hit album *A Legendary Christmas*). During the summer of 2017, his trio was selected as a finalist at the D.C. Jazz Prix Competition. He has also been very active in jazz education, conducting numerous music clinics/educational performances and serving on the faculty at East Carolina University from 2006-2010.

While working towards his Bachelor’s in Jazz Studies from Loyola University and Master’s from the University of New Orleans, Turner befriended and played with members of the legendary Marsalis family, including Delfeayo and Jason. While gigging with Delfeayo, Turner remembers the trombonist preaching about the historical importance of music. Patriarch Ellis Marsalis imparted to the pianist the importance of balanced programming, how the perfect highs and lows of a set list can create an optimal experience for the audience. Turner took these concepts to heart in conceptualizing and developing the set list for **MY AMERICANA**.

"Growing up in jazz academia, I learned (as most jazz students do) repertoire from the Great American Songbook and Tin Pan Alley standards, the Gershwins, Cole Porters and all that," says Turner. "Yet all that's been done ad nauseum. In thinking about **MY AMERICANA**, I wanted to cover songs that reflected how I grew up. So I focused on what I call the 'Black American songbook,' including songs from the church and spiritual traditions while running the pop/jazz gamut from Stevie Wonder to Thelonious Monk and Kenny Kirkland." Turner continues, "I had a classical teacher in middle school who saw me leaning towards jazz, and she gave me a book of Fats Waller arrangements to work on." Since these arrangements were part of Turner's first formal exposure to jazz, he knew something from Fats' catalog had to be part of the mix as well. He concludes, "It was also important to include some original pieces that tap into the influence of those influential in my development, from Duke Ellington, Chick Corea and Herbie Hancock to Marcus Roberts and Jason Moran."

Legendary saxophonist Jimmy Heath once gave Turner a crafty piece of advice: "Every record needs to have blues, groove, and a ballad." The pianist puts the "blues and groove" elements into practice from the start, launching **MY AMERICANA** with the bustling high energy original "Return to Thanos," whose title is a playful ode to the supervillain in Marvel's popular *Avengers* series. Slowing the pace considerably, the pianist and his trio bring uncommon sensitivity to a soulful, waltz-styled reading of "Dienda," one of the rare compositions by one of Turner's influences, the late Kenny Kirkland.

Turner credits Monk's catalog for being a crucial part of his personal development, and he has long patterned his style after Monk's ability to embrace stylistic freedom while staying within the musical parameters of his time. Without resorting to well worn "Monk-isms," his lively, whimsical swing through "Monk's Dream" brings a fresh vibrancy to the classic he's played live countless times. Likewise, his spirited re-imagining of Waller's "Ain't Misbehavin'" blends the familiarity of the beloved melody with fresh harmonic patterns and rhythmic variations.

Rather than celebrate Stevie with an instantly recognizable hit, Turner taps into "If It's Magic," a dreamy obscurity from *Songs from the Key of Life*, sticking gracefully to the lead melody as his trio provides a soft, pillowy rhythmic undercurrent. Picking the tempo back up, "Circles" is a brisk, funky, Latinized original that the pianist playfully calls his "sorta modern groove-ish number." Turner then takes us to church with a soul-stirring, piano-only reading of "Precious Lord," originated by "the father of black gospel music" Thomas A. Dorsey, which has been performed by everyone from Mahalia Jackson to Elvis Presley and was a favorite of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

MY AMERICANA wraps with "In and Out," an original post-bop styled barnburner by the trio (which Turner dubs "uptempo, minor sounding and simple") and a joyous romp through what is perhaps the most identifiable African American song of the 20th Century, "We Shall Overcome."

"I'm Ernest II, named after my grandfather who died before I was born," says the pianist. "My father told me it was his father's favorite hymn, and it was sung at his funeral. I also played it when my uncle passed a few years back; I would like to think of it as a hymn for my Turner ancestors. Also, it coincidentally was the first hymn I ever learned to play at nine years old and captures the historical-meets-contemporary spirit of the project perfectly. After so many years of working with others and performing live for regional audiences, it's wonderful to now have the opportunity to reach more people with my deeper artistry."

MY AMERICANA is will be available on April 30, 2019 in stores and online everywhere.

Online:

Ernestturner.com

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