

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Conversation with Virtuoso Derek Menchan

Mish (Eileen) Murphy · Tuesday, August 30th, 2022

Jazz/classical virtuoso Derek Menchan is about to drop his third album. He's a fascinating individual, effortlessly (it seems) juggling his roles as music producer, multi-instrumentalist, composer, performer, vocalist, and philosopher. His two earlier albums *The Griot Swings the Classics* and *The Incredible*, are considered cult classics, favorites of music insiders because of their creativity (for example, exploring/blending musical genres), technical excellence, and emotional depth. Oh, and "listenability."

Cultural Daily's Assistant Poetry Editor Mish Murphy recently chatted with Menchan, who as always, had interesting things to say.

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Mish Murphy (MM): *I heard that you were hard at work producing your third album. How's that going? What can you tell me about it?*

Derek Menchan (DM): Well, not only am I working on a third album, but really a third and fourth album, more or less simultaneously. I have teamed up with a sensational group of artists and am exploring new soundworlds in these albums—well, new soundworlds for me and my label, at least, and I can say that these projects are quite large in scope and the work my colleagues have done so far is jaw-droppingly impressive. I think, when released, they will make quite an impact.

(MM): *Looking back on your first two albums (The Griot Swings the Classics and The Incredible), what have you learned? What would you do differently in retrospect, if anything?*

(DM): Great question. I am not sure I would do anything differently, per se—even as the cat who produced *The Incredible* is far different than he who did *The Griot Swings the Classics*. I announced myself as a producer to be reckoned with in *Griot*, and it showed all my prowess in a very short 30 minute album. What I could have done differently as an artist I did do, in *The Incredible*—a huge, hour-long foray into my mruzick world. It, to me, shows a command and independence not yet achieved in *Griot*—a daring and bold statement. For these reasons, I wouldn't touch *The Incredible*; it stands as an answer to its own father, the album before it. I sound, on it, like a man who has traveled the globe and produced so many albums, since my first, even though the projects were separated by only two years.

(MM): *You've collaborated with vocalist Kaci Timmons quite a bit. In the photo I have of you together (see below), it looks like you're having a wonderful time. Please tell me about that.*

(DM): One wild thing I can say about making albums that I guess may be unique and certainly personal to me is that Kaci Timmons happens to be one of only a couple of people I have hired to be on my projects—without first hearing what they could do. I just KNEW. I met the lovely songstress in Michigan in the winter of 2018, and, right at our first interaction, I could just feel she was the perfect fit for the sound I was looking for.

Little did I know that, once we met for our first recording session in Texas, months later, she would actually surpass my expectations. That is how amazing she is. She is a dynamic talent, able to sing anything put in front of her; it is almost scary the power behind her voice. She's a featured artist on album 3 (along with 3 other guest artists), but album 4 is shaping up to be essentially "her" album.

And we have a song we finished several months ago, for album 4, that is so stellar I cannot even believe it is we who did it. This is all I'll say: just wait! It is going to be FIRE!



Kaci Timmons and Derek Menchan. *Photo credit: Chris Spicks Photography*

(MM): *What exactly is involved in your producing an album, a music CD? It sounds challenging. Can you explain it for someone like me who doesn't have a lot of technical background?*

(DM): That is huge. As I am executive producer and producer—as well as the main musician on

my works thus far—this means I fund the album and create its artistic vision. I select the theme, the individual tracks; I select and hire all the guest artists; I play and sing all the music and create the vibe of the album art and have my amazing understudy render it. I also have a wonderful audio engineer whom I regularly employ, and he helps to carve out the unique soundworlds I envision and that my mruzick is known for.

(MM): *How did COVID affect you as a musician and producer?—because, for one thing, it seems you often collaborate with other artists...*

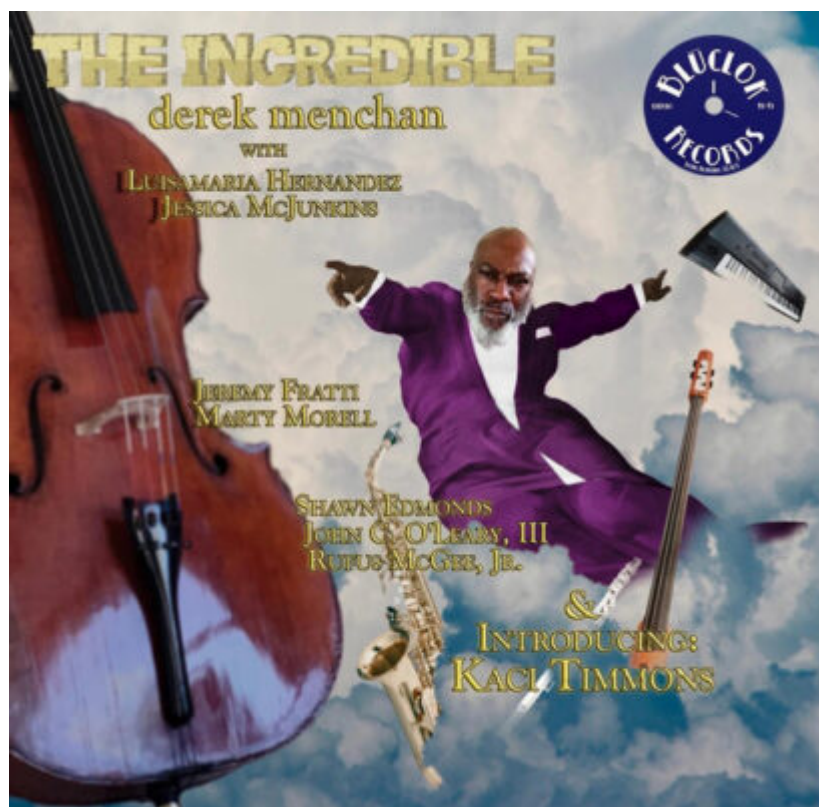
(DM): COVID found me twice as active as a producer as all my stuff is created in the studio in my house. So when the lockdown and its aftermath hit, I utilized the time by creating tracks and bolstering my online presence, as did many of my colleagues. The result was that, when the lockdown ended, I had a bigger following because of my social media posts of some of my wacky, impromptu home recordings. The guest artist thing wasn't affected at all; we can email files all the time, and collaboration is where it's at for me.

(MM): *Do you have any observations on COVID as a philosopher?*

(DM): Only that the worldwide loss of life it caused makes me think of one of the works I study, the giant Hindu tome the Mahabharata...

...suffice it to say that, amongst other things, it deals with the end of the world—but not of the planet. It deals with what is known in Sanskrit as yugas, or ages. The world ends, over and over—but the planet continues. The cosmos is still there. Life continues, if not reduced in size. We lost hundreds of millions of people due to COVID. I was never in doubt that an age ended. I just look forward to what's to come...

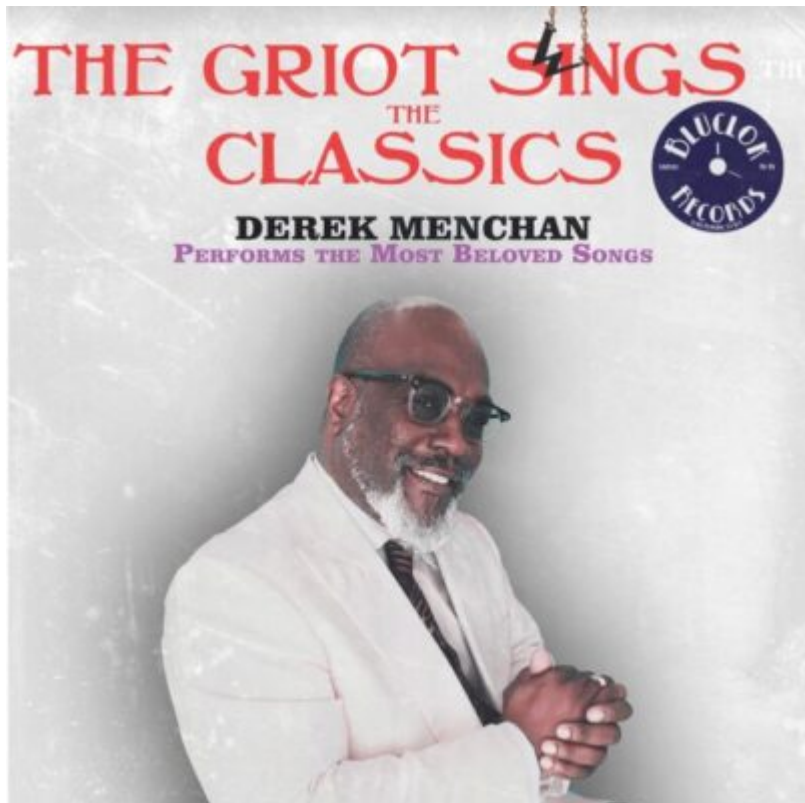
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THE INCREDIBLE by Derek Menchan

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THE GRIOT SWINGS THE CLASSICS

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Read Mish Murphy's previous interviews of Derek Menchan for *Cultural Weekly*:

<https://www.culturaldaily.com/interview-with-the-incredible-music-mage-derek-menchan/>

<https://www.culturalweekly.com/inner-phoenix-interview-with-derek-menchan/>

<https://www.culturalweekly.com/derek-menchan-motorcycle-inspiration/>

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