



With reactivating the iconic jazz label, Flying Dutchman, veteran singer and songwriter **Billy Valentine** became the perfect musician to reintroduce the imprint with his sensational new album, ***Billy Valentine & The Universal Truth***.

Possessing an empathic, lissome voice, Valentine draws upon the soul-jazz legacy of such iconic Flying Dutchman singer and songwriters as Gil Scott-Heron and Leon Thomas, on his new album as he delivers testifying renditions of message songs originally recorded and written by Curtis Mayfield, Stevie Wonder, Eddie Kendricks, War, Prince – and of course, Scott-Heron and Thomas.

Valentine says that he's always been drawn to message songs. He remembers witnessing the civil rights protests through the Deep South in the United States, the Kent State University shootings in 1970, and the Vietnam War and its devastating aftermath on many military veterans returning to civilian life. "So, the music on my album speaks to me," Valentine says, "I think this is the most important music that I've done yet in my life."

Produced by Bob Thiele, Jr. – the son of Flying Dutchman Records' founder, Bob Thiele – the album features an array of jazz luminaries that included tenor saxophonist **Immanuel Wilkins**, trumpeter **Theo Croker**, bassist **Linda May Han Oh**, guitarist **Jeff Parker**, vibraphonist **Joel Ross**, percussionist **Alex Acuña**, pianist/keyboardist **Larry Goldings**, bassist **Pino Palladino**, and drummer **James Gadsen**, among others.

The album opens with a plaintive makeover of Mayfield's 1970s "We The People Who Are Darker Than Blue," a sobering ballad about projecting racial pride and Black humanity in the face of insurmountable odds. That theme continues on Valentine's righteous rendition of Kendricks' 1972 Black Power anthem, "My People Hold On."

Valentine tips his hat to Scott-Heron and Flying Dutchman Records' legacy with his haunting take on "Home Is Where The Hatred Is," a soul-stirring testament about the struggles of kicking substance abuse. The label's rich legacy continues with Valentine's mesmerizing cover of saxophonist Pharaoh Sander's signature song, "The Creator Has A Master Plan," which originally featured vocalist Leon Thomas, who co-wrote the classic, and later recorded his version on his 1970 Flying Dutchman Records debut LP, Spirits Known and Unknown.

The album continues with Valentine's poignant reading of Prince's 1987 socio-political masterpiece, "Sign O' The Times" followed by a biting rendition of Stevie Wonder's sardonic 1974 hit, "You Haven't Done Nothin'." Valentine then draws upon his own legacy with his enthralling version of "Wade In The Water," a Black American jubilee gospel tune that has been covered by many musicians, including the Young-Holt Unlimited, whom with Valentine once sang background. The album continues with a razor-sharp cover of War's 1972 signature tune, "The World Is a Ghetto."

Valentine began recording the album right before the coronavirus pandemic. As the sessions proceeded, the world erupted in protest after the May 2020 murder of George Floyd by the Minneapolis Police Department. "Making the album suddenly became very cathartic," Valentine recalls, "The pandemic was one thing. Then to see what happened to George Floyd – that just broke my heart."

Although the songs on the album were written decades ago, Valentine ties many of their specific topics and themes to modern times, particularly the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement.

"All of these songs speak to everything that we are going through now," Valentine explains. "It feels like history is repeating itself. Once I stepped into these songs, beautiful things happened, because I've studied each of them. With each song, I was able to find a place within my soul."

The making of *Billy Valentine and the Universal Truth* seems to have started more than 30 years after Valentine first met Bob Thiele Jr. in the late-1980s. Around that time, Valentine had recently ended his partnership with his brother John. Together, they'd performed, toured and recorded as the Valentine Brothers. Beginning in 1979, the Valentine Brothers released a handful of (now rare groove) modern soul LPs on Source, Bridge, A&M, and EMI Records. Some of their most renowned singles include 1982's "Lonely Nights" and "Money's Too Tight (to Mention)." The latter was covered three years later by the British soul group, Simply Red.



Around the time of performing with the Valentine Brothers, Billy's recognition as a songwriter emerged after penning songs for other artists such as Ray Charles, and the Neville Brothers. He also worked with Jesse Johnson and Vesta Williams.

Valentine grew up in Columbus, Ohio, after he from West Virginia. In Columbus, his parents owned a nightclub, Club Faces, where his five brothers and seven sisters worked. "We had people lined up around the block to get in because my mother and father greeted you at the front door," Valentine recalls. "And my sisters would work the cash register while my brother and I worked the stage. When there was a break, we would call our sisters to come up on stage to sing with us as well. It was a family operation."

With his older brother, Alvin being a noteworthy Hammond B-3 organist, a young Valentine grew up during the height of 1960s and early-1970s jazz movement. In addition to touring with the soul-jazz trio, the Young-Holt Unlimited, Valentine opened for such musical icons Donny Hathaway and Roberta Flack. When he and his brother, John, moved to Los Angeles to further their musical career, they soon got hired to sing in the vocal orchestra for the U.S.'s first run of *The Wiz*. That gig lasted three and half years.

After the demise of the Valentine Brothers, he struck a songwriting partnership with Thiele, Jr., which led to him singing demos for Warner Chappell songwriters, such as Gerry Goffin, Mark Isham, Burt Bacharach, and Hal David. "I was singing demos for writers, who were trying to plug songs for Michael Bolton, Al Green, or Bonnie Raitt," Valentine recalls. "I started to truly make a living singing demos."

Singing demos opened doors for Valentine to work in television and movies too. He worked with filmmaker Robert Townsend on his 1991 classic movie, *The Five Heartbeats*, on which he provided the singing vocals for fictional lead singer, Eddie King, Jr. On television, Valentine sang on songs produced for *Boston Legal* and *Sabrina, The Teenage Witch*. And on *Sons of Anarchy*, over its entire 7 season run, Valentine's voice would become a staple on so many memorable cover songs produced by the series' composer Bob Thiele, Jr.

Now we have an illustrious and multifaceted career that spans more than 50 years, Bobby Valentine is ready to be reintroduced to the world with the glowing, ***Billy Valentine & The Universal Truth***.

The jazz sensibilities within his own vocal, interpretative prowess and within the splendid arrangements will certainly catapult Valentine in a head-turning late-career renaissance, especially given the acclaim the Los Angeles' West Coast Get Down and Jazz Is Dead scenes are receiving.

"On this album, I was able to stretch my vocals and express my music in a different way," Valentine says. "This really feels like my true debut album as an artist."