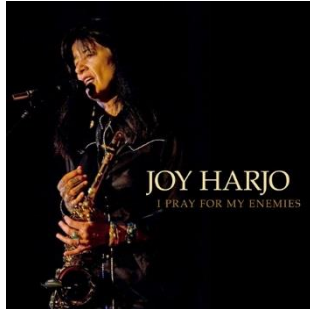


Joy Harjo

I Pray for My Enemies



One does not have to be deeply invested in Indigenous ethos to appreciate the work of award winning poet/singer/songwriter **Joy Harjo**. Her latest work, a mix of poetry and music called **I Pray for My Enemies** is a quirky concoction of spoken words, upbeat jazz music, and a fresh perspective on contemporary philosophy. She deftly explains it all while embracing her culture like a rock in her fist. The rock can be a teaching rock, a rock used for directions, for grinding, or a weapon. Harjo has a teaching rock. We must look deep into the grains that make up the rock, the sparkly grains, the shiny black grains, and the hidden elements that are concealed deep inside it or in this case we must pay heed to her words and music that make up her teachings and prepare to learn. It is time to open the heart and the spirit.

The album starts out with the tune **Allay Na Lee No**, a work of faith. She pays homage to the Old Ones who are always watching over us. It starts out with a modest chant and a simple beat and then segues into this energetic, slightly discordant dance tune. **An American Sunrise** is a song of observation. Where we were to where we are. The music is exhilarating, with electric guitar, popping percussion, and a tribal chant that backs her up with punctuating chorus. It's a mix of bluesy jazz and reflections, a musical snapshot of what happened in the blink of an eye.

**Calling the Spirit Back** is a prayer not only of gratitude, but appeal to stay on the path. It is introspective assessment that suggests you try to return to the time when the spirit and your heart were one. It was one of my favorites on the album. Watch out for the Thieves of Time.

*"Call your spirit back. It may be caught in corners and creases of shame, judgment, and human abuse. You must call in a way that your spirit will want to return."*

Mixing modern day jazz and Native American mythology Joy explains how the rabbit, a popular character in stories from the Indigenous culture, is responsible for what occurs in this outlandish folk story. **Rabbit Invents the Saxophone** is one of those quirky songs I mentioned. This one has a driving refrain, full of upbeat elements that thrive on the edge of avant garde. Harjo seems to take an overlay of the past and slap it on top of the present and somehow it all works out. Rabbit had a hell of a band.

**I Pray for My Enemies** is the final tune. Harjo has an oblique, different view of what makes an enemy and it is food for thought. Interwoven with saxophone riffs and chanting filled with conviction, the message is on the wall. The last two lines says it all, *"The door to the mind should open only from the heart. An enemy who gets in risks the danger of becoming a friend."*

There are sixteen tracks of spoken word prose and jazz components and I truly liked them all. If this century is to claim a beat poet, it would be Joy Harjo. Her point is that the philosophy of the past cultures is just as pertinent today as it was hundreds of years ago, maybe even more so. The

only thing that has changed is man's blind acceptance of technology and a hardening of his heart. If we don't listen now, then we are condemned to make the same mistakes our ancestors did, and frankly, we are all running out of time on this planet. Harjo has been named Poet Laureate for an unrivaled third term and it is easy to understand why. Highly listenable.

- R J Lannan, Artisan Music Reviews