



Terry Allen “**Amerasia**” Sugar Hill Records

What you need to grasp, at the outset, with Terry Allen, is that in the sphere of *the arts* there are no boundaries. He is, without a shadow of doubt, the original electronic age, multi-media man, but in that regard presses far more than mere buttons and keys. He’s a painter, sculptor, musician, writer [narratives, plays and songs] and occasional actor.

“**Amerasia**” was originally released in 1987 on Allen’s own label Fate Records, on cassette only, and amounts to the soundtrack to Wolf-Eckart Buhler’s documentary film of the same name. The film traced the lives of a handful of Americans who remained in South-East Asia following that country’s removal of its forces from Viet-Nam. The initial sessions took place in Bangkok, Thailand, during 1984, where Allen cut five of the album’s seventeen tracks with a local band, Caravan. Allen has claimed, in interview, that the band members were former communist rebels who had, a few years earlier, fought in Laos. Subsequent recording sessions for this album took place in Lubbock, Texas during January 1985 where Allen was supported by The Panhandle Mystery Band aka *pretty much* The Maines Brothers Band. Lloyd Maines and Terry co-produced the finished recording.

Let’s repeat the fact that Buhler’s movie was a documentary. It’s rare that material specifically composed for a movie soundtrack, in total, amounts to a cohesive body of music that sustains repeated listening. Rather, each piece is required to fit the mood of the scene that it supports. A case in point would be the consecutive instrumental tracks, “Church Walking” featuring a piano and saxophone, “Food Stall” with fiddle and the same pianist, and finally “Canal” featuring piano and guitar - those cuts are, respectively, forty-two, forty-five and forty-four seconds in duration. In addition to the foregoing trio, a further half-dozen tracks are longer than one but shorter than two minutes in duration. One of those tracks, “Pataya” was composed, and is sung, by Surachai Jantimatorn in his native Thai tongue, although [thankfully] the CD liner booklet provides an English translation. “Let Freedom Ring,” the closing track on the album that immediately follows, features a vocal in English by Allen, who penned the song, [and a supporting translation in Thai by Jantimatorn]. It’s sufficient to quote the opening lines “*My country ‘tis of thee, Sweet land of liberty, Of thee I sing*” in order to gain a subjective flavour of the lyric. It’s the only track that offers hope, in the voice of two nations, hence it’s somewhat strategic placing on this collection.

The sound of a chopper in flight opens the album title cut and, précising Allen’s narration, Terry recalls how “*Throughout the Vietnam war, from 1963 to 1975, the United States used Thailand as a landlocked aircraft carrier from which to bomb the neighbouring countries of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. This is one view of the aftermath.*” Elsewhere on this collection “My Country ‘Tis Of Thee” [the melody of which we know, here on the British side of *the pond*, as the National Anthem], the second track, is performed on a Laotian bamboo flute by Kenny Maines. Of the longer, normal song length cuts, “The Burden” is a song of remembrance – “*Of the ones who are gone now, And the ones that remain,*” “Back Out Of The World” features a sixties pop style girlie choir chirping on the chorus, while considering that the documentary was filmed in Thailand, “Display Woman/Displaced Man” is a pretty self-explanatory title. Set to a sixties Rolling Stones styled beat, “Nobody’s Goin’ Home [Friendship Highway],” is an irony filled tribute to the legacy that resulted from America’s occupation.

Sugar Hill reissued this album in late 2003 and it features sleeve notes penned by sometime Allen collaborator, David Byrne [ex-Talking Heads]. Byrne marks the collection out as an “*angry record,*” and giving consideration to America’s [militaristic] undertaking of Spring 2003, succinctly states, “*Obviously,*”

this record is prescient and sadly relevant.” With current day hindsight, never a truer word was written.....

Folkwax Rating 6 out of 10

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