

Allan Walker – Bio

Allan Walker is a jazz saxophonist with deep roots in R&B and a resume that includes tours and recordings with some of the biggest names in the music business. Raised in Roanoke, VA, until the age of 18, he moved to Washington D.C. and resided there for 40 years. Living in D.C. allowed him to travel easily around the East Coast, particularly to Boston and New York. He was raised in a family of nine, with six brothers and sisters, all of whom were heavily into music. His mother, though, was his primary influence. She played the piano for his brothers and sisters when they were very young. Allan started playing the sax when he was just 13 years old and was drawn to the music of Hank Mobley, John Coltrane, Stanley Turrentine, Jerry Butler, Bobby “Blue” Bland among others, whom he listened to on the radio and on juke boxes. He joined the band in junior high and practiced long hours, sneaking out of the house at night to hear whoever was playing around town. As he likes to joke, “The saxophone was my first girlfriend.”

By the time he was fifteen, he began playing at venues all over town as well as on the university circuit as part of a 15 piece band. He was even good enough to start accompanying artists from Motown, Stax, King, and other major labels at the time who needed a pick-up band when they played between D.C. and Miami. But his career started to really take off at the age of sixteen when he began recording and touring nationally and internationally with acts like The Temptations, The Four Tops, Marvin Gaye, The Coasters, The Drifters, Little Anthony and the Imperials, and countless others.

In the late 1960’s, already a successful and in-demand player, he started to become seriously interested in jazz. He was inspired by the likes of Clyde “Fats” Wright, an excellent pianist, and Don Pullen, the amazing pianist/organist that Allan got to play with whenever he was in town.

After high school, Allan was already an accomplished musician and got a scholarship to the prestigious “New England Conservatory of Music.” He headed to Boston, but since he was making a good living, more formal schooling didn’t really appeal to the young man on the rise. So he turned down the scholarship and instead spent his time performing around the Boston area and travelling frequently down to New York City to play the clubs. One of his special memories is jamming at “Count Basie’s” in Harlem when Thelonious Monk sat in with the band.

Allan headed back to D.C. to be closer to his family in the late 1970’s when opportunities to play jazz were starting to diminish because of the dominance of rock and roll and disco. Allan got married and started raising a family. But the situation for jazz musicians kept getting worse around the country, with civil rights riots taking place in many U.S. cities, including D.C., Vietnam veterans coming back home to few opportunities, and drugs starting to be a serious problem, especially in black communities. The opportunities for jazz musicians and the amount you could earn playing clubs shrunk even more. But Allan needed to make a living to support his family, and thus began a 20 year period when he put down his saxophone and went into various successful businesses with his wife that had nothing to do with the music industry.

Even after such a long hiatus, music was still central to Allan’s life. He always felt it was an acute loss to no longer play, so he picked up his instrument again, and after just a short while, got his chops back in spades. He was even privileged to perform at one of the last dinners honoring Richard Pryor at for the

first Mark Twain Awards Ceremony at Lincoln Center, which included luminaries like Robin Williams, Chris Kristofferson, Danny Glover, Morgan Freeman, Chris Tucker and Ruth Brown.

Then, in 2008, with his children grown up and successful in their own careers and he and his wife on a more stable financial footing, his son, who by that time had his own thriving business, urged Allan and his wife to move to Los Angeles. The time was right, and Allan moved to the West Coast and returned to being a full-time musician.

And again, Allan found himself to be in demand. He attended a private fund raising party at Will and Jaden Smith's house for President Obama (where he got a chance to kiss the first lady), and started working with some major blues players, like Roy Gains, Sugaray Rayford, for whom he arranged several horn parts on his Blind Alley CD, and many others. Ralph Carter, the music director for Eddie Money and Sugaray, offered him the opportunity to record and arrange horn parts on many songs for some Jane Fonda videos, which led him to performing live on the "Today Show" with Fonda.

Since then, he has played on many CD's as a sideman, horn arranger, and soloist and is finally working on his own CD project, which will be released in 2014.