**TajMo**

It’s been nearly a decade since Taj Mahal and Keb’ Mo’ teamed up for their collaborative debut, *TajMo*, and though the album was a runaway success—it won a GRAMMY Award, garnered rave reviews, and spawned a massive joint tour of the US and Europe—neither artist ever expected to record a follow-up.

“That first album turned out so great that part of me wondered if maybe we just got lucky,” Keb’ says with a laugh. “I always figured it was a one-time thing. But when we got back into the studio together, I felt that same magic again, and I realized it wasn’t luck at all.”

Recorded in Nashville with Keb’ and Taj co-producing, *Room On The Porch* finds the pair in peak form, playing to each other’s strengths and opening up new creative horizons more than a half-century into their storied careers. The songs are warm and inviting here, rooted in the joy of human connection and the power of positivity, and the performances are as timeless as they are adventurous, incorporating the full spectrum of American roots music from blues and jazz to folk and country. Keb’ and Taj invited an all-star group of players, singers, and co-writers (including their sons) to join them in the studio for the sessions, but the spotlight remains firmly fixed on the legendary pair throughout the collection, their instantly recognizable voices and guitar stylings complementing and elevating each other at every turn. The result is a delightful, big-hearted work that manages to feel both classic and current all at once, an album rooted in deep tradition delivered by two icons with a boundless appetite for growth, reinvention, and discovery.

“The two of us collaborating has always been a very organic thing,” Taj reflects. “We have different skill sets that go well together, and even though it’d been a while since we’d played together, it was easy to get back to that same creative place we landed with the first album.”

Though the two only began recording together as TajMo in 2017, the pair’s creative relationship (and mutual admiration) stretches back decades.

“Taj Mahal has always been one of my favorite artists,” Keb’ explains. “I first heard his music during my senior year of high school, and it had a profound effect on me. His playing was immediately imprinted on my psyche.”

Born Henry St. Claire Fredericks Jr., Taj landed his first record deal in the mid-1960s with Rising Sons—an early band he formed with Ry Cooder and Jessie Lee Kincaid—before going solo under the name Taj Mahal in 1968. While his early work was thoroughly entrenched in the Mississippi Delta, he soon began blending an intoxicating mix of sounds from throughout the African Diaspora into his records, touching on everything from rock and roll and R&B to reggae and jazz to West Indian and Caribbean music as he quickly became known as one of the most influential and progressive roots musicians of the modern era. Over the course of more than six decades and nearly 50 albums, Taj would go on to win five Grammy Awards (plus the Recording Academy’s coveted Lifetime Achievement honor); perform everywhere from The White House to Carnegie Hall; be inducted into the Blues Music Hall of Fame; receive the Americana Music Association’s Lifetime Achievement Award; and collaborate with the likes of the Rolling Stones, Bob Marley, Eric Clapton, Angelique Kidjo, and countless other luminaries.

“Keb’ was one of the first guys from the next generation that really caught my attention,” Taj recalls. “He understood that you had to really study your craft, that you had to learn the traditions and then find your own voice from there.”

Born and raised in Compton, Keb’ spent the first few decades of his career working primarily behind the scenes, establishing himself initially as a highly respected guitarist, songwriter, and arranger. Though he recorded a one-off album in 1980 under his birth name, Kevin Moore, it wasn’t until 1994 that the world would meet Keb’ Mo’ with the release of his widely acclaimed self-titled debut. Critics were quick to take note of Keb’s modern, genre-bending take on old school sounds, and two years later, he garnered his first Grammy Award for Best Contemporary Blues Album with *Just Like You*. In the decades to come, Keb’ would take home four more Grammy Awards; top the *Billboard*Blues Chart seven times; collaborate with icons like Willie Nelson, Bonnie Raitt, The Chicks, and Lyle Lovett; have compositions recorded and sampled by artists as diverse as B.B. King, Zac Brown, and BTS; perform multiple times at the White House; release signature guitars with both Gibson and Martin; compose music for television series like *Mike and Molly*, *Memphis Beat*, *B Positive*, and *Martha Stewart Living;* and earn the Americana Music Association’s award for Lifetime Achievement in Performance.

Rather than rest on their considerable laurels, Taj and Keb’ decided to continue pushing themselves into new creative territory with *Room On The Porch*, writing and recording the bulk of the album from scratch over the course of just two weeks in the studio.

“Taj writes from a very spontaneous place, but I’m all about preparation, so this was a brand new way of working for me,” Keb’ explains. “It was honestly a little frightening, but I figured if we surrounded ourselves with talented people and really trusted each other, we’d come up with something special, and that’s exactly what happened.”

Feel-good album opener “Room On The Porch (ft. Ruby Amanfu)” is a perfect example.

“That song started out as a little guitar piece I used to play by myself after shows when I was still wired from the stage,” Taj recalls. “I shared it with everybody in the studio, and then Keb’ and Ruby built this whole beautiful song around it.”

Like much of the album, it’s an earnest, tender affair, with Taj, Keb’, and Ruby all trading vocals in an ode to friendship and community. “Stay as long as you like / That’s alright,” they insist. “Come up on / There’s room on the porch for everyone.” The driving “Thicker Than Mud” honors the enduring bonds of family; the romantic “My Darling My Dear” and soulful “She Keeps Me Movin’” revel in the comfort of love and commitment; and the bilingual “Better Than Ever (ft. Wendy Moten)” finds the silver lining in every cloud.

“We didn’t plan anything out in advance,” Taj explains, “but we’re naturally just all about family and love and positivity, so the songs came out that way organically.”

“It was like a party every day,” adds Keb’, who later put the finishing touches on the album at his own home studio. “We had our sons in there playing with us and all the other musicians and writers were hanging the whole time, so it was a really fun place to be.”

It wouldn’t be a TajMo album without a heaping dose of the blues, though. The pair reach all the way back to 1923 for an aching take on Jimmy Cox’s “Nobody Knows You When You’re Down and Out,” tip their cap to the next generation with a raw, stripped-down cover of Jontavious Willis’ “Rough Time Blues,” and embrace the genre’s ageless power on the sweltering closer “Blues’ll Give you Back Your Soul.” “They say jazz will give you back your mind / Reggae give you back your body,” Taj sings. “I know you like you like rock and I know you like the roll / But the blues, the blues will give you back your soul.”

“If you take the African imprint out of Western music for the last 500 years, there’s almost nothing left,” Taj reflects. “As much as it might feel like we’re touching on all these different genres, the way I see it, we’re just connecting with the music of our ancestors and their influence on what’s happening now. That’s what gives me energy and keeps me excited.”

Indeed, that excitement is palpable on *Room On The Porch*, which feels just as fresh and revelatory as the pair’s debut. No luck required.