



## JOANNE SHAW TAYLOR

Interview by James Gaden. Photo by Shervin Lainez

*Joanne Shaw Taylor is an artist that took me by surprise. I first saw her supporting Glenn Hughes and had no idea who she was, but her blues rock style impressed me enough that I remembered her name. When I received my batch of promo albums for review, her new album 'Almost Always Never' was among them. I quickly checked it out and was enamoured with the results - Joanne's strong songs, distinctive vocals and fiery guitar playing meant I quickly went back and got her previous two albums, 'White Sugar' and 'Diamonds In The Dirt'. All three are terrific records, and she was recently spotted dressed as an angel playing lead guitar for Annie Lennox at the Jubilee concert in front of millions. With her star on the rise, I was only too happy to call her while she was on tour in the States, to discuss her latest masterpiece...*

**As a relative newcomer to your work myself, can you give the readers and I some background on how you started playing this type of music?**

I started playing electric guitar when I was thirteen. My dad was a guitar player and my brother was, so I grew up in a very musical household with a big record collection. I saw a Stevie Ray Vaughn DVD which was the catalyst for all this really - I'd been playing classical stuff up until then. I wanted to get into the electric guitar more, I was very attracted to that. I got into the Texas blues guitarists, Albert Collins, Freddie King, ZZ Top, kinda went from there really. I started gigging when I was fifteen... and haven't stopped! (laughs)

**If it was the playing of those guys that drew you in, are you one of those people who is more about playing live then making the record?**

Yeah, I think so. I welcome the break! I like the writing process, working on new ideas, I like being in the studio itself but sometimes it can get a bit boring. Live, it's almost instant gratification, seeing how the songs go down and performing them there and then. I think I'm more of a live person than a studio one.

**You do play a lot of gigs, but you've still managed to turn out three very good albums in a relatively short space of time. Do you have to write on the road to have material ready?**

Firstly, thank you! The first two albums... the first album, I had like a year to put it together once I'd sent it out to labels. The second album, I think I had about ten days! (laughs) I don't really write when I'm on the road, I tend to write when I know it's time to get back in the studio. Because I write a

lot, pretty much all the stuff on my albums is original, I think I spend so much time on that, get so involved, I need to break away from it when I tour. I also find my writing is better if I don't write all the time, because I end up rehashing the same ideas otherwise. Having a break, I can find new influences when I go back to it.

**When I got your other two albums, I listened to them, and while I like them all, I think this one is your best so far. People often say "the difficult third album" - was it like that for you?**

I think so - people do worry about that, after talking to other musicians, they seem to worry about doing another album that sounds like their previous work. I think people can over-think it, so I decided to just write songs I like and hope for the best, really! (laughs) That's all you can do. I had a different producer this time, which helped in terms of fresh ideas, a different band... this one is my favourite too.

**I thought it was more varied than the other two, there are more acoustic guitars, more keyboards like organs and pianos. Were you looking to bring other instruments in, so as not to rely solely on electric guitar to focus on?**

More than anything, I wanted to try something different. I'd started doing the three piece blues-rock thing, and I intended 'Diamonds In The Dirt' to be more varied and song orientated, but it didn't quite come together like that. This time around I used a new producer and told him to arrange the songs as he saw fit, make the most of the songs themselves. I think we managed that and I think we needed, as you just said, a keyboard player and some acoustic stuff - we have mandolin on one song, it adds more

variety.

**As you stated earlier, you usually write all the stuff yourself, but on here we have a really good cover of Frankie Miller's 'Jealousy', from his 'Standing On The Edge' album. Was that a favourite of yours or one suggested to you?**

My boyfriend suggested it actually - I'm terrible at picking covers! The reason I write so much original material is I wouldn't have any songs to perform if I didn't! (laughs) He suggested the track, and the original has this twin guitar thing on it - we were going to replicate that but we ended up just going with an echo. I listened to the original and it's this angry, bittersweet slow blues. I thought I could sing that one and it worked out really well.

**It worked that well, when I played your album for the first time, I found myself singing along to it, then caught myself wondering how come I knew the words! It took a few seconds to realise it was Frankie Miller's - you did such a good job and it meshed so well with your songs. I gravitated to it because 'Standing On The Edge' is my favourite record he did.**

I think you and me are the only people I know who have that album! (laughs) Thank you, it's what we were aiming for. I'm generally not very good at that, I'll hold my hands up, I'm not very good at making a cover my own. I'm better at writing my own stuff, but that did seem to work really well, I was really pleased.

**After hearing your work, I get the impression you might be quite a fan of Richie Kotzen?**

I am, yes, a very big fan!

**Ah - because there were some tracks on here that reminded me of him - 'Beautifully Broken' in particular I thought could easily be a Richie Kotzen track. I thought the tone on your guitar and your vocal phrasing was very much in that style.**

Aw, thank you! I'm a huge fan - Richie is, aside from me, one of the world's greatest guitar players. (laughs) He's almost like a Prince-style artist to me. He looks great, he sings his ass off, he can certainly play, he writes his own songs, he produces himself... just a great, great artist.

**I love Richie - I'm a huge fan of Mr. Big and when he joined Mr. Big, he was one of the only people I'd accept stepping into Paul Gilbert's shoes!**

Oh yeah... when they used to cover 'Burn', that was amazing! That solo in 'Burn' must be the most ridiculous guitar solo in the world! Every time I watch that I just end up thinking "I'll never be able to play arpeggios like that!" (laughs)

**You've been doing this a while now, and there aren't that many female guitar players out there, and fewer still who are doing blues-rock. Has it worked to your advantage, meaning you stand out, or have you faced difficulty being accepted in such a male dominated genre?**

It's a Catch 22 situation really. There's certainly the novelty which gave me a foot in the door early on, but it meant I've had to work twice as hard to stay there. There's that quote about women have to do twice as well as men to be half as good, there's some of that too. I have a female drummer as well, which has even more of a novelty factor about it. I think people just don't expect

women to play rock guitar or drums. There are more out there now though than when I started 12 years ago! It's... I don't want to say a blessing and a curse, I think Catch 22 sums it up better.

**It was Dave Stewart who spotted you originally wasn't it?**

Yeah - he came to a charity gig I was playing at when I was sixteen. One of his friends handed him a demo and he got involved after hearing that.

**Did he help you get a deal or just offered a guiding hand musically?**

He had his own label at the time called The Artist Network and I signed to that. He put together a band called D.U.P. that I played in for about a year. I worked with him for a year or two and then the label folded unfortunately... or fortunately, looking back, because I don't think I was ready to do an album back then!

**Was knowing Dave the reason you were playing with Annie Lennox at the Jubilee concert?**

Ah, yeah! I met Annie years ago through Dave because they are still close friends. She knew me from back then and remembered me.

**Did you have to buy your own wings when you played with her?**

(Laughs) No I didn't, but I did get to keep them!

**I get the impression you are very much a jeans and t-shirt kind of girl, I didn't think fluffy wings were really your thing!**

No, I tend to hide my wings when I go out in public! To go from Converse, ripped jeans and a battered Joan Jett T-shirt to a white suit with wings... well, you do things for Annie Lennox that you probably wouldn't do at your own gig! (laughs)

**When you play your shows here in October, have you decided how many songs you will play from the new album or is the set list still a work in progress?**

Kind of a work in progress, but I think I'll be filling the bulk of the set list with this album. Then a few choice favourites from the other two albums and maybe a cover. But mostly I'm excited about touring the stuff from this album.

**Do you have a particular favourite, on the album?**

It changes... I think from a pat on the back point of view, I'd go with 'Almost Always Never'. That and 'Lose Myself To Loving You', because those two were songs that I really hadn't written anything like before and I thought they turned out really well... for someone who thinks of herself as a song writer, but not a good one! (laughs) I was really pleased with them.

**So you should be - this record has had like a hold over me. I keep having to go back and play it again and that doesn't happen to me that often.**

That's the best thing I could have heard, that's why I made it, and it's so nice to know at least one person thinks that! (laughs)

*Joanne Shaw Taylor's new album, "Almost Always Never" is released by Ruf Records on September 17th. Joanne's UK tour starts at the Robin in Bilston on October 9th. Ticket Hotline: 0844 478 0898, www.thegigcartel.com. Special guest is Tristan Mackay.*