

# JOE BONAMASSA

With a string of quality releases to his name, along with some high profile collaborations like *Black Country Communion* and his work with powerhouse songstress *Beth Hart*, Joe Bonamassa has built up a loyal and ever increasing following for his brand of the blues. In March, he played a historic four nights in London, each show at a different venue – beginning at *The Borderline*, moving to the *Shepherd's Bush Empire*, rocking out at the *Hammersmith Apollo* and bringing it to a close with a stunning performance at the *Royal Albert Hall*. All four nights were captured in high definition as 'Tour De Force', released individually or in a box set. James Gaden grabbed the opportunity to speak to Joe during one of his very few moments of downtime...

I've been watching the DVD sampler from your upcoming box set 'Tour De Force' and I must say, I'm really impressed with it.

Well thank you! Enjoy it while you can, take a good long look at it, because I'm never doing that again.

How did the concept to perform four different shows at four different sized venues first come up?

It was basically Kevin Shirley, myself and my manager Roy who came up with the idea. However, if I'd honestly known what I was getting myself into, I'd have just paid for the lunch myself and left the room! There's no way I'm ever attempting it again.

It must have been such a huge undertaking. It's not just the fact you're doing four different venues - it's four different venues, four different sets...

...four different nights, four different bands, yeah! We brought in different band members to represent my entire back catalogue in the space of one week. There are so many different facets to what we have done over the years. We've done a horn band, an acoustic band, a three piece, a four piece... it was basically taking fifteen studio albums and mashing the best of those into four nights and about sixty songs.

How difficult was it to fix upon a setlist for the shows with you having so many records to choose from?

It wasn't so bad, a lot of the stuff was self-explanatory. A lot of them you knew you had to play with a particular group. Some

were clearly the stronger songs on a record. It wasn't a problem initially. Learning and executing it all was the tough part.

I was wondering about that. When you performed 'An Acoustic Evening at the Vienna Opera House', you spent what I consider to be a very short time rehearsing for that. How much time was set aside for these shows?

We spent three weeks initially with the four piece band and about five or six days with the other groups. Basically we'd rehearse it, then play it, then rehearse with the second group, play with them. That way, you're not cramming it all and trying to remember which stuff is up next, the freshest stuff is in your mind. You would then clear out your short-term memory for the next band. It was a lot of work and a lot of pressure.

How did you decide on which show should have which theme?

It was pretty easy to come up with doing a blues night at Shepherd's Bush and doing the three piece at The Borderline. The Royal Albert Hall was perfect for the acoustic and electric show and Hammersmith suited the rock night. That side of things was easy, it just fell into place.

Regarding the four different sets, did you prefer one over the other?

I thought the Albert Hall show was really strong. A close second was the Borderline gig, very close to that was Shepherd's Bush with Hammersmith fourth. That's because I was just so cold in Hammersmith. I couldn't warm up. By the time the show



Photo: Christie Goodwin

was over, it was still only about 60 degrees in the room! Too cold to really play.

I favoured Shepherd's Bush because I'm a sucker for a good brass section and yours was brilliant, it suited the songs so well.

Oh, I'm a sucker for horns too, you and I are the same way!

How about the venues themselves? Some artists prefer the close proximity shows, others like the large grand venues. Do you have a preference?

I don't mind the big gigs, but I do enjoy smaller club gigs. The situation I'm in tonight, (playing in Aberdeen) we've got the sound fighting us. The place is effectively a concrete and tin shack with a tall roof. What can you do? With electric music, it's nearly impossible. Those nights are tough. But then when you play in a really great sounding arena, it becomes killer.

The packaging for this

collection is fantastic - especially the box set with everything in, which is done as a miniature Marshall amplifier.

Yeah, I've got to thank Paul Marshall for that, letting us borrow the brand to put everything in!

Good packaging is something I associate with your more recent releases. 'Dustbowl' came in a lovely digi-pack, 'Driving Towards The Daylight' had a lavish booklet with it, and the artwork and packaging for this collection is stunning. Is this something you get involved in?

Yeah, I'm still holding out as one of those cats who likes the booklets. I'm not into buying things digitally online. I want a package and I think it's nice to have something to read through while you're listening. Obviously with this box-set, you can read 'War And Peace' with seven and a half hours worth of music like we have here! (laughs) It's a lot

of fun and it's extra value for the fans. People really enjoy it. I've yet to get a finished box set in my hands, but the pictures I've seen, I think 'Yeah, that's cool'.

Regarding offering extra value to the fans, the DVDs have a bunch of behind the scenes extras, and there's some footage of you visiting a rare guitar shop in Soho. On the shows themselves, you have some pretty special guitars, including ones that belonged to Rory Gallagher, Gary Moore and Bernie Marsden.

Yeah, Bernie lets me borrow his guitar for all the English tours. I actually have it right now. That's a beautiful '59, there's Gary Moore's guitar which used to belong to Peter Green, then there's Rory Gallagher's guitar which is really special and a lot of fun to play. They were like the special guests of the night!

Did you actively seek out those guitars or do they tend to find their way to you like

Bernie's did?

They come from different sources. Bernie and I have been friends a long time. My girlfriend Sandi knows Donal Gallagher so she sorted that out for me. With the Peter Green guitar, that was just a random 'Hey, this guy called Phil Harris has the guitar' and did I want to check it out? I said sure and he brought it down.

I believe you've been encouraging Bernie to make a new solo record?

Yeah, I'm actually playing on it this week. He's supposed to have a few guests on there - Bernie has quite a Rolodex!

You constantly spread yourself musically, whether it's some acoustic shows, exploring classic rock with Black Country Communion, soul with Beth Hart or funk with RockCandyFunkParty. What are you looking to do next?

Ah, whatever comes to mind really. All of those things you just mentioned, they are all tied

to the core of my musical roots, which is the blues. I find playing all that stuff helps you become a better blues player in a strange sense.

These four concerts indicate how far you've come as an artist. Are you surprised when you see yourself in the Albert Hall, or did you always imagine it that way?

I'm surprised I made it out of The Borderline. I think a lot of people are too! These concerts are a snapshot in time. All I could hope is that the shows would come out well. Then we're on to the next thing, touring again. It's funny, that stuff you're watching was like six months ago to me, I'm right back out doing more shows.

With you being so prolific in terms of both recorded output and touring, is that why you have to keep changing format, to keep yourself fresh?

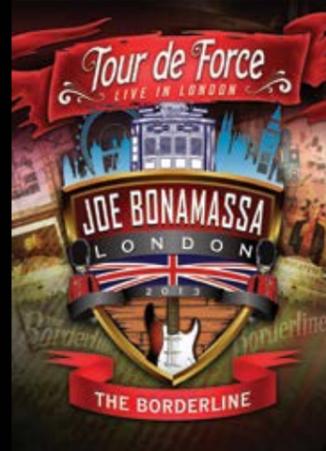
Absolutely, that's really what

it is. You start by making yourself happy. Hopefully that will be contagious and it'll branch out from there.

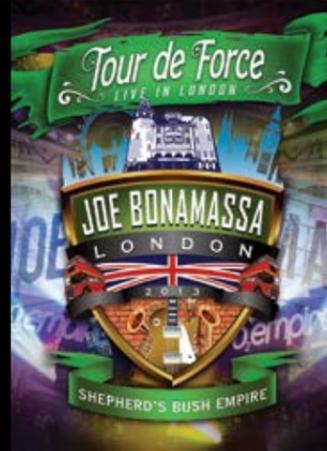
With everything done, boxed up and ready for sale, do you look back at that historic week as a real landmark, or was it more hassle than it was worth?

No, it wasn't more hassle than it was worth, it was just a lot more work than I anticipated. At 36 years old, I don't know if I have enough energy to do another hell week like that one. I'm really proud that I pulled it off, but I don't think I could do that in ten years time. It would have to be done over two weeks. We wanted to do something unique, and we achieved that, so for that reason, I'm very proud!

On October 28<sup>th</sup> Joe Bonamassa will release 'Tour De Force', four Blu-ray and DVD releases of his sold-out March 2013 London concerts at The Borderline, Shepherd's Bush Empire, Hammersmith Apollo, and the Royal Albert Hall. The shows are available in this beautiful box set designed to resemble a Marshall Amp (pictured right) or they can be purchased individually. Each night is detailed below. For further information visit: [www.mascotlabelgroup.com](http://www.mascotlabelgroup.com)



**The Borderline:**  
The first night in the Borderline offered a rare chance to see Joe up close and personal. Playing in a 'Power Trio Jam' format with Anton Fig on drums and Michael Rhodes on bass, they power through early tracks like 'Miss You, Hate You' and 'Pain And Sorrow' alongside well chosen covers such as 'Burning Hell' and 'Are You Experienced?'



**Shepherd's Bush:**  
The second night, held at the Shepherd's Bush Empire, was dubbed 'Blues Night' and featured Bonamassa fronting a four piece band augmented by a superb horn section. The setlist featured favourites like 'The Ballad Of John Henry' and 'Athens To Athens', early material such as 'So It's Like That' and more recent output such as 'Slow Train'.



**Hammersmith Apollo:**  
The third night saw Hammersmith Apollo house the 'Rock And Roll Night' of the shows. Opening with a short acoustic set including Bad Company's 'Seagull', the full band then join Bonamassa to tear through tracks like 'Driving Towards The Daylight', 'Dustbowl' and the seldom played Led Zeppelin track 'Tea For One'.



**Royal Albert Hall:**  
The final night took place in the Royal Albert Hall and used an array of musicians to perform the 'Acoustic Electric Night'. With some similarities to the stunning acoustic show in the Vienna Opera House, this terrific finale sees songs like 'Black Lung Heartache', 'Sloe Gin' and 'Mountain Time' round off an amazing series of concerts.