

# MATT SCHOFIELD

*Winning plaudits worldwide for his guitar playing, Matt Schofield's blues infused music saw him snapped up by Mascot Records' offshoot Provogue for the release of his new album 'Far As I Can See'. James Gaden spoke to Matt about the six stringer's latest offering...*

**A brand new record, and a brand new label to go with it, seeing you at home with the likes of Joe Bonamassa, Leslie West, Robben Ford... did Provogue come to you or did you go to them?**

It was kind of a combination of both! We'd both been trying to connect with each other for a few years. Ed, the owner, had reached out to me before it turns out, but the message never got to me! When I was free and open, I spoke to them and he said "Oh, glad you finally got back in touch!" (Laughs) Ed's a straight talking Dutchman and he asked me, "You're not going to change all of a sudden are you, go and explore a different style?" and I told him that no, what I play is what I am. He replied, "Good, that's exactly what I want you to do!" It's great to have a label give you full creative control and not want to interfere with what you do, so on that I was sold.

**You've written all the material yourself, with the exception of two cover versions. Do you write by yourself and then turn it into a band track?**

Well, I can write without a physical guitar, I play a virtual one in my head. My partner Dorothy contributes many of the lyrical themes and we work on things together after I've come up with a rough musical concept. I wish I had a magic formula but no, I still consider songwriting and singing a work in progress. Guitar came pretty easy for me, I could do it almost straight away. The other stuff is a journey to bring my writing and singing to the same level.

**What was it about the blues that initially drew you in?**

I always heard it and liked it as a kid, my dad would play his records. I saw a video my dad had - pre-YouTube, now you can just bring it up but back then it was quite rare. It was BB King, Albert Collins and Stevie Ray Vaughn jamming together. That was the revelation for me, the "I wanna do that" moment. Not be one of them specifically, but be up there - they all had such strong individual voices, I'd never seen that highlighted more clearly. You just couldn't say who was the best, you couldn't even compare. They were all so strong and so different, which was incredibly exciting for me and they looked like they were having such fun! So that, and the emotional content of blues, the self expression and the connection with the listener was my main thing, rather than a strict 12 bar formula or set patterns of notes, which is how blues is often thought of.

**Regarding your vocals, I think your voice sounds great here.**

Thanks! The last three or four years, I've paid a lot more attention to vocals, it always used to be guitar I heard. When I started my own bands, somebody had to sing, so I started doing it. Initially it was BB King and Albert King, great singers as well as guitar players, Robert Cray too... but then I started checking out Bobby Bland, Donny Hathaway. I'll never get close to those guys but you start to learn from them. I'd soak it up and then have a go myself. I learned a lot on my last record because I worked with producer John Porter, who taught me so much about singing in the studio, how to pronounce words when you sing them rather than say them, diction, that kind of thing. It's a slow process because I'm stubborn, I try to figure things out for myself. I've never lost my voice on tour though, so my technique can't be too bad!

**You mentioned Albert King there, you have covered his 'Breaking Into Somebody's Home' as well as The Neville Brothers 'Yellow Moon'. Why did you choose those?**

They go way back. 'Yellow Moon' was one of the first albums that my dad got on CD. I wanted to try it, but coming back to the vocal thing, I was wondering how to do it because Aaron Neville is just incredible! (laughs) My friend Jordan John, who plays drums on the record, gave me confidence that we could do something interesting with it. He said he could layer up a Stevie Wonder harmony on there, give it our own twist, swap the sax for a guitar... same with Albert's. We needed a bass guitar on that and I'm used to being in an organ trio, so that was quite new for me.

**How long did you spend making the record?**

We laid it down live, as much as humanly possible for about five days, to get those dynamics and then there was a second week where I was dicking around with guitars. (laughs) We did a lot of mixing as we went, sometimes you can make a song different by playing with the mix, but not necessarily better. We'd rather capture a moment in time and a vibe than look for ultimate perfection.

**More and more artists seem to favour cutting stuff quickly rather than spending hours**

**tweaking and retouching parts.**

I hope it's a reaction against that endless tweaking. We purposely cut ourselves off. We have no click tracks, no auto-tune... you have to be bold, everyone has auto-tune on their records nowadays and I'm not that confident as a vocalist. I should say "Hmm, I could probably tweak that up a bit actually" but I can't bring myself to do it, it feels like cheating! All my favourite records have all kinds of nonsense on, mistakes, the hi-hat is too loud... but that's the character! As human beings, we're all flawed, so records should be the same!

**To continue the 'Old School' recording theme, the album is also getting a vinyl release.**

Yeah! The label have started doing it with a few releases, so I was keen, it's a first for me. A lot of my favourite records are old vinyl, like the first three ZZ Top records. That's the sort of sound I'm looking for. That feel of being right there in the room with them, that intimacy! The label liked the sound of this new record enough, they're putting it out as a double heavyweight vinyl album to get the maximum sound quality. So now I'll have to go and buy a nice turntable! (laughs)

