

It's a good time to be a Joe Lynn Turner fan right now. In the last interview I conducted with Joe, he'd just finished 'The Usual Suspects', one of his best ever solo releases. Merely months after that came Akira Kajiyama's 'Fire Without Flame' album which found Joe in the role of co-writing and providing all the vocals. And now Frontiers release 'Sunstorm', a classic selection of eighties flavoured melodic rock, composed by some of the great writers of the genre, arranged with a more modern touch by Pink Cream 69's Dennis Ward, and with all lead vocals provided by the incomparable singer.

James Gaden took up some of Joe's time just before he was due to jet off to Japan to perform Rainbow songs with an orchestra, something that, according to internet reports, went very well indeed.

I make the call to Joe, and my thoughts of wondering if he'll remember me are banished when he tells me he has messages for me from his assistant who I know, and I enter the rather surreal world of friendly chat with a guy who graces about twenty of the albums in my collection! He tells me he's just about to leave for Japan, so I decide the best place to start is with talk of the show with the orchestra.

"The New Tokyo Philharmonic," Joe confirms. "80 piece, no integrated rock band at all. Nothing - no drums, no guitars, just the orchestra. It's the violins and the cellos that are doing it - they've even copied Blackmore's riffs! It's pretty amazing how detailed it is."

I ask how this came about, because it's not your usual scenario of the rock band with an orchestra for little more than backing.

"This conductor, Yasu, he's being trying to do this for years." Joe says. "He's been trying to get the funding for a few years, you know, and finally it's worked out for him. This has been his pet project, his baby, for a long time. He wanted to do this so badly, he was a big fan. He's a young guy, but he loves the Rainbow stuff, and he thought it would be a good thing to do. He got the funding, and he met me in New York, and sent me all the files and everything which I'm rehearsing with now.

"I have to re-listen to everything, figure out where my moves are, because it's quite different. You think it's just the same

song, but there's quite a difference. Even the meter, the tempo, has altered. And with there being no rock band, I haven't got a snare drum to count on or anything. So it'll be different, and historic in it's nature. Not many people have done this. I know Malmsteen did, but that was instrumentally. I believe he wrote the quartet, or whatever it was. Rainbow did have an orchestra at Budokan, but that was only a 32 piece. This will feel completely new. I'm looking forward to it."

I'm almost drooling at this point, as I see the side of me that loves rock merging with the side of me that loves the likes of Michael Ball and John Farnham, and resulting in a musical equivalent of a wet dream. So I ask if there's any chance of the show being recorded.

"We looked into it," Joe tells me, "and my record label over there asked about a DVD, but it was something crazy like \$50,000. Just a ridiculous amount of money. I'm sure there'll be some form of recording taking place, a board mix of something. It's unlikely to happen without somebody documenting it. It'll be bootlegged - everything is."

After diverting into a totally separate line of questioning about bootlegs, I steer the conversation back to Turner's three album streak of brilliance. I enthuse how much I like 'Sunstorm', and comment for me, his last couple of releases have been among his best.

"Wow. Thank you for those kind words. I dunno, sometimes you just run into that streak of creativity, and everything comes out right. One journalist said to me 'The Usual Suspects' was the best Rainbow album he'd heard.

That's really ha-ha tongue in cheek, but it was

made along those lines so that is a compliment. You can't escape it, your past is constantly following you. If you've done something in the past, you usually carry that with you into the future. You can't erase it. You naturally live and breathe it, so it's going to come out in what you do in the future, in some form. There's no point trying to deliberately do it this way, or that. Work and do what comes out, and Rainbow influences are what comes out with me. You are the sum total of your parts, and it always amazes me with those people who think you can just disregard what went before."

Before I get to 'Sunstorm', Joe asks me if I have a finished version of the album. I tell him I have a promo with artwork on the sleeve and song titles and band details on the back.

"That's more than me then!" he says, laughing. "All I have are rough mix versions on my computer." There's a reason why this is relevant as the interview goes on, but I don't realise until later. "Everybody thinks that the artist gets copies before everybody else," he continues, "and we get bootlegs and desk recordings and this and that... we get nothing!" He laughs again. "Honest to God - even photographs, I really have to thank fans and friends who send me stuff like this because otherwise I'd hardly have anything. I'd have no recollection of where I was or what I did! It's phenomenal, and I'd like to thank all the people who've sent me stuff - I really appreciate it."

I ask about the history of the 'Sunstorm' album. As I understood it, the story behind the album is there were some tracks from his aborted second solo album that should have followed 'Rescue You'.

"That's right, there are three of my songs on the cd that were from that era, and have been redone. Those songs would be 'Keep Tonight' which was written with Jack Ponti, 'Fame and Fortune' and 'Loves Gone Wrong' - both of which were written with my old friend Larry Devoskin, who was in Fandango, but he called himself Larry Dawson back then. Larry is still kicking, doing wonderful things with music and making a good living. He's written with Sammy Hagar, among others."

I then ask how the three songs from that era then became the album I have in my hands.

"Frontiers had material they felt fitted with my three songs and sent me them to see if I was interested in singing them," Joe explains. "They came from some of the great songwriters of that era, like Jim Peterik, John Parr... I listened to them and I thought one or two were a bit, you know... but they said no, trust us, we love them, this will work, they will be redone. So I thought about it and I said ok, I'll give it a shot. And from what I've heard, I think songs like 'Fist Full Of Heat' came out great. I'm not worried about it after hearing what it came out like. And I love the songs Jim Peterik writes - 'This Is My Heart', 'Another You'.... just fabulous."

I recognised the style of 'Another You' and suspected Jim wrote that one. My previous interview was with him, I'm a big fan of his work and that song had a lot of his trademarks. I was going to ask Joe about 'This Is My Heart', because that is my favourite song on the whole album. It has a massive chorus that constantly has me hitting the repeat button on my stereo.

"Well, that's Jim Peterik for you!" Joe enthuses. "It splits your head right open. 'Another You' kills me because of the lyrics and it has R 'n' B tones which I like. Jim was writing for Purple to follow up 'Slaves And Masters' when I was in the band. We had a bunch of great songs that, in my opinion, would've taken Purple into the Aerosmith category. At that time, Aerosmith had been out of it for years, and they reformed and came back, bringing in people like Desmond Child to give them a new, commercial sound with 'Rag Doll' and what have you, and that's what Peterik's job was with Purple. He was there to

give us this extra oomph, and we got some great stuff, like 'Stroke Of Midnight', 'Between Two Mountains', 'Heart Like A Hurricane' - all these great songs.

"Others there got seriously jealous, there was backstabbing, screaming for Gillan to come back - I'm not going to go back to all the dirt slinging, but we could've had an amazing album that really would've catapulted Deep Purple into the 21st century, and made them a big comeback band. Some members didn't share the vision though. Ritchie was fairly into the idea, but Jim and I would sweat over lyrics and melodies, and get real excited about bringing stuff down saying 'Guys, look what we got for this track, it feels right, it fits like a glove'. The more that happened, the more the mutiny happened. It's a shame, because I'm telling you, we had some great songs."

Some of this material is the stuff of legend, so I wonder with Joe re-recording Fandango and solo songs on his 'Undercover' albums, and dusting off old songs for 'Sunstorm', is there any chance of him being able to bring light to some of these songs? Or are they all tied up legally?

"Well, to be honest, I had some of the Purple tapes, but what pisses me off is I don't have a finished track of 'Stroke Of Midnight'. If I did, I would probably record it. I did finish a song called 'Bloodfire' that was on the 'JLT' album. 'Bloodfire' was originally slated for that kind of Purple blues feel they do. I found a rehearsal tape from my Purple days which had this and some other stuff on, but none of it was finished. I did 'Bloodfire' because I thought 'fuck this, it's a good song and it should be recorded'. I'd happily do these songs if I had finished copies, but I think Ritchie has those. But I would do them, because I think the fans have a right to hear them. That's what sucks, the fans are the only people who lose out.

"Some fans were happy I was joining the band, but there was quite a knee jerk reaction from various fan clubs and groups when my name was announced, to the point where they wouldn't even give 'Slaves And Masters' a spin. If you listen to the record, it happens to be a fine album. It's one of Ritchie's favourites, he's said so in the press many times, and it's one of mine too. It flows, it's cohesive, has continuity, good songs, great playing. I think it has one of Roger's better production jobs too. So what's not to like? Well, simply was that I was in the band at all. All of a sudden these people, who live in the past, start groaning and won't even play the record."

I tell Joe I have seen on quite a few forums, there are people who never bothered playing 'Slaves And Masters', but they played one of the HTP records mostly out of curiosity because it was him and Glenn Hughes, and they were blown away by it. So it's their loss.

"That's just it. Some people's resistance to change is incredible. When I say change, I don't mean changing the genre, I mean just a member. Sure, when I came in there are other influences, but I tried to keep my writing for Purple riff orientated, like the stuff I grew up with from them, the 'Machine Head' and 'Who Do We Think We Are'. Riff orientated bluesy rock, with a bit of quirk mixed in, because they're a quirky band."

And after all that, Ritchie ended up going back to Rainbow before long, then abandoning it all in favour of medieval tunes.

"That's the pathetic thing!" Joe laughs. "Now with Steve Morse, I think they've moved into a territory which I just can't relate to. Some of it I just think 'What the fuck is that about?' If you do a complete U-turn, say if I went grunge, the fans I have from my Rainbow days would think of it as betrayal. What Ritchie did was a different thing, it wasn't an attempt at moving with the times or trying to be popular, far from it. It was stuff from his heart, and I knew he wanted to do that, because I use to go

around German castles with him watching a medieval minstrel quartet. He was like a groupie, he'd follow them everywhere, and he'd say to me 'I'm not from this century, I'm from the 16th century and I feel misplaced, I don't fit here, I'm out of touch.'

"Oddly though, his later stuff doesn't even sound that medieval."

I agree, comparing it more to Fleetwood Mac in the eighties than the sound on the first Blackmore's Night album.

"Yeah, like 'Road To Mandalay'. That is a bit Fleetwood Mac," Joe agrees. "And it's not bad. I prefer that for listening than the Maypole thing. I've tried my hand at a medieval song, with the 'Shadow Of The Tyburn Tree' that I did with Stuart Smith. That's a fantastic song and a true story. We researched that song, had all the books out. We really tried to make it authentic, and I think we got a real 16th century feel to it."

I agree again, telling him the last time I spoke to him there was still speculation about him duetting with Candice, and I played 'Shadow Of The Tyburn Tree' to people who liked Blackmore's Night. When they asked who was singing and I said it was Turner, they were very surprised. I tell him this and say I thought he got a really good feel to it. That whole album was great, especially the title track.

"It's a killer album. I'll be seeing Stuart in a couple of weeks - I'm doing a track for Howard Leese's album, with a whole bunch of singers on it... Paul Rodgers, Bobby Kimball, a lot of good singers. I once mentioned it to Carol Stevens, and she said 'We don't want anything to do with Stuart Smith'. I was like 'Ok, once you're best friends, but now you've cut him loose.' Go figure."

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We get talking about shows with Heaven and Earth, Deep Purple, Rainbow, and I mention about a solo show he did with Glenn Hughes filling in Greg Smith's bass role, which eventually lead to HTP forming.

"That era was a very creative for me. Glenn is just prolific, he finds it a lot easier to come up with compositions to me. I'm in awe of how prolific he is, I struggle a bit more. But that period, we bounced off each other really well."

I laugh and comment Joe isn't doing so bad in the prolific stakes. We've had from him 'The Usual Suspects', 'Fire Without Flame' and 'Sunstorm' all within a few months of each other.

"Yeah, but I think I've shot my load now though!" he exclaims, and we both burst out laughing. "It's exciting to be caught in a situation where you have to produce a record, like now... my manager is just killing me for a new CD, and I'm like 'I just finished two cds, and they're hardly out!' People are just picking up on them, and I'm doing the orchestra thing, and I've got another project I'm doing, called Big Noise.

"What that is will be me, Vinnie Appice on drums, Carlos Carvazo on guitar from Quiet Riot, Phil Soussan on bass who worked with Ozzy, Billy Idol, John Waite and others, and Gary Corbett from Cinderella on keys. It's a bunch of great guys, and we're gonna play our own songs. We'll do 'Shot In Dark' that Ozzy did, some Black Sabbath that Vinnie was on, Purple and Rainbow stuff I was on, Dio stuff Vinnie played on, like 'Last In Line', songs like 'Cum on Feel The Noise' - it'll be a fun project. I'm going

to be in Nashville for two weeks putting that together, maybe do a DVD, the whole thing. The idea is we'll play dates for fun, not try to come up with an album. However, we could, because there's some great writers in that band. We'll take baby steps, and see where we go with it.

"I'm doing so much, it's hard to find time to devote to it all. I did some writing this week and a couple of things came out ok. I tend to be writing a bit heavier material at the moment, maybe it's just a phase, but I'm feeling more balls to the wall rock."

I comment that is always good to hear!

"I think so!" Joe replies. "I'm worried about Serafino because he prefers light melodic rock, but I did 'Sunstorm' which is very commercial - we'll see. So I've done like three albums in quick succession, I'm spent from a writing point of view. I've got some dates and festivals to play, so I'll cut loose there and recharge, hopefully be all fresh when I come back."

I can't resist a flippant comment that when he's done the orchestra thing he might totally change his outlook and become a Tom Jones style crooner.

"Hey, I'm wearing a suit!" he laughs. "I've got this beautiful black striped suit, you've got to show a little class. Malmsteen wore his full regalia, but he's Malmsteen. I think he sleeps in that outfit! It's a genre deserving of respect. I'm going to be in a classical venue, with classical musicians, so I shall dress accordingly. I'm not wearing a tie, it'll be a t-shirt under the suit thing, but it looks good. So anyway, this Sunstorm thing, we need to talk about that!"

Absolutely, we've gone way off the point, so I bring things back by asking Joe how he sees the new release, how he would define it to someone wondering whether to buy it or not.

"I guess I should re-quote Jim Peterik when he said 'This album will establish Joe once again as a premier rock vocalist in this genre'. I know we're friends, but that was so kind, he didn't have to say that. That's big stuff. So I'd reiterate his words. I've tried to do a clean job on the vocals, not overdo it or scream, and keep it like the sort of stuff I love, and hopefully my fans will love."

That was definitely something I noticed - Joe's vocals are a bit more reigned in on this album.

"Yeah, and people tell me that's to my credit. 'Usual Suspects' has some more wild stuff I hadn't done for a while so this was cleaner. I was worried about my songs for the project too - I hadn't heard or sang them in years, so I had to make sure I performed them accordingly.

"The other thing is, and Dennis Ward, who did such a great job would probably tell you, is we were working from opposite sides. I was sent skeleton tracks, nothing like the finished product. I had to envision what Dennis was telling me would be there musically, and sing so it fitted with what Dennis envisioned. Some of these tracks I had had no guitars on them at this point. I had to rely on my imagination a lot and sang strong where I imagined the big guitars would come in."

It's now that I understand why Joe was happy when he just heard rough mixes, because it was obviously a lot more than he had to work with.

"It's like trying to describe a beautiful girl," he explains "but you only have a skeleton to look at. So I'd email Dennis, or call him, discuss what he intended to put there, and take it from there. The skeleton tracks were completely redone at Dennis' end. He'd approve or reject a vocal, and when I heard the rough mixes I think it feels right. I haven't overdone the vocals, but they aren't underdone either. Dennis adjusted his thing to get the best from the material, and I have to compliment him. He added just the right textures. There's a lot of patting on the back needed for Dennis, the musicians who played on it, and the writers who contributed.

"It's amazing because the album was made



technically, using files sent back and forth across the water. Dennis is in Germany, I never met him! That's what amazes me about the final result, it's come out so pristine. So yeah, an amazing job by all involved.

"The album is like a resurrection" he continues. "These songs were

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resurrected from the dead, and now they're full of life. We said some of them could be hits in the eighties, but I think some of them could be hits now. 'Another You' could easily be played by an easy listening station, and other tracks could be well suited to pop radio."

After getting over the shock that an album this good can come from people in totally different places sending their contributions to one another, I ask Joe if this album is well received, would he do another one?

"I don't know if it can be done", Joe confides. "The songs are that good on this album... It's like Rocky came out, and now he's doing Rocky VI. I'm not going to fucking see that! I'm wary of follow ups if I think they aren't going to be a good sequel. I do have a lot of songs from the eighties, but Serafino might not want to do those because they are a bit more hard rocking."

That makes sense - Jim Peterik said a similar thing to me in my last interview. He said he has songs that Serafino probably wouldn't want to put out, because Serafino is very aware of Frontiers market and is a great judge of what the fans respond to.

"Yeah, right. I'm in business with Serafino. He loves that slam-bam chorus, and I think that's reflected on Sunstorm, and there was some of that on the 'Usual Suspects'. So, if there were more songs of the quality of the ones on this 'Sunstorm' album, then yeah, unbelievable."

I announce to Joe I think this album will go down really well with his fan base. It's got the big choruses, it's got the ballads, eighties hooks with fresh production, it's got it all.

"Yeah, the playing is really great on this album too," he says. Dennis Ward supplied bass, backing vocals and some guitar and keyboards as well as producing the album, and Uwe Reitenauer played guitar, Chris Schmidt played drums and Jochen Weyer supplied the keyboards.

"These songs were just in demo form," Joe continues. "I did the vocals and sent them to Dennis, and he built them into what they became. I recorded the vocals with my engineer, and Dennis would either approve or reject them, and then add his flourishes."

"I think it came out phenomenal, and I'm extremely proud of not only my contribution, but that of everybody involved. I think this could become one of those classic albums. When people dive into this who love this kind of genre, they will probably make this a stock album for fans of this music. Also, I'd like to say I'm flattered that I was chosen as the vocalist for this project. That's the one thing I'd really like to say, I'm humbled and honoured it was me, because there's a lot of strong voices out there."

I bring things to a close by thanking Joe for another fantastic interview, and he is as gracious and kind as ever. I wish him luck for the Japanese show with the orchestra, and the interview ends much as it began - with me thinking of Joe Lynn Turner as one of the nicest people I've had the fortune to encounter.

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