

THE FIRE STILL BURNS

From Fandango to Rainbow, to Yngwie Malmsteen and Deep Purple, to a string of high quality solo albums, a pair of excellent studio records with Glenn Hughes and fronting Mother's Army, Joe Lynn Turner has an impressive resumé - and that was the edited version! One of his most popular recent endeavours however has been the Sunstorm project, a venture created to find an outlet for some of the unreleased gems in Turner's vault, paired up with songs written by some of the genre's best composers. With two albums out already, fan reaction was very positive... so 2012 welcomes the third installment 'Emotional Fire'. This time though, there's a change to the formula - James Gaden talked to Joe to find out all about it...

How are you doing Joe?

Good James, good - I worked my ass off last year and promo aside, I'm taking these two months off, take some time to dedicate to myself. That's progress. I don't really take enough time for that.

I interviewed Glenn Hughes recently and you two, you're always working, Glenn just did a bunch of one man shows to promote his book and he collapsed at the end of his last gig due mainly to over-work. It's important to shut down from things for a while.

It's true, we are workaholics. I saw Glenn this summer with Black Country Communion, it was nice to see everybody, I hadn't seen Joe Bonamassa in years, as you know, he's all over my solo stuff, he's playing and co-writing with me on the 'Holy Man' record... and nobody seems to realise that! I got a call from Bob Held, who was his old producer, and said that he had a lot of unfinished tracks that we did together. They just need finishing, and Bob wanted to release it with Bonamassa being so hot. I have to check into the legality and everything, I want to stay friends! (laughs) I know what it's like to have people jump on your tail! But there's some lovely songs there - I've sent some to Paul Rodgers, he's a big fan of Bonamassa and he'd be perfect to sing some of this stuff. Look at 'Angel' or 'Honest Crime' that I cut with Joe - they'd be perfect for Paul. And I don't think anybody has heard those tracks enough that Paul couldn't redo them himself.

Well, that tallies up with the reason for this interview, which is the third Sunstorm record - different from the other two because instead of you doing some of your old songs mixed in with new stuff, you're doing some of other peoples old tracks like Michael Bolton and Cher.

Yeah, that I sang on originally! (laughs) It's all full circle. I was in Turkey and was there for about six weeks, chilling, that was pretty much the only time I had off last year. But at the same time I was writing and stuff if inspiration came to me. While I was there, I had no access to my main hard drive where I have my old songs and demos. I told Serafino I couldn't go rooting through them because I was in Turkey, so Serafino went about gathering material himself. I'll be honest, I'm a little sad the opportunity to do some of my old stuff passed for this record, things like 'Tough At The Top', 'Number One', those would be fun to do. But what Serafino sent me - most of it I thought were good songs, there were a couple I had reservations about, I thought they sounded a bit typical eighties. But I had thought that before, and when Dennis Ward comes in, he's an amazing producer and he can make it work.

I must say, when we last spoke you told me you had just started receiving the track ideas from Serafino, there were none of your songs and you were not sold on some of them, so I was a little bit worried about how this album would sound. But I think it really has the Sunstorm punch to it! There some real class on here, and your vocals with Dennis' production and that great band, it keeps that Sunstorm vision going. I do miss your songs, but the inclusion of some Michael Bolton cuts is very smart. I think you and Michael have a similar writing style, big on melody.

Yeah, absolutely, I tip my hat to all of the guys involved. There were a few exchanges where Dennis and I made a few subtle changes and swapped a few things around... I think yeah, I wish I could have contributed some of my stuff to this one, but having some of Michael's songs was great. I remember very well doing the original sessions for some of those, when I was hired to sing backgrounds. I was doing a lot of the high parts when I was a young man with that voice. I could probably do it now, but

I'd have to rest afterwards! I'm not sure Michael could even do them up there now, these were cut thirty years ago! The Cher thing, I was writing with Desmond Child and I was asked to sing on one of her songs, and it was 'Emotional Fire'! So for this album, we've rocked them up a little bit.

I loved what you did with them - Cher's version is alright, but this one has much more punch, more balls and is a great Sunstorm style track.

Yeah, Dennis knows who to rock them up, he makes it sound phenomenal. I've been exchanging messages with him about maybe doing a record together, an all new record. I would LOVE to work with him on some new material.

Have you actually met him yet then?

No, it's all been online! (laughs)

Like I say, I was a bit worried about this album, but as soon as the first track 'Never Give Up' came on, I was a lot happier. That has all the Sunstorm hallmarks, it ticks every box!

Yeah, we've got some good writers on board, the Martin brothers and some Swedish guys - I'm quite familiar with a lot of the Swedish writers because I've got a really great album with Chris Antblad who was the songwriter of the year last year. We were gonna put it out and we were all set, them boom! Sunstorm is out in February. So we figured we should wait, fans can only buy so many records. I'm sad we have to wait because that record is so... it's so different! It's rock, pop, with a twist...it's not standard, yet... kinda poppy with some rock. It's what used to be known as hit material!

Sounds great! Regarding Sunstorm, with the songs, this is your third time around so when you were sent some demos you didn't like, did you have the power to reject them and have Serafino pick something else, or was it "Here are the songs you are doing, off you go"?

To be honest, I didn't get into that. At first, I thought about saying 'Look, can we have some last minute entries?' but I thought why should I stir the pot? I was only back in the States for a couple of weeks before I was back out on the road playing in Russia, so I figured as I'd left it all in Serafino's hands I'd just accept it and not make waves. Besides, it was what he had gathered, so he must hear something in those songs I didn't like. He's not stupid, he has good taste. So I looked at it as a challenge, see what I could do with them and when we got into it, the logistics of actually singing them, that was when I could tweak things slightly to suit me.

Some of the demo vocals were nasally, high toned stuff so we switched the key to something I was happier with. Dennis sent me the Bolton stuff in the original keys! He was in his thirties when he recorded that, and I'm on backgrounds singing above him - Dennis, I turn sixty this year! What are you fucking doing? (laughs) If I did it in the original keys, I didn't want it to sound laboured. In the eighties, every song was like 'solo... and modulate!' Yawn - boring! Why follow it so strictly? Dennis agreed and we could make those subtle changes to get a much better performance. All my life, I've much more enjoyed the deeper Paul Rodgers kinda sound instead of the high whiny voices that were "in" at one point.

I had this very discussion with Jeff Scott Soto elsewhere - it's Steve Perry's fault! When Journey hit big with him, suddenly all the singers had to sing right up there! But guys like Paul, and Jimi Jamison, they've always kept lower and they sound so much better as a result, especially as they have gotten older.

Yeah, it's a rich tone. You mentioned Jimi, I just spoke



to him and Bobby Kimball. We were talking to see if we could have done 'The Three Amigos' where we toured together, but I'm not sure if we can do it. Maybe we can do it with two - Jimi is off to Asia in Spring and I'm looking to play over there. I've been playing Russia so much I'm overdue to go to the Pacific rim.

The other thing I wanted to ask about this Sunstorm album was, previously you told me that you had been given skeleton tracks to sing to, sometimes with very few instruments in, because they would be added by Dennis afterward. This time, with you covering stuff that Bolton and Cher had done, was that easier, having a previously recorded version to use as a guide, or did that make it tougher to make the song your own?

This time, fortunately, Dennis had put some guitars on there, some lead lines - there was more structure in there. That helped with the songs I wasn't sold on, I started to see where we were going - I'm not trying to disparage the writers, these guys have written great songs, but not every song can be great! However, Dennis put some more beef in what he sent me, which helped enormously. That band is an amazing band - I'd use those guys for solo work if I do an album with Dennis, they would be fantastic.

When you told me originally that there were two or three Bolton tracks on it, you said one was 'Gina' from 'The Hunger' but you couldn't remember the other one at the time... and it turned out to be 'You Wouldn't Know Love' which Cher did cut, but so did Michael, it's on his 'Soul Provider' album. I always liked that, I thought it was a great rock song, but I think because it was on 'Soul Provider' which is what made him a mainstream guy, a lot of his rock fans shirked that record and maybe missed it. I was pleased you got to do that, you did a great job!

Oh yeah, great song! We've been friends since Blackjack, I thought it was great for him to invite me on the records, to sing on 'The Hunger'. I saw him last year actually - he has a reputation of being a little snooty, but he's never been like that to me. Besides, you do have to be off sometimes in this business, or people will just overwhelm you. The reason I mention that is whatever my doubts originally when this project started with a couple of tracks, when I saw there were some Bolton songs on there, great! Of course, 'Emotional Fire' was written by Michael, Desmond and Diane Warren. Diane's fabulous.

You're both very skilled songwriters, but I think that often gets overlooked, you both get seen as "singers". Michael has written some stunning stuff, not just for himself but for others.

And he's got a supremely soulful voice. He's a consummate professional and really talented. He had people saying his voice grated on them, I don't know how. I'll never figure people out! (laughs)

So, with this being the third Sunstorm album, are you happy to leave it as a trilogy, or do you think there's more to come?

I'm all in favour of not wearing something out. I was on the treadmill last night and I decided to listen to

'House Of Dreams' again. Personally, I don't think we can beat the first Sunstorm, now I've had time to look back on them. That was amazing. 'House Of Dreams' is pretty good though. I enjoyed it, the song writing was really good. This third one though - there's a good feeling about it, if it's really well received I'd certainly consider another, but if not, I do think a trilogy is a good place to stop.

Besides which, if you did get really into dusting off more songs from your vaults, there's nothing to stop you doing that on a solo album.

Exactly! And I would! There's a lot of songs that can be done, or songs from my albums that can be re-done a different way. I honestly think some of those solo records didn't have a fair shot. I think some of them slipped by people. But material can always be revisited. I could hand pick the best stuff and redo them with Dennis giving it some serious production.

Yeah, you could tweak arrangements, or add another dimension, maybe add strings to a ballad...

Yeah, give them a different treatment. I have my hardcore fans who will know these songs but there's plenty of people who it would all be new to, which is quite nonsensical.

Again, same thing with Glenn Hughes - ever since Black Country Communion has taken off, he's got a whole bunch of people checking him out who are maybe Bonamassa fans first and foremost. How can they not know Glenn?

(Laughs) Yeah, there's this other crowd that really don't know him, especially over where you are, that are picking up on Glenn now. I'm so happy for him, finally, somebody has helped him reach more people! BCC do a lot of styles, a bit Zeppelin, a bit bluesy, a bit Glenn... they're all great musicians. Bonamassa has just sold out some solo shows over here, and I knew him, had him on my records when nobody gave a shit! (laughs) Yeah, who is this Glenn Hughes character? (laughs)

I've just finished reading Glenn's autobiography - I highly recommend it and I wondered if that was something you had considered doing, with you working with some really cool people in your time?

I really would - I actually started with a journalist but the guy was too unreliable. I'd love to write the book, but I really don't have the time and I need someone literary enough to turn it into an actual book. I know where the bodies are buried! (laughs) No, I wouldn't go for the throat, I'd just tell it like it is if I was to write one. But at the moment I'm too busy playing live and making music.

Glenn's a savvy guy, he knows how to keep in touch with the fans. I've made a New Year's Resolution to be more active with social media. I turned away from that stuff because it was not what I thought you should be. But my publicist Lisa keeps telling me I should do it and there doesn't seem to be any getting away from it. She says 'Glenn does it!' I said 'well, do people care what I have for breakfast?' and she said 'Yes!' (laughs) Really? I think it's stupid, but hey! One thing we will do, is we are polling the fans about what they want to know, then I go on with a video and answer them. I don't think many people do that.

Yeah, that has merit, that has purpose. When I write an update on my page, I try to make it funny or at least interesting. I can't be doing with 'I just had ice cream - yummy!'

Yeah, what's the point? I think it would be much cooler to do "this question is from so-and-so" and then I provide the answer. And I'll tweet, then it'll go to my Facebook... I've got to start doing that.

So, the other album with the Chris Antblad, is that on hold until later in the year, or indefinitely?

I don't know, we'll see. We have to let Sunstorm play out. What a shame! I just think this thing has the goods, there some stuff, there's a ballad written by Gary Baker from Nashville who wrote 'I Swear' which has been covered loads of times in different genres. He wrote a song called 'Maybe Someday' and it's just an amazing,

tear jerking ballad. My vocals on it are actually the demo vocals. There's not a lot of moving around, ad-libbing or stuff, it's all about the song. The songs are so strong. But I'm sad it's had to be delayed again, but perhaps it'll give us time to take a good look and make sure it's all right for when it does come out.

It might serve you well, being delayed. I always think that January is a shit time to put stuff out, everyone is lethargic, everyone is broke after Christmas.

Yeah, maybe you're right, that's why I'm glad Sunstorm is out at the end of February! (laughs) People do perk up in the spring. I tell you, we have three Sunstorms out now, a brilliant band, a wealth of great material... I think it should go out on the road. Hello! I think that would be interesting.

Definitely. I know you've played a couple of Sunstorm songs in your solo set.

Yeah, and it goes over great, from Brazil, to Europe, to the States... the hardcore fans know it, but the guys who come and see me to hear stuff from Rainbow and things, they hear it and want to know what it is. You get a resurgence of interest because you can only attract the attention of so many people with adverts and things. But there you go.

I was surprised there were no Jim Peterik tracks on this Sunstorm, he always comes up with the goods.

Yeah, he's a brilliant writer. On Jimi Jamison's record that he did... and the stuff he did on 'House Of Dreams' - 'Gutters Of Gold', 'Tears On The Pages' - just brilliant. Really good, well written songs. It needs the wow factor. That's why I initially had a little trepidation with this record, I knew some were good cuts but the ones I wasn't sold on worried me. But like I say, as we moved on and Dennis worked his magic, there seems to be a really good feeling about it. I just hope, like we discussed before, I hope it doesn't get leaked too much like the last one.

I had this exact discussion with Brian Howe last issue, he told me went over budget getting his album 'Circus Bar' just right, and it was superb. But it was leaked and he decided as a result he had no chance of recouping his money, so he's not bothering making records anymore, which, as a fan, I'm unhappy about.

Kudos to Brian, I like him, he's a funny guy, a great singer. He really puts his heart and soul into his stuff and that was a reason why I had the trepidation about these songs. I was frightened at first, but when I looked at it as a challenge and seeing if we could match up with what Serafino saw, then we made progress. Now I've heard what Dennis has done with them, the way he's brought everything up and with that band, who play furiously, it's more than listenable! We've talked about the Bolton songs, but I really like 'Lay Down Your Arms', that's got some real emotional content in it. I must admit, when I've done a record, I'm always a bit dark in my outlook, second guessing things and questioning them, so we'll see. It's good to hear you are happy with it.

I think the fans will be pleased with it, if they like the two before this, I can't see this upsetting anybody.

Yeah, but there's no accounting for taste! (laughs) The state of the music business... I mean, Lady Gaga? She did a show at New Year here in Times Square. We stayed home because I call it amateur night - a lot of amateur drunks out there and I'm a professional! We stayed home and had a nice meal, put the TV on and there's like a million people there and Lady Gaga - I thought she

absolutely sucked! It was flat, when she was interviewed I thought she was a pretentious, plastic person trying to be sincere. I think she's completely manufactured, this is what society has come to! Any other planets I'm welcome at? It's disheartening - I miss the old days! I listened to Jimi Hendrix, you know what I mean? (laughs) Most of what I listen to is old stuff. There's very little new stuff that comes out now I would even want.

Anyway, I digress - I once again want to thank Dennis and the band for a terrific job as always. I didn't sing any backgrounds on this one either, so I just had to make sure the lead was as good as it could be. I'm interested in doing some different directions too, maybe explore country stuff, I've got a good country name! Not like 'yee-ha' or anything, more the new country scene.

That brand of country is big. I quite like some of it.

Yeah, real big. Some of the new stuff is inspiring, it shows there are still song writers out there. I know some people in Nashville, I have some material in that vein, I'd like to send it to some of these guys to see what they think. I'm not just one self... the great poet Walt Whitman said "Do I contradict myself? Very well, then I contradict myself, I am large, I contain multitudes." I'm many musical selves - I'd like to do some new country stuff, I'd like to get together with Karl Cochran and write some heavy funk-metal tracks. I want to dig into that too.

Yeah! You've only dabbled with the odd funky song here and there, you've never really gone for it.

Yeah, I want to open up the soul part of me. Glenn does that and mixes it with some alternative sounds. I like him to straight on hit it and funk out, because he's the white Stevie Wonder. He should have made his mark that way in a fair world. If I was producing him, that's the kind of record I'd want him to make, funky bass, killer instrumentation, black girls backing him, the full bit. That's his forte. But I've never had chance to explore that, and that's really my background. However, as you know, the only way an artist makes money is live. So I have to focus on that first, look at playing Asia for a bit. But I'd like to do something like that, before everything blows up! (laughs)

