

JOE LYNN TURNER

Discusses Sunstorm, Rainbow and a live solo album with James Gaden

It's a good time to be a Joe Lynn Turner fan. The legendary vocalist is not only at the helm of a brand new Sunstorm album of all new material, there is also a superb live album from his shows supporting his classic 'Rescue You' record called 'Live In Boston 1985'. On top of that, there is a Rainbow release from Turner's first tour with the band, also recorded in Boston. Fireworks called the singer a few days after he finished a South American tour.

How did your tour go?

Great, I did a bunch of South American dates and the crowd down there were just as amazing as I expected them to be.

And you've just done Greece too.

Yeah, it was mostly acoustic shows in Greece and it was so much fun to do a lot of covers. It was mixed in with some Deep Purple and Rainbow stuff of course, but it was mostly about the influences in my life, stuff like The Doors, The Beatles, Van Morrison, all kinds of fun stuff, I did some Free, Kansas, just some great songs.

Is that something you might think about in the future as an album?

You know what, yeah. A smaller record company approached me about doing something along those lines, I want to do it properly in a studio... it works well live but in a studio situation, with some accoutrements, it could be great. In some cases we had a cajon, which is like a drummer beating on a wooden box, sometimes we had a small piano and an acoustic bass, but it was just killer.

You have some new things out... first off, there's the Boston 1985 show when you went out promoting 'Rescue You'. I've had this as a bootleg for years but I'm glad it's been given a proper release, it sounds great. How come it's only just coming out now?

Cleopatra Records approached me and they have a programme where things like this, which have been bootlegged, they make them legal, clean them up. They were honest, telling me I was not going to retire on it or anything, but it was about me owning the material. They would enhance the sound and make it sound right, and be a better product than the bootleg and all legal. I was proud they chose it and I think it sounds damn good.

It does, and it showcases the songs from 'Rescue You' really well. It showed you weren't reliant on Rainbow, you only play two Rainbow tracks, but it doesn't matter, the rest of the show is that strong.

Thank you! I agree, we did basically all the album plus 'Good Girls Gone Bad', which I had written for 'The Canadian Ballet' which was a stripper movie, it was a great documentary about the lives of these girls. I had a couple of other songs from that which I should dig out, I was really prolific writing back then. I have been chastised from fans for not playing a lot of my solo stuff and I've made a resolution that I'll play more of my stuff from now on. I tried to keep Rainbow alive, now Ritchie is going out with what I will call a cover band... we'll get to that, but I played in Chile and I mixed things up with some stuff from 'Slaves And Masters' like 'Wicked Ways' and 'Fire In The Basement', stuff I haven't done in years, and they went crazy for it. I'm tired of a lot of songs I play, but I still have passion for playing so I want to play more solo material. We have a new Sunstorm out and I'm trying to get support for a Sunstorm tour, we've got four albums of great material, a great band, it would be fucking killer.

Serafino [Perugino, Frontiers boss] offered me one show in Milan but you can't rehearse everyone for one show, if you do one show, you might as well schedule a few through the UK and Europe.

I think people maybe viewed Sunstorm as a project at first, but now you've got four albums, it's actually had more legs than a lot of so called "bands".

I don't really see why people turn off from a "project", if it's great new music, it's great new music, what does it matter whether it comes from a band or a project? What's the difference, are you putting a patch on your denim jacket or something? (laughs)

I think Sunstorm is more like a band thing, but then Frontiers will put something out like Revolution Saints where the record is great, but you know chances of them touring is virtually nil. The same goes for a lot of releases, but Sunstorm could be different.

Right, we're not a "band" but there is a common thread tying all the albums together and that's me, so you could call it a Joe Lynn Turner project if you want, but it is an ongoing thing. I did think I'd stop at three albums, but I'm so glad I didn't, this new one is harder, heavier, it's incredible. I really enjoyed this record. I think we've hit on something here because Sunstorm has evolved, that is the key word. You're right,

some projects are done as a one off, but Sunstorm isn't, it's evolving.

Who instigated this fourth record then, did Frontiers talk you round?

Serafino told me that these Sunstorm records are successful and it's one of his pet projects, because it was he who had a tape of some of my songs from the 80s, which was lifted from a drunken night in a hotel room. Serafino wound up with a copy and thought the songs deserved to be heard, and that was how Sunstorm started. We did the same on the second one, but I didn't give up any of my songs for the third one because I was sick and tired of not getting any publishing for them. This business isn't like it was, CD sales are not what they were, so if you don't get your publishing and your royalties, it's discouraging. I felt like I was giving these songs away. I'm taking nothing away from Frontiers, they have a passion for this music, but I have other things I'm working on, I've got something going with a producer from Sweden who has done very well so I've got something there which will see me change my style somewhat, I'm writing for that.

Is that why you haven't written on this one, instead leaving most of that to Allesandro Del Vecchio?

Absolutely. Allesandro knew me from Rated X – there's another band that actually became a project because of what happened to Karl Cochran, and with the schedules of Tony Franklin and Carmine Appice we couldn't find three weeks to tour, which I was blistering mad about, because we had festival dates that went to hell... anyway... Allesandro and the guys were doing skeleton tracks for Sunstorm, sending me what they were

doing and then I'd tell them how I wanted the mix and the production. I was telling him the guitars needed to be up, the harmony needed to be sparse, whatever. All the guys, especially Allesandro, were fantastic. We shot a video in Greece for 'Edge Of Tomorrow' that looks great, all about lying politicians, thieving bankers, us all being broke, economic crashes – you're seeing it in England, we're in bad shape. America is having a revolution, it's all change. This is the edge of tomorrow.

I was taken aback by this new Sunstorm sound, I was expecting the 80s style AOR and this isn't like that, it's more modern, harder, and you describe it as trying to blend Rated X with Sunstorm.

Sure, that's the evolution. When I agreed to do a fourth one, I asked Serafino for full control of the songs. We must have had twice the material and I threw out a bunch. I had full approval, I didn't want stuff thrown at me. Originally they were pitching me some Mark Free stuff and I didn't want to go there, so we made a contract where I had full approval. I called Allesandro and asked him for something that was between Rated X and Sunstorm, like my solo stuff, but with an aggressive edge. Allesandro was totally behind it, he knows who I am as an artist, the guys kept me in the loop every step of the way and I think we have a great working method now. I am really, really proud of this record.

It sounds like you're basically more like the producer for Sunstorm now then, instead of the singer and one of the contributors. Your role has evolved like the music.

Perfect – I couldn't have put it better, I took these tracks and tweaked them to be right for me. I'm not taking writing credits because I did act more like a producer, I was picking songs and "Joe Lynn Turner-ing" them. These guys took my lead and it worked so well. There was a mutual respect and that's what it's about at this stage of my career. I've made an album I'm really proud of with a team who respect me and I respect them. That's what I want.

On the subject of respect, I saw the comment Ritchie Blackmore made about you regarding the Deep Purple induction into the Rock And Roll Hall of Fame, where he said you should have been inducted for your "excellent singing and writing on 'Slaves And Masters'".

That knocked me out. Yes, I was unhappy about how things panned out with him going out with this new band, but that comment was worth as much as any award. I don't blame Ritchie for not being there, it's a Hollywood cabal and it's lost sight of what it's supposed to be, but anyway, I really respected what Ritchie said.

I know you and he were all set to meet up, and then he tells the press you aren't going to be involved because he's got a new singer in the form of Ronnie Romero. I thought that was a bit off, he should have told you first if he wasn't going to work with you.

As you know, when Ritchie and I talked about meeting, what I wanted to do was make it an authentic Rainbow reunion with Jimmy Bain, who

we just lost, or Bob Daisley. I wanted to really celebrate the Dio era, all eras of Rainbow, do it right because people love the band. Make it an extravaganza. Some people have never seen Rainbow, but love the band. However I didn't know exactly what Ritchie wanted to meet for. And then we never ended up meeting.

I wondered if he was annoyed you had told the press you were in contact and then decided to go with a new guy in the form of Ronnie Romero instead. Or maybe he didn't want to commit to a lot of shows, which is why he went for lesser known musicians. Or maybe he feels Romero is better suited to the songs he wants to play, because he did tell me it would be a lot of Dio material. Regardless, I think he should have told you first, rather than say you wouldn't be involved via the press. I wondered if his comment about the Hall of Fame was him making amends.

Maybe. I know he does love 'Slaves And Masters' so that was nice. I was getting all kinds of shit on the internet that I was delusional when I said Blackmore was interested in doing some Rock stuff and we were talking about meeting up. I just said we were going to be meeting and used the word "possibility" that we might do something together. As things got closer, I changed that word to "probability" but the internet said Blackmore wasn't going to do anymore Rock, I was ripped apart and yet here it is. It's not with me, it's with two guys from Blackmore's Night, Jens Johanssen and Ronnie Romero, and I don't think that's Rainbow, because they've never done a record and a tour to be considered a Rainbow line-up. I think he missed the opportunity to do it last year to tie in with the 40th Anniversary, but there you go.

'Slaves And Masters' is a great record and I think it suffered the same way Deep Purple's 'Come Taste The Band' did – that got lambasted for not having Blackmore, and Tommy Bolin got all kinds of criticism, and the same happened with you for replacing Ian Gillan. As time has passed, lots of people are

realising how good 'Come Taste...' was and I think more people are realising that about 'Slaves...'

Yeah, a lot of people come up to me asking me to sing stuff from it or telling me how much they liked it. It got panned by people like Simon Robinson at the time, just because I was on the record, and then you factor in the Grunge movement, it didn't get a shot. Some people panned it because Gillan wasn't on it, without even hearing it! What is up with that? I listened to it again recently because I've been playing four of five tracks from it on tour and they're coming off great, and I think it was ahead of its time. This band I had with me were killing it, these songs work. We weren't trying to appease a bunch of toothless old men, we were trying to reach a new audience. Yet Jon Lord, God rest his soul, and Ian Paice, they really wanted Gillan back, so that's what happened. Was 'The Battle Rages On' better than 'Slaves And Masters'? Fuck off, neither was 'House Of Blue Light'.



Brian Johnson got a lot of grief when he replaced Bon Scott in AC/DC, that worked out okay!

Yeah, and look at now! I'm a good friend of Brian's, I know him well and I think the current situation is disgraceful. How could you get a fucking asshole like Axl Rose to replace a guy who has given blood, sweat and tears for 36 years... the Young brothers should have just hung it up, it's not like they need the money. I have 'Appetite For Destruction', that is brilliant, but to wheel him out in a chair to fill Brian Johnson's shoes? And before Axl, fans were taking to the internet suggesting all kinds of people who were either unsuitable or just terrible singers, like you can just swap Brian out and carry on. There's no loyalty. It pisses me off.

Speaking of new singers, there is a live album from Rainbow coming out from your first tour with them, entitled 'Boston 1981', on the 'Difficult To Cure' tour, which were your first Rainbow shows. It's great because it spans your stuff, Graham Bonnet stuff, Dio stuff and even Purple too. I assume Ritchie was the guy choosing the songs?

Yeah, but that was fine by me, I understood fans would want to hear stuff from Bonnet and Dio, you had to include material from past versions of Rainbow, I've never been someone to refuse to sing another singer's song. A lot of them do, I know Bonnet only really does his stuff with his shows, but I was happy to take them on. 'Love's No Friend' was cool because it wasn't a hit song, it was an album song, it wasn't like having to go out and do 'Since You've Been Gone'... although I did that plenty of times, I still do it at the Rewind Festival. I just take the song and try and make it my own. I had no problem, I loved the Dio stuff, I loved 'Down To Earth' – although I thought that had more commercial elements than 'I Surrender', yet I was the one who got hell for making the band "commercial". There's nothing more commercial than 'Since You've Been Gone', the original is a pure Pop song! I thought my era got condemned for being "commercial" when we actually had a lot of great, Melodic Hard Rock on the records I did. 'Difficult To Cure' was great, lots of Blues influences on it... but some people like different things.

It's probably partially to do with the fact that some people didn't like the change from the Dio era, and the fact your era had the highest charting single and more "hits", so that is probably where the commercial tag comes from.

Yeah, that's true, some people don't like change, but some people hang on to it, won't even think about trying it again after twenty or thirty years. But no, I liked trying to make those other singer's songs my own, I'd usually try and stay true on the first verse and by the time the second verse came around I was on my own. I'd try and pay respect to the original and then put my stamp on it, I'm not there to ape anyone, I was just trying to interpret it. I'd be interested to see if they play 'I Surrender' with the new Rainbow lineup, I think Ronnie Romero is more of a Metal singer and I think he'll do great on the Dio stuff, but I don't know what he'll do for

some of the other tracks. We'll see.

Do you have any specific memories of that first Rainbow tour?

We were all really full of enthusiasm back then, it was a great band – although I think that was the case throughout my era, we just put out so much good stuff. I think the line-ups I was in played more shows than any other, we were really productive and put out some great songs.

I think that's because you had three writers in the band, with you, Roger Glover and Ritchie.

Definitely, what I didn't cover Roger did, vice versa and I respect that to this day. Ritchie rarely writes complete tracks, mostly he would jam ideas out, then Roger and I would literally cut the tapes up into sections to make verses and choruses, come up with lyrics and then Ritchie would approve things, so it was a trinity working together.

Did you have to do any old Rainbow songs when you auditioned?

No, the only songs I really auditioned with were new things which wound up on 'Difficult To Cure.' They threw the tracks for 'Midtown Tunnel Vision' and 'No Release' at me and I listened through, made up some words and sang over them. I have what Ritchie called a "magic lyric bag" where I could pull something out and just freestyle and it was my ability to improvise that helped get me the job. Then, and I've told this story before, they gave 'I Surrender' to me and they had a backing track which Graham Bonnet had already cut. I put my stamp on it and that was it, I never had to run through any Dio stuff or anything at that point.

Were there any songs you wanted to do, that you didn't, or any Ritchie wanted you to do that you weren't comfortable with?

There weren't any I bitched and complained about having to sing, I looked at them as a challenge. I'm still singing Dio songs now as a tribute to Ronnie, I want to help keep his music alive. There were some songs we really should have done, not on that first tour, but we did 'Eyes Of Fire', it was the epic from my era and we only did it once or twice. The other one I really wanted to do more was 'Firedance', I loved that and we only played that a little. People want

the hits, they want familiarity. It happens now in my solo set, if I don't play 'Can't Let You Go' I get shit for it! Especially where I've just been in South America, we play that and 2,000 people sing it, I don't even need to be there, I just hold the microphone out! (laughs)

I remember saying the same thing to Glenn Hughes, about the amount of times he must have sung 'Burn', he must be sick as hell of it.

Well it's a classic – I play 'Burn' too! I'd rather sing that than 'Smoke On The Water' if I'm honest. People ask me why I do it in my set because I didn't write on it or sing on the record, but I fronted Deep Purple, I sang it with them, we used to open the show with it, and it's a classic. I have a real affinity for it and if people want to hear it, why not?



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