



One of those things is Rated X, the brand new band featuring vocalist Joe Lynn Turner, bassist Tony Franklin, drummer Carmine Appice and guitarist Karl Cochran. Joe Lynn Turner explains to James Gaden about the “Rated X curse”, enduring a year of hurdles and overcoming a tragedy, in the name of Rock N Roll...

The origins of Rated X began like many projects out there, via the vision of Frontiers leader Serafino Perugino.

“Serafino approached me months before we started with the idea that he wanted a project consisting of notable players to showcase my voice,” Turner explains. “The Sunstorm albums were great and he was looking for something with more big names involved. I didn’t pay much mind to it at the time because nowadays the only way to make a living is to tour, so I stayed out touring. I had a two week break where I came back home and got a call from Carmine, asking what was going on with this potential project. I said that I’d just gotten back home and hadn’t looked at it. He said ‘Well I’m in!’ and I thought that’s great, and he said ‘Tony Franklin’s gotta play bass, we have to convince him!’ We both called him and got Tony on board. Then we started to go through a list of available guitar players. We got Bruce Kulick, he was the first guy. With Bruce, because we were all seasoned professionals, we all put egos aside and said instead of seeing it as a project, let’s treat this as a brand new band.

“The problem was Bruce couldn’t fully commit because he is still playing with Grand Funk Railroad,” the vocalist continues. “He was with us a couple of months and we did some writing and it was okay, but it wasn’t great. Finally, we just said ‘Look, let’s just part friends and leave it’ and that was that. Then we had to look at who the hell else was available! I’d been in Mother’s Army with Carmine and the guitar player on those records was Jeff Watson. He’s a virtuoso, he’s brilliant, so we called him up. He was happy to join in, but he warned us he’s a studio owner and his studio took up a lot of his time. He thought he could manage the two and we sent him some tracks. About a month and a half later, he doesn’t even have two songs finished. We were thinking ‘Well, what the fuck?’ He said he was working on it but truth be told, he was piece-mealing it. He was busy with his studio, making a living, and he almost finished two tracks, but they weren’t super great, I’m sorry to say. I said ‘We love

you Jeff, but we can’t work like this. We need somebody who can be there for this.’ He was cool with that.”

At this point Turner took matters into his own hands and suggested one of his long term collaborators from his solo career.

“I turned to Tony and Carmine and said ‘I got the guy!’ and suggested Karl Cochran. He’s written with me on my solo albums, he’s played on my records, he’s played in my band, he’s a guitar star waiting to happen. I suggested we put him on a track or two to see what happened. We put him on ‘This Is Who I Am’ and ‘Fire And Ice’ and he killed it. We all knew – he played in the pocket, he was exactly what we needed, he got it, he was perfect for us.”

Unfortunately, disaster struck when Karl suffered a stroke during the making of the record, leaving him paralyzed down one side of his body.

“Karl was working as musical director for Flavor Flav, who was doing Sly And The Family Stone stuff. The night he played at the Iridium in New York, he started to get what’s called a TIA, which is the warning signs of a stroke,” Turner says ruefully. “And nobody brought him to a hospital. There he is, an up and coming guitar star and he’s finally coming into his own, and that happens to him. I was in Germany at the time, doing the ‘Rock Meets Classic’ tour with Alice Cooper. Carmine Skyped me and told me what had happened. When we heard, my wife Maya and I were just crying uncontrollably, we couldn’t stop. He was supposed to have died. Miraculously he didn’t.

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Rated X vocalist Joe Lynn Turner on his band mate Karl Cochran suffering a paralyzing stroke during the recording of the album.

“I and a bunch of other notable musicians got together in New York City and we threw a benefit for him. We called it ‘Rock ‘N’ Recovery’ and we raised over \$25,000. Karl’s been doing conventional therapy as well as things like acupuncture and I asked him how it was working out. He raised his right arm up to his shoulder! You gotta remember he was basically paralyzed – his leg too, because it happened on the left side. The left side, unfortunately, includes cognitive ability, your speech, so he has to basically re-learn that. He can understand you perfectly, and he knows what he wants to say, he just can’t say it. It’s so fucking frustrating, it’s heartbreaking. His speech is improving, but that will probably take longer than anything. I knew the brain has the two sides, the left side is more analytical and the right side is the more creative – but I learned the brain will take over what is lacking on one side and compensate with the other. Just amazing. Because of that, the doctors feel he has a good chance. With everyone pulling

for him, the money we’ve raised for his bills and so many great reviews for this record, he’s really excited about things, very positive. He’s absolutely determined to come back and that’s great, strong of mind and strong of will is what you need, but as you can imagine, there are down days for him. We raised a lot of money for him and we’ll try and raise more. With medical bills in this day and age – don’t get sick! It’s very costly and we’re all trying to help Karl as much as we can. He has some medical insurance but you’ve heard of Obama-Care? I think it was more like Obama doesn’t care, he fucked us on that one. As long as you’re well, everything is good, but don’t get sick.”

With that tragedy happening during the making of the album, there was the urgent matter of finishing off the remaining guitar parts.

“Karl had completed seven tracks and I think he’d done the rhythm guitar on an eighth but there weren’t any solos on there yet,” the singer explains. “Serafino was going to get Alex Beyrodt in – I’ve toured with him and he only had like three days because he was going out with Primal Fear. I said to him ‘Alex, you’re a fantastic guitar player but I need to get Nikolo Kotzev on this.’ Nikolo is one of the most unsung heroes in my opinion, he’s just brilliant. I felt Nikolo was the guy to go to. He did the remaining tracks, which were ‘Our Love Is Not Over’, ‘Maybe Tonight’, ‘Peace Of Mind’ and he and Karl are both on ‘Don’t Cry No More’ and ‘Stranger In Us All’. Nik is just amazing and he did it for nothing because he felt for Karl and wanted to help us out.”

Even more amazingly, Karl Cochran’s medical problems weren’t the only ones Rated X faced while making their debut album.

“It really sounds like we cut this all together like in the olden days, when in reality we never recorded any of it in the same room. Because of the technology we have, we used phones, email, Skype, you name it, we were always in touch. Tony might be putting his bass down and even though Carmine and I weren’t there, we could listen in on Skype and talk about it. Or we’d send files to each other then discuss them on the phone. It just started taking shape that way. The music really sounds alive, it’s got excitement, drama, ups and downs... but we really didn’t know how it would sound until Pat Regan put the mixes together. There’s such colour on this album, from heavy to melodic... it’s a killer album that I’m very proud of, especially with the trials and tribulations we encountered. Not just with Karl – it took us a full year, we had corrupt files, so many things going wrong we referred to a Rated X curse! It was a labour of love – it was supposed to be out in September, we had to put it back because we were correcting and fixing things, it was tough. We believe in this band though. We are looking at playing some festivals, getting out there. Every one of us could probably make more money playing solo but we decided for a few weeks we’d do some shows to let people know hey, this is Rated X!”

The material has a lot in common with the member’s back catalogues. The presence of Franklin and Appice offers a taste of Blue Murder, many of the hooks would be at home on Turner’s solo albums and the augmentation of Alessandro Del Vecchio’s keyboard work adds flavours similar to Deep Purple.

“This is no longer just a singer’s band, this is a band of real players,” Turner agrees. “It’s a song writers band. We have great songs that are catchy and all, but there’s Tony doing a bass solo part, which goes into a Carmine solo part... especially on ‘Lhasa’. That song is huge. You can picture all these guys in a desert, it has a real cinematic visual feel to it. There’s a Pink Floyd vibe there, Carmine builds the drums up, Karl’s solo... I got chills. I stood away and just listened to it with headphones and fuck, it’s an experience. The music takes you on a journey, and I think that’s lacking in music today. A lot of people don’t really listen to albums from start to finish. If you listen to this, I think it does take you on a journey and it goes by so quickly, it’s not boring. We’ve got all sorts on there... ‘Maybe Tonight’ is definitely a more romantic track, it was actually the first song I wrote for my wife. That started out more Pop and this band toughened it up and it just works.”

Rated X boasts two thirds of Blue Murder in the line up, but had history have been a little different, it could easily have been three quarters, as Turner was suggested as a potential singer for John Sykes’ group early on.

“Yeah, Sykes put the kibosh on that because years before, I had gone out with his girlfriend,” Turner replies. “He said it wasn’t going to work for him. He probably didn’t want to work with someone who had been with his girlfriend, I understand that! It’s an incestuous business anyway. I always remember Robert Plant’s line, it was backstage at Hammersmith I think, after a Rainbow show. Robert was there and this girl came up to him and he simply said

‘Have we fucked?’ That’s the epitome of ‘Rock Star’ right there!”

Turner has endured his fair share of critics over the years, but his age-defying performances on the pulsating ‘Get Back My Crown’ and the soaring ‘You Are The Music’ are superb.

“My wife was the inspiration for ‘You Are The Music’. A Russian friend of ours died, and then came back to life. He lived for quite a few months, then he had an aneurism and died again. Crazy! We wanted to write a song as a gift to his family. My Swedish friends came up with the track and we worked on the lyrics together. They put in some brilliant things and it came out great. I don’t mind saying those notes toward the end were a reach, but I got ‘em. There’s no tricks on this record. I did look at changing the key of the song but it didn’t work as well. It went through about three incarnations, we changed the tempo of it and finally got the groove right. Then it was down to me to go in and try and nail it at the end. That was pure will and sheer fear of not doing it right! I’m really proud it came out so well.

“We’re getting great reviews, which I’m really excited about. I’ve seen reviews using words like ‘phenomenal’ or ‘album of the year’. I’m not trying to brag... well, maybe just a little!” he laughs. “I just think we can go up against anyone out there, because there was nothing on there that we didn’t do, no secret overdubs or trickery, just five guys playing their asses off, old school. We’ve been pleasantly surprised about how people have received it. Oh, there was one comment, before any music had been put out. It was a news item about the band and who was in it, nothing more. Somebody commented ‘I don’t know why but I think this is gonna suck.’ That’s one of my big problems with the internet, the negativity. These twats with a keyboard, morons given a voice. I’m not expecting everybody to like it, but why does

someone feel the need to go online and post a hateful or negative comment to something they’ve not even heard? I shouldn’t get mad at them, but we went through hell putting this thing together and it was like delivering a baby. It was laborious but we’re so proud. The first time I heard it played back, I thought it was a damn good record and I think it’s a grower, it improves every time you play it.”

The inclusion of a track called ‘Stranger In Us All’ could be mistaken for a nod to Rainbow, but it turns out that wasn’t down to Turner.

“Actually, it was Tony who came in with the words to ‘Stranger In Us All’. Alessandro had written the track and it had a different title and lyrics. Tony came up with a new set of lyrics about the evil side within each of us and he called it ‘Stranger In Us All’. I thought it was a much stronger concept, I liked the idea of saying you never really know people, you never really know what you are capable of.”

Once everything had come together musically, then there was the small matter of what to call the band.

“We thought about the name Legacy – only to find all these shithouse bands already using that name. Most of them were covering our old stuff!” Turner laughs. “I said ‘Guys, we’re all ex-members of bands, we all have ex-wives, we’ve led X-rated lives – what about Rated X?’ Tony said ‘Yeah, but if you look up that, all you get is porno sites.’ I said ‘And?’ We’re rock ‘n’ roll, sex goes well with that, remember! Tony’s wife said ‘And your next album can be called ‘X-posed!’ It was great! I also thought it was a merchandising ploy. I love the cover, I think that will make for a great looking t-shirt. Who doesn’t want to be a bit naughty, to be Rated X?”

Rated X is out now on Frontiers Records.

