



JOE BONAMASSA

As Joe Bonamassa grows his reputation as one of the world's greatest guitar players, he is also evolving into a charismatic blues-rock star and singer-songwriter of stylistic depth and emotional resonance. His ability to connect with live concert audiences is transformational, and his new album, The Ballad Of John Henry, brings that energy to his recorded music more powerfully than ever before. The ninth solo album and seventh studio release of his career – as well as his fourth consecutive with producer Kevin Shirley (Led Zeppelin, Black Crowes, etc.) – the disc adds a heavy dose of “swamp” to Bonamassa’s virtuoso mix of ‘60s-era British blues-rock (à la Beck and Clapton) and roots-influenced Delta sounds. It shows off Bonamassa’s vocal range as much as his instrumental voodoo, and the artist says, “I feel this is my strongest work to date.”

The album’s title track honors the mythic American figure that Bonamassa calls, “the ultimate working class hero.” He was inspired to write “The Ballad Of John Henry” – a song that drives as hard as its legendary namesake did pounding railroad spikes into the ground – while crossing the U.S. on a tour bus and observing the country changing in unsettling ways. “It used to be,” says Bonamassa, “there was dignity to being a middle-class worker, making an honest living. It was a certain mentality that was uniquely American. Now kids say, ‘I want to be rich, and I don’t care how I get there.’ To me, my mom and my dad are my heroes, working their whole life at meaningful jobs that add to society. We need more of those heroes these days. That’s what this song means to me.” Kevin Shirley adds, “I feel like Joe accessed the magic of the old blues guys and the spirit of the freed slaves. It’s an amazing track, and it’s awesome that he used this legend.”

Like that of John Henry, Bonamassa’s story has its fair share of legend, grit and endurance. Remarkably, the 2009 release of The Ballad Of John Henry coincides with his twentieth year as a professional musician, an extraordinary timeline for a young artist just into his ‘30s. A child prodigy, Bonamassa was finessing Stevie Ray Vaughan licks when he was seven and by the time he was ten, had caught B.B. King’s ear. After first hearing him play, King said, “This kid’s potential is unbelievable. He hasn’t even begun to scratch the surface. He’s one of a kind.” By age 12, Bonamassa was opening shows for the blues icon (something he also did recently as the opener on King’s 80th birthday tour), and went on to tour with venerable acts including Buddy Guy, Foreigner, Robert Cray, Stephen Stills, Joe Cocker and Gregg Allman.

Bonamassa’s recording career began in the early ‘90s with Bloodlines, a hard-charging rock-blues group also featuring Robby Krieger’s son Waylon and Miles Davis’ son Erin. His 2000 solo debut, A New Day Yesterday, was produced by the legendary Tom Dowd; Bonamassa’s rendering of the title track, originally a Jethro Tull hit, was called, “a jaw-dropping performance” by allmusic.com. Recently, he was named *Guitar Player’s* “Best Blues Guitarist” in 2007 and 2008 and has won *Blues Wax’s* “Artist of the Year” an unprecedented three times.

His latest, The Ballad Of John Henry – with no shortage of its own jaw-dropping moments – marks a more confessional approach to songcraft than he’s previously employed. “Making the first half of the album,” Bonamassa says, “I was in the happiest place I’d ever been in my life. The second half found me in completely the opposite state. I’ve come to the conclusion that experience makes for better art. I had more to say, and it’s the first time I’ve personally opened up the book on my life.” Several tracks address a relationship that flamed out during the album process including “Last Kiss” – recorded completely live – and “Happier Times,” about which he says, “That came at the bottom. It could be the best, most honest song I’ve ever written.” Another track he feels is one of his strongest is “The Great Flood,” an apology to another ex-girlfriend with whom he’s now friends – “I had a nagging feeling there were things left unsaid that needed to be put into words.”

Bonamassa is also known for his scorching covers – including Led Zeppelin’s “Tea For One” from You & Me (’06) and Chris Whitley’s “Ball Peen Hammer” from Sloe Gin (’07) – and The Ballad Of John Henry serves up

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guitar-ific reinventions of choice tracks including: Tony Joe White's "As The Crow Flies" ("my nod to Rory Gallagher," says Joe), Tom Waits' "Jockey Full Of Bourbon," Ailene Bullock's "Funkier Than A Mosquito's Tweeter" and the Sam Brown tune "Stop!" by Greg Sutton/Bruce Brody. Throughout, Bonamassa is again backed by the stellar players Carmine Rojas (bass) and Anton Fig, Bogie Bowles (both on drums) and Rick Melick (keyboards) as well as Blondie Chaplin (rhythm guitar). It's also Bonamassa's first disc to feature horns, courtesy of Lee Thornburg and David Woodford.

It follows up Bonamassa's last studio set, 2007's Sloe Gin, which debuted at #1 on *Billboard's* blues chart (and hit #4 and #10 on the Heatseeker and Internet charts, respectively) and received a 2008 nod for Album Of The Year from the U.K.'s prestigious Classic Rock Roll Of Honour Awards. *Classic Rock* magazine wrote, "They're calling him the future of blues, but they're wrong – Joe Bonamassa is the present; so fresh and of his time that he almost defines it." Sloe Gin careens between heavy electric blues-rockers and acoustic, folk-etched cuts in a flow that Bonamassa says was partly inspired by Rod Stewart's classic 1969 solo debut LP. *Modern Guitars Magazine* wrote, "If calling Sloe Gin a Bonamassa sampler isn't graphic enough, think of the album as a musical buffet in which unrelated entrees share a single trait: they taste good." The *Boston Phoenix* called it, "an elegant and brawny guitar-hero album."

His most recent release was the 2-CD set Live From Nowhere In Particular, which *Guitar Player* said, "finds Joe playing with soul, intensity and *savage* tones." It features 13 songs recorded live in concert on the artist's 2007 North American tour – at shows like the one at New York's Westhampton Beach Performing Arts Center reviewed for www.hampton.com by Lon S. Cohen: "In a thousand years, when archeologists dig out Joe Bonamassa's guitar from the strata of the earth, it will still be smoking...He holds the guitar like a shotgun but what comes out of it is poetry, color, and a story is told in notes." A review of a show at Alexandria, VA's Birchmere drew similar sentiments from writer Paul Roy on blogcritics.org: "I have flirted with the opinion that Bonamassa may be the overall best guitarist on the planet these days, and after seeing him perform live again...I am now totally comfortable with that opinion. He is simply mesmerizing to watch."

Bonamassa circles the globe playing an average of 200 shows a year, and his mind-blowing guitar wizardry and electrifying stage presence are selling out progressively larger venues all the time. In 2009, he'll make his headlining debut at Royal Albert Hall in the U.K., where audiences have been especially appreciative of his gifts. British publication *Guitarist* has written, "For all-out invention, frenetic fret-tickling & truly enormous tone, look no further than Bonamassa," and journalist Pete Feenstra wrote of a *BBC Live* performance, that, "he is both as eloquent and learned about the music he plays as he is technically brilliant." Sam Leach, one of the Beatles earliest promoters in the U.K., compared the first time he saw him to his initial glimpse of the Fab Four– "I got that same feeling of excitement...Joe is the premiere Blues/Rock artist on the planet."

Ongoing journeyman touring is a given, and looking beyond The Ballad Of John Henry, Bonamassa will continue his recording collaboration with producer Kevin Shirley, who says, "It's great working with Joe and seeing him enjoy the discovery of all these places he can go. He's an artist who can play anything, there are so many facets to him." Bonamassa adds, "Kevin comes up with fantastic ideas outside the box. He appreciates the blues, but pushes me, the only person besides Tom Dowd who's done that."

On top of touring, recording and overseeing the independent label J&R Adventures with his entrepreneurial partner and manager Roy Weisman, Bonamassa is an avid DJ currently manning the airwaves on Planet Rock radio with a weekly hour-long program airing throughout the U.K. (he recently wrapped a two-year stint on Sirius Satellite Radio). For seven years, Bonamassa has also been the foremost ambassador for the Memphis-based Blues Foundation's Blues In The Schools program. While touring the U.S., he visits schools to promote the heritage of blues music to students nationwide and raise awareness for the award-winning program.

For more information, log on to: www.jbonamassa.com

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