

ALBUM REVIEW



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by John Apice
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People such as myself sometimes are guilty of reading too much into an artists' music and lyrics. We're expecting to hear something under the surface, some philosophical meaning, some outrageous double entendre or message. And it has taken me decades to understand that sometimes a song is just a song and to sit back, relax and enjoy it for what it is. Moments of pleasure with no ulterior motive.

Maybe some artists don't write and perform this way because it's not easy to write simple, direct and say exactly what you mean and get out songs. Now don't misunderstand me – lots of commercial music is mindless, filled with cliché and enriched with lameness that appeals to the masses. Some of the very best commercial music does transcend that tag. Petula Clark comes to mind with many of the commercial songs she recorded. "I Couldn't Live Without Your Love" is masterful. The Box Tops' when they recorded that less than two minute classic "The Letter."

Right now, I am speaking more specifically of singer-songwriters who are not just performers and singers – but, artists. Some actually create something from nothing and others are truly inspired by life itself. That would be Joanne Lurgio.

Bonnie Raitt is not only a great guitar player and singer – she is an artist. Joni Mitchell is not only a superb guitar player but a literate songwriter few singer-songwriters approach – she is an artist. Loretta Lynn is not just a country vocalist – her abilities as a singer, an interpreter of song -- like the director of a great movie -- how she embodies the story in her songs, and shapes the words with the melodies -- few singers not only don't do this, they don't understand how to -- they just sing words. Loretta...is an artist.



Joanne Lurgio has released her third album – *Rise From the Storm*...let me introduce you to an *artist*.

Joanne has crafted a collection of songs that do not need analyzing. They don't need any musical DNA investigation, or taken apart piece by piece to understand some deep valid reason for their existence. Joanne's songs are impeccable, concise and can be anticipated like the dessert you look forward to at the end of a big meal.

Her vocals are consistently smooth as satin – she doesn't have a jazz voice, no real gritty, whiskey blues voice, nor is her material country or folk. Joanne's talent lies in its strength to survive on its own merits, embracing many flavors. Not familiar with Joanne? Allow me to draw

a parallel: She's in that Shawn Colvin, Allison Moorer, Cris Williamson, Mary Chapin-Carpenter, Cindy Bullens, Wendy Waldman, Deborah Holland mold. But, then again, she's not. She has mastered a poignancy in her songs that is atmospheric. She writes beautiful ballads, manages to provide imaginative arrangements throughout her songs. She inserts instruments into her songs brilliantly that are not overbearing. It brings the shine of the lyric and melody to the surface and all of this in a posture of simplicity so each exponent has its own energy.

Example: "*Pennies*," uses a European-flavored accordion courtesy of John Juxo and this conveys something very gypsy / French / Italian even German about the way this songs unravels. The subject sounds like it could have come from the pen of Bertholt Brecht and Kurt Weill, Jacques Brel or even the late Dory Previn. Quite an invigorating tune.

The album opener is the impassioned "*Going With the Flow*." Nothing heavy, no need to dissect. Just a plaintive, perfect mandolin (played by Joanne's son Joe Lurgio who played on three tracks) and accordion (John Juxo) driven optimistic song sung with the wonderful Marc Douglas Berardo. This song sounds like something Leonard Cohen could sing with Emmylou Harris. Just a song that requires nothing more but listening and appreciating.

The renown Duke Robillard is featured on electric guitar on "*I Feel Rich*," that Joanne sings with an eloquent, seductive blues-inflected muscle. Balancing her tracks quite nicely Joanne sings the title track – slow, with the uncluttered fiddle of Cathy-Clasper Torch and harmonies with Lara Herscovitch. The tune has a nice traditional sound to it, Appalachian in style -- filled with feeling. "*Time has a way of forgetting, while the heart holds on to the pain....*" The album is full of clever lines but designed in a manner as to not sound dated or clichéd.

An upbeat rhythm begins "*Young Summer Hues*," which adheres firmly to the feelings one has when reminiscing about the past. Lurgio sings with power and poetry and she does it well with no need for any backup singers or other embellishments.



Joanne tugs at the heart with songs that many can relate to whether they are rural or urban. This song, with its stirring fiddle, like the previous song, deals with reminiscing. However, this is a different kind of recollection. It's not a recalling of any one person or love lost. It's the missing for another time, a different earlier life, and something worth remembering though we know – we could never go “*Back in the Day.*”

“*Ursula*” is a powerful ballad written for Joanne’s Grandmother – and follows basically in a folk song story-form in the tradition of Joan Baez and Cris Williamson and maybe even Janis Ian. Threaded with a real sense of respect and expressed with much vocal emotion. Thankfully, a well-written, inspired little tale with no political overtones or heroics. A simple retelling and documentation of someone’s life who many of us don’t really know – *or* in some small way maybe -- we do. It's a nice way to remember someone. They say if a person’s name is said after they have passed away their memory will continue to live on. For “*immortality has nothing to do with fame.*”

While Joanne has listeners ears tuned into a reflective mood she continues with the moving “*When the Heartache Ends.*” A song-style that I am amazed younger singers don’t thoroughly embrace as a song subject. They would probably sing it with vinegar, anger, and bitterness. Instead, Joanne is focused on living *after* having suffered enough with a broken heart. There comes a time when enough is enough and life must go on.

Marc Douglas Berardo returns to sing with Joanne on a tune about how a single person in your life could make a difference. “*Shone Your Light,*” has a melody that to my ears recalls the female vocalists of the 60’s – this one could have been sung by Petula Clark. It has a foundation built on what sounds like a Hammond organ – played with an undercurrent of notes just below the surface.

Stirring her blues vocal into a thick pudding Joanne sings “*Matter of Time*” with gratifying support from blues guitarist Duke Robillard. A song with some Bonnie Raitt-Tracy Nelson blends.

Joanne has played it safe throughout this album with many songs listeners can relate to but with “*Gun Metal Sky,*” Joanne explores a darker subject – addiction and homelessness.

It embodies some creative lyrics surrounded by a sullen slide guitar controlled by Mike “Scatman” Sullivan with absorbing, moody notes that cut through like razorblades. Joanne lays down some mellow Genya Ravan (Ten Wheel Drive) inspired grit. Quite a departure from Joanne’s other songs but appropriate. Joni Mitchell had her drug-styled song “*Cold Blue Steel and Sweet Fire,*” and Joanne punctuates hers with this powerful slice of music. Had Janis Joplin survived and was still recording today, “*Gun Metal Sky,*” would definitely be something latter-day Janis would have on her list of new songs to record.

Next is a gospel influenced melody with a heavy church-organ that frames the optimistic lyrics of “*Finding My Way.*” It sounds like the right tune to rise out and segue from “*Gun Metal Sky.*” Joanne’s songs never wear out their welcome. They are all perfectly timed and they all seem to follow some relevant path. Joanne’s vocals consistently resonate even when she is not singing in a strong voice. Her low tones, whispers, and inflections are prominent. Nothing is thin, and Joanne never performs on fumes. She has a formidable energy with her music that is refreshing. Songs actually project like each tune did indeed matter to her – before she committed it.

There’s a bonus track – “*Won’t Ever Quit,*” – with its exhilarating vocal reminiscent of Susan Osborne -- a brilliant singer who sang with The Paul Winter Consort decades ago and recorded the stirring “*Lay Down Your Burden.*” This tune by Ms. Lurgio, was the Official Song of the 2012 Gloria Gemma Breast Cancer Resource Foundation 4th Annual K -- made dramatic by the

additional voices of a chorus of women – The Gloria. A song that is easily a show stopper – an anthem and worthy of its position as the closer on this distinctive collection of songs from “*Rise From the Storm.*”

The album must have been a labor of love – with many fine musicians featured. The CD includes a saddle-stitched lyric book with all credits. Produced by John Paul Gauthier and recorded in Rhode Island.

Photography in the CD booklet – David Lee Black

Website: <http://www.joannelurgio.com/>

FaceBook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Joanne-Lurgio-music/284425717763>

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