

A Conversation with Jonatha Brooke
by Frank Goodman (12/2006, Puremusic.com)

Since breaking through with *The Story* in the early nineties, Jonatha Brooke has become one of the most recognized pop singer songwriters of her generation. After *The Story* split, JB had major label deals that eventually ran their course, and she wasted no time establishing herself as one of the early front runners in the DIY indie recording scene.

As a musician, she's very self-assured, and multifaceted. She does the moody complicated ballad and the groove single with equal aplomb, and leads a very talented band through the wide scope of her material. She's married to her manager, Patrick Rains, who established himself by helping catapult Al Jarreau to international notoriety, and together the pair have negotiated their way successfully through the minefield of Indie pop, creating a fierce fan base that continues to expand.

This new DVD of JB's, *Live In New York*, is a fantastic way in to the world of this compelling artist, since it includes songs from many phases of her variegated career to date. You also get to know her band in performance and in behind-the-scenes situations.

Check out the audio clips on the Listen page, and we're sure the interview will induce you to pick this DVD up for Xmas. She'll have a new CD out in a few months, so catch up with the career of one of the best in one fell video swoop, *Live In New York*.

Puremusic: So how are you lately? How is life treating you?

Jonatha Brooke: Life is really good. I have no complaints, whatsoever. I have two new records, I have like twins in the world.

PM: I love this new DVD, *Live in New York*, and that's what I hope we'll talk about. I think it's a superb show and documentary, really, because there's a whole story to it. What a massive undertaking for an indie artist.

JB: Well, thank you for noticing. [laughs]

PM: I mean, the project is so daunting when one takes in all the footage--and I think it's a good idea to shoot all that extra footage behind the scenes, the setup, and the rehearsal--

JB: Uh-huh.

PM: --versus just the performance. When you start to even think about it, the layman, much less somebody who's been in music all their life, it's staggering what it takes to get that done.

JB: Well, thank you for considering all that. Because I think normal people don't realize how much is entailed. And I think that we were dumb enough not to really know, going in, either.

PM: Right.

JB: We didn't even realize we were going to make a DVD, or that that was the whole project. We just wanted to do this ten-night run, and try to create a little event that would hopefully ripple out, like when you throw a rock into the water. We wanted to create a real destination for fans and make a little buzz in New York City, instead of just getting on a bus again and traipsing around the country.

PM: Right. Not to mention that a ten-night run anywhere is extremely difficult to pull off. New York City has lots of people, sure, but it's a helluva tough crowd.

JB: It's fierce, yeah.

PM: To do a ten-night run in New York City, that takes some cajones, which you've never been short on your whole career.

JB: [laughs] Well, luckily I have a partner who has even bigger cajones than I do.

PM: Now, let's talk about him, Patrick Rains, because he must be an amazing character.

JB: He's awesome; unflusterable. He's like smooth water, just comes up with really cool ideas, I freak out, and then he'll say, "No, no, no. Come on. Let's just take it step-by-step, we'll figure out how to do this." And he's just somehow able to piece together whatever is needed at the time. And so he had the idea for doing this extended run. And then we started looking around New York for a perfect small theater that would have the vibe that we were seeking.

PM: In a town full of cool little theaters.

JB: A town full of cool little theaters, but very expensive cool little theaters.

PM: Absolutely.

JB: I had done three nights at Joe's Pub, which is in the same building as the Public Theater.

PM: Of course, that's where the Public Theater is, in that Joe's Pub building, right.

JB: Yep. And the guy who books the place is a super sweet person, Bill Bragin. He said, "Hey, do you guys know that there are all these other little theaters in the building? Maybe that's something you want to take a look at."

PM: Wow.

JB: So one night he led us around the Public, and there are six other different theaters, of varying shapes, sizes and atmospheres. And we walked into the Anspacher, and we thought, "Oh, goodness, this is it." So that became our destination.

PM: And it seated how many?

JB: 275. But then, of course, we had to figure out how to stage it--we had to bring in sound, we had to bring in lights.

PM: You had to bring in everything?

JB: Everything. It was expensive.

PM: Right. And what a headache...

JB: Oh, my God, are you kidding? Flying a Meyers rig? [Suspending a very pricey audiophile level sound system from the ceiling.]

PM: Oh, you weren't messing around.

JB: No, we weren't. We thought, look, if we're going to do this, we're going to go down flying high.

PM: Right. Wow.

JB: Yeah, pretty fun.

PM: Holy jeez. And then you had to bring in a whole lighting company, I'm sure.

JB: Yep, yep. We brought in lights, too.

PM: That's an expense...

JB: Oh, my God, yeah. We figured, look, we lose our shirts every few years just trying things. We're gamblers. What else are you going to do?

PM: Right.

JB: It's kind of fun. And you can always get a new shirt. You've got to gamble. And I think that's the beauty of Pat, is he's been gambling since he was seventeen. He moved to L.A. from Minneapolis, and the second week he was there he realized, "Oh, I know what I'm supposed to be doing here," because he had met Al Jarreau. And he managed Al Jarreau from that time on--well, it took him three months to convince Al to let him manage him, because he was only eighteen at that point.

PM: Holy Jeez!

JB: And gave himself a little ultimatum, "If I can't get Al a record deal in three years, I'll go to law school."

PM: And Al had had no record deal yet.

JB: Right. He had nothing.

PM: Oh, wow!

JB: He was just putzin' around town doing little gigs at the blah blah cafe.

PM: And how old was Jarreau at the time?

JB: Jarreau was like ten years older than Pat. So, sorry, Pat was probably more like twenty-one and Jarreau was thirty-one.

PM: Wow. And he didn't have a deal yet.

JB: Nope.

PM: But he was amazing.

JB: Oh, God, he was incredible.

PM: Right.

JB: And so Pat kind of called home and said, "Okay, now I know why I'm here. I won't be home for Christmas. Hold my calls." [laughs]

PM: Unbelievable.

JB: Yeah. And so he took Al from zero to everything.

PM: And so how long did he or has he managed Jarreau?

JB: Well, they stopped working together in about '97-'98.

PM: And when did you meet Pat?

JB: I met Pat first off--actually my very first record deal with Elektra I was introduced to him because I was looking for management. And he was way too busy at the time. So that was '91. Then we started working together in '94, after Elektra kind of botched working *Angel in the House*. And then I botched--I went with another manager at first,

and it was a disaster. And I came crawling back to Pat [laughs] to say, "Hey, would you still be interested, because this didn't work out..."

PM: Right.

JB: And he was nice enough to say, "Oh, yeah. I'm still in."

PM: So Elektra, you would say, kind of botched *Angel in the House*? [Jonatha's CD with Jennifer Kimball; together they were known as The Story.]

JB: Well, yeah. And I have to say that it was partially that the manager that we had gone with at the time was not particularly present. If Pat had been in the driver's seat I think he would have been in there every day kicking ass, because that record was taking off.

PM: Yeah. And that was a fantastic record.

JB: Yeah. And it was just a matter of a few good ideas that could have crossed it over and taken it further. But our person dropped the ball completely. And we didn't know any better, we were just sort of dorky road dogs at that point.

PM: Right. But a fantastic act, because I remember seeing the act, in fact, opening for the act in that period, and that was really something.

JB: Pretty cool.

PM: Yeah, I really liked that a lot.

JB: Anyhow, the gambling thing, we've always done that. I mean, that was what starting Bad Dog Records was--it was a big gamble, but it was just the best of all of our options at the time, because MCA had just dropped me after *10 Cent Wings* came out. I was touring the US, and I was in the middle of a string of dates, and my option came up, and they chose not to renew it.

PM: The way they do.

JB: Yeah, that's kind of typical. So we threw a party, and I was pretty morose for a couple weeks. But I had to get back on the road. We had a bunch of people come over--Meshell Ndegeocello, and Wendy and Lisa from Prince's old band.

PM: Wow.

JB: You know them.

PM: Sure, love them.

JB: Yeah. And a few of their musician pals from L.A. And we got really drunk, and we started turning it into more of a celebration than a funeral.

PM: Right.

JB: And we decided to start Bad Dog Records and see what would happen if we just did it ourselves.

PM: Now, on Bad Dog, did you release anybody else, or just your stuff?

JB: Just me, so far, because we are losing our shirt pretty much, from time to time.

PM: Yeah.

[laughter]

JB: I'm really expensive.

[laughter]

PM: How'd I know that? Luckily you're hooked with somebody that can probably afford you.

JB: Well, it depends, really. We're both on this roller coaster. Some years are great and some years are like, "Okay, how are we going to pay the Amex this month?"

PM: Right. So you never know.

JB: It's a great adventure.

PM: Essentially, this great DVD is from the *Back in the Circus* period, right?

JB: Yeah, yeah.

PM: Shot in 2004, but it incorporates a lot of your best songs, I think, dating all the way back to '91.

JB: Well, that was a big part of the whole concept, to put together a show that really covered everything, that brought in some of everything-- the first song I ever wrote is on the record, and some of The Story era-- those intense harmonies and those gorgeous sort of brooding melodies. And then to rock through the *Steady Pull* era, and then come back to the intimacy that *Back in the Circus* had--I mean, we really wanted to cover everything that makes me passionate about what I do. I mean, I love every element of the dynamics of my songs.

PM: Yeah, I mean, it's a beautiful perspective for the really serious cult following that you have. I mean, the Brooke people out there are a really fierce audience.

JB: Yeah, for sure.

PM: You refer to the first song that you wrote; that was such a cool story that you told in the DVD about "Love Is More Thicker Than Forget."

JB: Yeah.

PM: Would you share that here, maybe in an extrapolated form? I think that's a really inspirational little story.

JB: Well, my sophomore year of college, I was in the Amherst College in Western, Massachusetts.

PM: Being the smart girl you are.

JB: Ah, I was a big smarty pants--nah, I'm a big faker. I just kind of snuck through somehow and got a degree.

PM: Some schools you can sneak your way into easier than others. Amherst isn't too--

JB: Well, okay, I got in, that was a big deal. But once I was there, I can't say that I was a real smarty pants.

PM: Right.

JB: But anyway, this particular professor who taught this composition course was kind of a crunch ball. I mean, he played sitar, and he'd have parties and invite all the students over.

PM: Really? What was his name?

JB: David Reck, a lovely guy. Especially for a very kind of snooty, very classically oriented music department, he was taking some chances and having kids write songs based on poetry that they would choose themselves. So that semester, he assigned E. E. Cummings--"choose an E. E. Cummings poem, set it to music, use these kinds of techniques that we've talked about in class, like word painting, etc." So I wrote my first song, and it was the most exciting thing that had ever happened to me.

PM: So did you get to play them, then, in class?

JB: Yeah.

PM: And were you a guitarist at the time?

JB: I was a hack. I mean, I'd always played the guitar, but--

PM: Played around.

JB: Yeah. Someone taught me three chords and I would cop stuff off records. I had a good ear, so I could sort of figure things out on the guitar and piano from Stevie Wonder records, and James Taylor records. I could sort of clunk along. But writing was this opportunity to make stuff up.

PM: So when you brought in your version of "Love is More Thicker Than Forget," how did it go over?

JB: It kind of was really cool. I mean, I got an A.

[laughter]

JB: And then that led to him giving me and my friend Jennifer Kimball, who then became my partner in the--

PM: Wow, she was in your class?

JB: No. But he gave me a full course credit to do an independent study and write a bunch of songs, and then put on a concert at the end of the semester. [laughs]

PM: How interesting!

JB: So at Amherst College, I got like a full course rated independent study to write some songs and do a concert.

PM: Good scam.

JB: And we got an A!

PM: Wow. Now, that's the same Jennifer Kimball that's still a popular singer in the Boston area with various good groups, right? The Wayfaring Strangers and...

JB: Yep. She has a band with her husband called Maybe Baby, as well.

PM: Right, right, right.

JB: And I think she just had a record out recently, her second record. But I think she's staying closer to home because she has a kid.

PM: Yeah. But a great singer.

JB: Oh, lovely singer. Really. I mean, just devoted to amazing harmony and thoughtful writing.

PM: And are you still friendly?

JB: I haven't talked to her in ages, but we're certainly not--

PM: No love lost?

JB: Yeah. I mean, it was rough at the time, but I think we're both rooting for each other.

PM: That's great. [Visit www.jenniferkimball.com to find out what Jennifer is doing.] And I was happy to see that in the collection on the DVD, certainly an old favorite of mine from *The Story* was included, "So Much Mine."

JB: Oh, my God. I'm just--yeah.

PM: What a great song.

JB: I love that song so much, and I was desperate to get a decent performance of it, because I really, really wanted it to be on this DVD. And I was so nervous that we'd just get a crummy take of it, or something, because it was only an encore, it wasn't in the show every night.

PM: Right.

JB: And I think we only actually did it once. We did it like the last encore of the last night. And we didn't have any dough at all left at this point. So we were only filming the last two nights. And it was just favors, basically. We had five friends with cameras who came in, and we gave them 200 bucks and said, "Please, please, please will you come film this stuff for two nights?"

PM: I really appreciate you sharing that--

JB: Oh, God, we had nothing.

PM: That's really amazing. Five friends with cameras.

JB: Basically, please, please, please.

PM: Now, what kind of cameras did they fly in with, do you know?

JB: I know the one guy did have one of those ones that you wear the belt, and it floats.

PM: A steadicam guy.

JB: Maceo. And that was his own camera. Everyone basically brought their own camera. So they were basically nice DV cams.

PM: Right. Now were they like \$2,500 DV cams, or \$1,000 cams, or five grand cams? Do we know?

JB: Who knows? Probably--

PM: Yeah. Because I'm getting into all that stuff, is why I'm interested, yeah.

JB: Probably like medium ranged ones, because they're all struggling artist types.

PM: But it was before HD. It wasn't HD cams.

JB: No, God no. No, no, no. I think Maceo had the nicest one. He was the steadicam dude.

PM: Right.

JB: But I don't know how much those cost.

PM: Those are expensive rigs.

JB: Yeah. I think he had one of those. That's his, and that's his work.

PM: Right. That's a nice guy to have on your team, a steadicam guy.

JB: Oh, my God, what a sweetheart, too.

PM: Yeah. Because he got a lot of the really good shots, too.

JB: Yeah. And then we had, of course, Pat's nephew, Blake, who had come to all the rehearsals. And he's the one that did all the off the wall--

PM: Oh, he's got the behind-the-scenes footage.

JB: Yeah. Anything that's out of focus, or moving around, or jerking, that's Blake.

PM: [laughs] Yeah, because from time to time I'd be watching it, and I'd think, "What the hell was that?"

JB: And some of it is like so bad that it's cool. And Emily, our brilliant editor, who's only twenty-five and is the most amazing thing ever--

PM: Really? I need to ask for her number.

JB: --who worked for next to nothing, also, was able to edit the bad stuff in and make it rock 'n' roll and look cool, from time to time, when the camera is just obviously falling, she's cut that in at a cool moment.

PM: Someday soon I might ask you for her number.

JB: Oh, she's awesome.

PM: Because my brother Jon is shooting a lot of TV in Beijing at the moment, and he needs a good editor in New York.

JB: Oh, well, she's a doll. She basically edited the whole thing. She came over every day to our apartment, because we were thinking, "Okay, we can't afford an editing studio. How about if I buy Final Cut Pro, and you come over and do it on my computer?" And she said, "Okay, cool." So she schlepped over here from Brooklyn and edited for like three months straight.

PM: Wow. No, I'm not kidding, J, I need that chick's number.

JB: Totally.

PM: So--it's such a very well honed and talented band you're leading.

JB: Aren't they so sexy?

PM: Well...

JB: [laughs]

PM: That rhythm section.

JB: And of course, you know Annie, everyone in is love with Annie. [laughs] [Ann Marie Milazzo--she sings divinely, and plays keys, guitar, percussion and clarinet.] Anyone who's seen her is like, "All right, I need her number."

PM: Oh, I wouldn't be so presumptuous. But yeah, she was a real chore, visually.

JB: [laughs] Are you kidding?

PM: I got through it somehow, but...

JB: [laughs]

PM: But yeah, she's a rare blend for your beautiful voice.

JB: Oh, she's hot.

PM: And so much more. I mean, she's adding good keys.

JB: Yeah. She never played keyboards before. We had to sort of twist her arm. I don't think we ever had a full-on shot of the keyboard. But [laughs] she had the name of every note Scotch-taped to every key--

[laughter]

JB: --because she's never played keyboards.

PM: [laughs] Oh, that's funny.

JB: She was so nervous about it that she just had to see which notes they were. It's the cutest thing, ever. She's so good.

PM: Now, where did you find her?

JB: Let's see, a bass player named Richard Hammond, who I'd worked with a few times-- he is basically New York's network dude, call him if you need anything.

PM: Ah.

JB: He's like, "You've got to call Annie. Just trust me. Call Annie."

PM: Oh, so he's a guy to know.

JB: He's definitely a guy to know. He's this lovely bass player, plays with everybody in New York. He's from Australia.

PM: Good. So I hope if he reads this by chance, he'll drop me a note.

JB: Yeah.

PM: So he turned you onto Annie as what, as a vocalist?

JB: As a vocalist, yeah. I mean, most importantly was someone who was a kick ass vocalist, who could blend with me, hold the half step and whole step harmonies, and not freak out.

PM: Right. "Because I know it's dissonant, yeah, just hang on there."

[laughter]

JB: Like that's the point.

PM: "I made it that way," yeah, right.

JB: She was just fearless. And she could alter her tone and her vibrato, and whatever, she could just match anything.

PM: Yeah, because when she'd go into her own little vocal cameo section you could tell like, oh, oh, that's more like your natural tone--

JB: Yeah.

PM: --and then she goes back into blending, very nicely.

JB: Yeah. She's so awesome.

PM: So what was her background before you ran into her? Do you know?

JB: Well, she is a killer playwright. She's a musical playwright. She's written a couple of full-length things that she's been really close on, for Broadway, getting workshops, and Off-Broadway kind of little sessions. It just breaks your heart because she's so frickin' good. One is called "Pretty Dead Girl" which is just awesome. I've seen it three different times workshopped; I just think she's brilliant, and it's just a matter of time.

PM: Wow.

JB: Right now she's working on--I think she's doing the lyrics for *Carmen*. They hired her to help with the lyrics for this *Carmen* they're trying to put up on Broadway.

PM: What do you mean? They're kind of redoing the lyrics, or--

JB: I think so, or translating it into sort of more of a pop vibe.

PM: Interesting.

JB: I don't know. But it's a gig. She always figures out a way to cobble things together. But she's the hardest working girl I've ever met.

PM: Wow, really, really something. Let's talk about that rhythm section, that Rich Mercurio on the drums.

JB: How hot is he?

PM: He's a devil.

JB: He's so cute, too. And he's like political ranter. Like we'll be in a minivan going to some gig, and he'll just go off about Bush.

PM: [laughs]

JB: And all you can do is just listen.

PM: There's one in every crowd.

JB: Oh, yeah. It's always the drummer.

[laughter]

PM: Oh, that's true, isn't it?

JB: It's true. And then Darren [Embry] the bass player, is more like our lefty subversive, he's the conspiracy theorist.

PM: Oh, really? He's the secret government guy. [He's also a superior player, and a standout singer.]

[laughter]

JB: He's the secret government guy. And then Geoffrey [Geoffrey Moore, the fine guitarist] is like the guy in between, who's like totally not political, never gets into a fray. He's just like totally calm, cool water.

PM: Wow. So where did you run into those guys?

JB: Geoffrey and Darren are L.A. dudes. And I met them in--wow, I think I method them in like '98 or '99 when I was first living in Los Angeles. I saw Geoffrey playing with somebody at the some Triple A Radio schmoozefest. And I told him, "All right, dude, I'm calling you." So I kind of stole him when I got book to L.A. from the schmoozefest. And then he introduced me to Darren. They've been best friends since they were nine.

PM: Wow.

JB: Yeah. They had a Kiss cover band together.

[laughter]

JB: Yeah, I make them sort of do a little bit on stage once in a while. And then Rich is the most recent one, because when I moved to New York, I figured I should at least have somebody on this coast.

PM: Right.

JB: So I auditioned five or six drummers once I got here, again sort of recommended by Rich Hammond, the bass player, who knows everybody.

PM: Wow. How interesting that he's not even American.

JB: I know. But he's been here for a long time.

PM: Right. He's just one of those guys.

JB: He's just one of those guys. And Rich got the gig.

PM: So I really liked all the trapeze elements in the video. How did they come to be?

JB: I'm kind of a lunatic that way. When I made *Back in the Circus*, the song "Back in the Circus" was the first one that was finished. And it really set the tone for the record. And exploring that trapeze girl circus carnie chick character was--I don't know, I've always been kind of partial to her, whoever she is. I think she was a character I danced once, when I was a dancer. And I just thought I'd revisit her, and why not make the art of the album reflect that particular character and the whimsy and intimacy of the sound of that song? It was all sort of part of this, "Okay, this is going to be a real theme." So I went to trapeze school on the West Side Highway.

PM: Of course.

JB: And I learned how to do trapeze.

PM: Wow.

JB: I went with Pat, actually. He did it, too.

PM: He did it too!

JB: Yes, he did it. He was awesome. I went to trapeze school. We sort of practiced for a day to see if it was even going to be feasible. And then my friend Linda [Hansen] the photographer, since we didn't have any dough, she said, "Hey, how about if we just get you a free ticket from your miles, come to New York, and we'll take some pictures and see what happens?" So we went to trapeze school, and she took some pictures. And I broke my back, and we got some great stuff.

PM: Wow. That's really amazing. I thought "Deny" was a fantastic song--

JB: Oh!

PM: --particular to this DVD, right?

JB: Yep.

PM: That you wrote for a Christopher Reeves directed film, *In the Gloaming*?

JB: Right.

PM: What a shame that it was not included, ultimately, in that movie. It seems so right.

JB: It was so tailored--I mean, obviously, I read the script, and I was blown away, and in tears. And I thought, all right, well, I'm the one to write this song. And it was one of those gift songs, it was finished in twenty minutes--

PM: Wow.

JB: --because the material was so powerful and the character was so clear, and the voice just was there.

PM: How did the script come to you, the hook-up?

JB: There was this really cool producer in Boston. I was living in Boston at the time. And his name was Nick Paleologos. He was working for public television in Boston. And he was a fan. And he called me up and said, "Hey, I have this project, and I think you're probably right for it."

PM: Wow.

JB: Number one because I had done that song "In the Gloaming" on *The Angel in the House*.

PM: Right.

JB: And he was thinking of using that as well. But he wanted me to write an original song for the movie. And so I did. And I think that Christopher Reeves ended up having his wife sing "In the Gloaming," which was cool. I'm not going to argue with that. So I understood them not using my version of "Gloaming." But it kind of sucked that they didn't use my song. [laughs]

PM: Yes.

JB: Because I thought it was just really so poignant.

PM: Did you meet Reeves along the way?

JB: I did. I met him. We drove out to his house in western Mass., and had a really nice meeting with him, and talked about the vibe of the song and the movie. I mean, it was really cool to have met him at all.

PM: So you met him after you wrote "Deny"?

JB: I can't remember what the sequence was. I think I may have met him before I finished it.

PM: Right. So you don't know what his personal reaction to the song was?

JB: I don't, at all. I know that Nick was knocked out

PM: Yeah, it's a great song.

JB: But for whatever reason, it didn't get used. But I got to use it.

PM: Yeah. And now your fans have it, which is great.

JB: Yeah, now my fans have it. I mean, whether or not one knows the story behind it, I think it speaks to any kind of communication block between a child and a parent.

PM: Yeah, I mean regardless of why it specifically was conceived, it's still a good movie pitch for various scenarios.

JB: Yeah.

PM: Absolutely. That still may find a cinematic home.

JB: I'm hoping, I'm thinking, I'm praying.

PM: [laughs] Did you get very involved in the editing phase of this project, or just let it go?

JB: I'd let it go, and then I would come back, because no one wants to have someone over his or her shoulder.

PM: Right. On the other hand, no one can you give you exactly what you want just off the bat, either.

JB: Right.

PM: You got to say, "Hmm, how about a little less of this, a little more of that..."

JB: Right. Luckily, there just wasn't a lot of work with, so Emily didn't have a ton of choices for editing. So it's just amazing that she did what she did with the dearth of good footage that we had, and how cogent it all is. Because these people had never seen a show before, they just were doing us a favor. They came in and they stood there. It wasn't as if anything had been rehearsed. There was no one directing it. There was no sort of central guy saying, "Okay, camera four, up. Okay, two."

PM: It wasn't like that?

JB: No, not at all.

PM: Holy jeez. That's amazing that you got what you got, then.

JB: Yeah, exactly.

PM: And were people literally standing there? Were some people on the move, or just Maceo, the steadicam guy?

JB: The steadicam guy, he was the only one moving--and Blake, of course.

[laughter]

JB: That's Blake, constantly moving.

PM: He was out in the hall and so forth.

JB: He was in the hall. He had the camera like duct taped to a broomstick so he could hold it up high over the drummer's head.

PM: [laughs] That's funny.

JB: Little Blakey, he was our hero.

PM: That's great. I thought one really brilliant stroke, though, in the editing was to cut back and forth from the performance to the black and white rehearsal of the song, at the very same point in the song.

JB: Yeah, that was Emily. I mean, she's incredibly musical. Somehow she crawled through all these gazillion tapes that Blake had made at rehearsal, and she found those moments where she could match it up, even though there was no click.

PM: Yeah, I mean, she'd lock it right up, to the frame.

JB: She's amazing. And where it was at all off, I could come in and say, "Okay, you need to go a couple frames this way or that way." But with Emily, there wasn't a lot of direction from me, she was really had a sense of what worked and what didn't. And the songs that just didn't have enough footage, we didn't include them, where it was too boring, or when we were missing a gap of anything that was working. So, pretty much it was the video coverage that decided whether songs were included or not.

PM: That's just how it goes, yeah.

JB: On a couple of songs, there was a train wreck, or I was just so out of tune that we couldn't include it.

PM: Everything that did get included, I was happy to hear that everything was in such good tune. God bless those guitar techs.

JB: God bless us all. And [Bob] Clearmountain, of course, made us sound way better than we deserved to. [Legendary American engineer, producer, and mixer. www.bobclearmountain.com]

PM: Yeah, well, that's him, right.

JB: What a master. And that was so fun.

PM: And you guys go back, right?

JB: We go back to *10 Cent Wings*, which was the first thing he mixed for me.

PM: What kind of a guy is he?

JB: He's a doll. He's just the most unassuming, humble, lovely sweetheart hero, and fan.

PM: Really? With all he's done.

JB: I know. He's just a wicked normal lovely guy, and he's a genius.

PM: That's always so nice to hear about people that have done everything.

JB: He's wicked normal. When we made *Steady Pull*, I mean, the real crowning moment of making that record with him was the "I suck" episode, when we all came in and we were just feeling like crap. I thought I had a new song, but I wasn't sure of it. And I was in tears because I was so scared to sing it for anybody. And I'm crying, saying, "I really suck." And Bob says, "You suck? Jeez. I suck every day. I just totally suck." And then the guitar player, Val McCallum, who was there was like, "Are you kidding? What? Shut up, you guys. I suck. I totally suck. You want to talk about sucking? I can't even figure out these chords on this frickin song, Jonatha. That's how bad I suck." So it was just one of those crowning moments of like, "Oh, my God, Clearmountain has the 'I suck' factor also."

PM: Isn't that something?

JB: That made me feel so much better.

PM: That's a cool story.

JB: And I think that of all the people that I've met over the years who I most admire as musicians or really top people in their field, they're the ones who still have that doubt, they're still trying to get it right, and still are thinking, "Mmm, I suck."

PM: Yeah, if you don't have that, you--

JB: You're an idiot.

PM: --you've lost it. Yeah, you really have lost it.

[laughter]

PM: Oh, that's unbelievable. I spoke with my brother Billy in Germany this morning. [He toured with his friends The Hooters in Germany, sometimes as a roadie, sometimes opening the show, sometimes both. On many of those shows, Jonatha was the opening act.]

JB: What a doll. How is he?

PM: He's good. He's playing and writing, living outside Heidelberg. He sent fond regards your way. [www.billygoodman.com]

JB: Oh, that's sweet. Well, likewise, send them right back. That was a really fun summer.

PM: Yeah, he told me six different ways what an awesome chick you are.

JB: Ahh! I love that.

PM: I'm also friends with Dierk--

JB: The guitar tech!

PM: --the uber-roadie, yeah, right.

JB: He was great.

PM: Billy said he used to skip dinner every night so he could roadie your show instead.

JB: He was a doll. He was so nice to me.

PM: He's an awesome individual.

JB: Yep. So he's still doing it.

PM: Oh, yeah, and playing, too--well, I think currently he's shacking up with some supermodel in Tel Aviv, actually.

JB: Oh! [laughs] He definitely had that vibe.

PM: Oh, are you kidding me? He's the guy that goes to the Goth club, and just stands there with his arms folded while the girls fight over him. One of them eventually walks over and says, "So what's your story?" and after a pause he gives them the guttural "Why do you want to know?"

[laughter]

PM: That's him.

JB: That's great.

PM: So what are you up to at the moment, career-wise, what's next?

JB: Well, it's the weirdest thing, but I have another new record that's finished.

PM: Wow.

JB: It's a studio record that I produced also with Clearmountain. And it rocks.

PM: Oh, let's hear about that.

JB: And coincidentally Eric Bazilian co-wrote four songs with me.
[Eric's one of the two songwriting icons of The Hooters, though all of them write very well. Eric and Rob Hyman have written many hits for themselves and other luminary artists, and both are respected producers as well.]

PM: Nice.

JB: And sang on two, which rocks.

PM: What an incredible talent he is.

JB: His craggy voice with my more pure voice is my favorite combination in the whole world right now.

PM: Right. Oh, I dig Eric's touch with music. He's special.

JB: Ah! He's really fun for me. I'm not really a cowriter, I'm just not good at it.

PM: Really?

JB: I'm kind of bossy and weird.

PM: It is a certain thing, co-writing.

JB: But he's the only guy I can actually co-write with because he's like in my brain, and I'm in his brain. And we can finish each other's sentences. And he dumbs me down, and I smart him up, it's a great symbiosis. You know what I mean?

PM: Yes, I do.

JB: Because he'll have a thousand ideas an hour.

PM: Oh, he's one of those guys...

JB: That's the beauty of Eric. But only a few are really keepers.

PM: Right.

JB: So I'll just be there like, "Nope, nope, nope, nope--oh, there you got something." And then he'll make me less precious and uptight.

PM: That's so interesting. I do love writing with those people who you just can't stop the ideas from flowing out of their mouth.

JB: Exactly.

PM: And you can say "No, no, no--yes, stop."

JB: Yeah, and they never get hurt feelings.

PM: And you have to say "stop talking, please."

[laughter]

PM: Otherwise they'll just keep going.

JB: Exactly.

PM: Wow. That's amazing.

JB: So that's really fun.

PM: And did he play on the record as well?

JB: He played on the record. I think he's on two songs playing. Oh, my God, the first song he's on, the one that is just the most off-the-hook out of this world--which is of course going to be a worldwide smash--

PM: Of course.

JB: --it's called "Careful What You Wish For."

PM: Mmm, great title.

JB: I mean, he's all over it. You'll hear it. It's got these gnarly super hero guitars and--

PM: Yeah, he's good at that.

JB: And that's the title of the record.

PM: So what's your timing on that? When do you want to come out with that?

JB: Well, that's coming out in January in Switzerland and Denmark and probably Germany, and then in March in the States through Ryko.

PM: So please think of us when you come out with that--

JB: Are you kidding?

PM: --because we want to review that and get all over it.

JB: We'll get that to you soon, probably send it out in January.

PM: So like I was saying, you're definitely one of the few female singer/songwriters who wrote and is writing the book on going your own way in this very difficult business.

JB: Oh, my God, it's not getting any easier, is it?

PM: No. It's getting harder, if anything.

JB: Yep.

PM: Do you have anything to share about where you think this business is at, or where it's going? You have any feelings about that?

JB: I have a lot of feelings, and it's very confusing--It's hard to say where it's going. It's harder than ever.

PM: Isn't that the thing? Everybody you talk to says, "Well, I just don't know, man." Nobody knows.

JB: Nobody knows. And the biggest question on everyone's list is like, how are we going to sell records? How are we going to keep selling records when they're basically out there for free? And the industry in general hasn't done itself any favors in trying to maintain the cache and the value of music.

PM: Right.

JB: They're discounting like crazy. Just because people whine and kvetch about how much a CD costs, they've completely kowtowed to that mentality of like, "Well, music should be free, so we're going to just keep slashing and burning." And I think the whole perception of music has suffered. Where it used to be, "Oh, my God, I have to get this record, and I don't care what it costs, because it's that artist that I love, and I want to hear every word, I want to read the book, I want to see the back of the album cover, I want to know who did what." And I think that we have to figure out a way, collectively, to re-establish the value of art. I mean, this is art that we sweat, bleed and suffer over. And it costs a bunch, still, I mean, even if you're doing it on your laptop, okay? That's not how I do it. But it's expensive to make a great record. Okay, it's less than it used to be. But how do you put the cat back into the bag and make people say, "Wow, this is a valuable thing, and I'm willing to pay for it. I'm not going to steal it." You don't steal a leather jacket from a store. I don't know. It's just a weird conundrum.

PM: Yeah. I refuse to shut up about it, too, that I keep talking about it in the 'zine, that stealing is stealing, people. Come on. It's so basic.

JB: Hello, hello.

PM: You don't do it anywhere else, don't do it here.

JB: Exactly. And this is Pat's story, but I'm going to steal it for your benefit.

PM: Good.

JB: But it's really true, you don't blink about going to a movie, movie tickets are twelve bucks a piece now in New York City at least. Then you spend another six bucks on a thing of popcorn, right? And then maybe another five on your drinks. I mean, you're talking two people in the movies, you might be out fifty bucks--

PM: Easily.

JB: --for an hour and a half that's gone.

PM: And I hope it was a good movie.

JB: Yeah, and hope it was a good movie, because you're not getting your money back. But people kick and scream about spending thirteen bucks on a CD that they'll have forever, that you also can return if anything about it displeases you. And where's the disconnect? Where do people get off bitching about that and they would never bitch about like seeing a shitty movie and having spent your fifty bucks?

PM: Well, if it was as easy to download a movie as it was to download a record--[It's easy enough, but it's a more high-tech hack.]

JB: Exactly.

PM: --they'd be having a bigger problem than they are.

JB: Yes. Music is a much more steal-able format.

PM: But it will come.

JB: But the movie industry has been much more active about educating the public about piracy. And I think the music industry has just really missed the boat in terms of a consistent campaign of, "Hey, this is stealing, and this is how it affects people." I don't know if you saw--they had some trailers a while ago about piracy in movies. And they showed the key grip and the dolly guy and the cater dude.

PM: They're really good.

JB: "If you steal our movie, we're out of work."

PM: Right. They really made sense, they brought it home.

JB: They did. And I don't think the music industry did at all a successful job of that kind of education.

PM: I was writing some anti-piracy stuff for China for my brother in New York, and some of my stuff was all about musicians needing to come out of their bags about, "Don't you understand what's involved here? Here's my producer, here's my wife, here's my bass player. Let us talk to you about what happens."

JB: It's true. And I've been really vocal about it. And I've been at all these conferences, and I've been on panels. And it just seems like if you're me, you don't get the press, and it doesn't get out there. If you're Metallica or Britney Spears, and you're trying to make waves about it, people are just going "Aw, shut the hell up. You're loaded. What do you have to worry about?" So then it kind of kills the cause.

PM: That's a point well taken.

JB: But someone like me, mid-level, I'm not going to--who cares what I say, although 99.9 percent of all musicians are more in my kind of situation--

PM: At best.

JB: --we're just trying to piece it together every month.

PM: Absolutely.

JB: But we're not getting the press, because we're not sensational, or we're not going to sell the magazines.

PM: I appreciate all that, because I think people need to read that, and they need to hear it from artists.

JB: They do. And it for me, okay, these two new records that I'm very proud of--I couldn't be more excited about them--but every day, Pat and I are sitting here like, "How are we going to hire a publicist?"

PM: Yeah, because they're expensive...

JB: Okay. We'll just figure it out. We always do. So we're going to hire a publicist, and worry about it at the end of the month. But how are we going to get airplay? Because these records deserve to be heard.

PM: Right.

JB: But if I ain't selling them, if I got nothing coming in to offset my very real expenses--it's not like I'm out shopping all day. I'm trying to run a business.

PM: Yeah, people don't understand what publicity and promotion cost. I mean, it's out there.

JB: Yeah. And they think, "Oh, you're a rock star, or you're a musician, you must be all set."

PM: Yeah, you're good.

JB: But it's a small business.

PM: Nothing but, yeah.

Do you find time or make time to read? You reading anything lately that turned you on?

JB: I just read--oh, shoot, what was it called? *Special Topics in Calamity Physics*, Marisha Pessl.

PM: That's funny.

JB: It's a novel.

PM: Yeah, good; because I was thinking, wow, that's a branch of science I'm not familiar with.

JB: And I also just read *The Sea*, the John Banville book. I thought that was pretty awesome. I'm working on *What is the What?*, the new Dave Eggers one.

PM: Right. Absolutely.

JB: It's been slow going so far, but I'm hoping it's going to pick up.

PM: Well, thanks, I'm sure they're all going to pick up. I haven't read any of those, so I'm going to check them out.

JB: I'm a huge Ian McEwan fan, so *Saturday* just fuckin' rocked, I thought. Yeah.

PM: Where in the world do you guys like to go to get away from it all?

JB: South of France!

PM: That was quick.

JB: We honeymooned there.

PM: You're lucky to have that partnership. That's a wonderful thing.

JB: It's pretty cool.

PM: And you've been very generous with your time this morning.

JB: Are you kidding? It's great to talk to you.

PM: I knew you'd be a really fascinating artist, and certainly you are.

JB: [laughs] Flattery.

PM: Got me here, didn't it?

JB: It shouldn't be underrated.

PM: Thanks, Jonatha. You're a really cool person. I appreciate your time.

JB: Likewise, Frank, thank you.

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