

JONNY LANG

Jonny Lang's talent belies superlatives. His extraordinary singing and guitar playing stamped him as a once-in-a-generation blues talent. His 1997 debut, *LIE TO ME*, jumped to the top of the new artist album charts, and critics marveled at the poise and maturity the 16-year-old artist displayed. Lang has been on the road since *LIE TO ME*'s release, touring with Aerosmith, The Rolling Stones, B.B. King, and Blues Traveler, as well as headlining around the World.

On *WANDER THIS WORLD*, his new release, Lang has expanded his foundation of blues into R&B, rock and ballads. "The blues had a baby, and they called it rock & roll" Lang said, quoting Muddy Waters with his characteristic, easygoing laugh. The album smokes from the opening, funky track, "Still Rainin'". Through the lilting waltz "Leaving to Stay", Lang's own heartfelt ballad "Breakin' Me," and the dark, moody acoustic lament, "The Levee."

"It's been a crazy two years," said Lang. "Musically I wanted to explore my songwriting, branching out into my music. I've been playing blues since I started, and I wanted to go in more of a soul, R&B direction. The blues was such a great place for me to start, with Robert Johnson, Albert Collins, B.B. King, Freddie King and all those guys. It's where it all started which makes it a really good well that you can always draw from."

"I think the new record definitely bridges the generation gap," Lang said. "People who come to our concerts range from people my age to my grandfather's age. I love seeing the crowd at the front of the stage, eyes closed and shaking their heads. That's the most magical thing about it."

"Ever since I can remember I've wanted to be involved in music," said Lang, "playing it, being around it, anything. I'd be happy playing on a street corner, probably happier in a lot of ways just because there are so many stresses that go along with selling a lot of albums."

Ex-band-mate and teacher Ted Larsen exposed Jonny to the blues. "When I started playing guitar, Ted said 'Just plug your chord straight into your amp and don't go through any pedals'," Lang recalled. "'You don't need that stuff.' As time went on, I used some effects, but I've slimmed it down a lot. It's a simple kind of full and dirty sound."

Despite his age, Lang has paid his dues having played hundreds of regional gigs as Jonny Lang & The Big Bang. "When we moved to Minneapolis from Castleton, North Dakota we thought we were hot stuff," Lang recalled. "Then we saw a band called Mambo's Combo, who were the best musicians I had seen up to that point. We looked at each and said 'We suck.' The funk scene got under my skin in a good way."

Within months, Lang was one of the hottest regional acts. His independent release *SMOKIN'* sold over 25,000 copies grabbing the attention of major labels, including A&M. *LIE TO ME* was released on January 28, 1997, debuting at #1 on *Billboard's* New Artist chart. The acclaim rolled in, from rave reviews to a listing in *Newsweek's* Century Club of the 100 Americans expected to be influential in the next millennium. He swept the category for Best New Guitarist in *Guitar* magazine's reader's poll and made a cameo in the film "Blues Brothers 2000" performing "6345789" with Wilson Pickett and Eddie Floyd. In 1997, he also appeared at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction ceremony in New York with Jeff Beck and filmed an hour long Disney Channel In Concert special.

Most young guitarists are long on flash and gimmicks. The high drama of Hendrix and the spidery inventions of Stevie Ray Vaughan are the most familiar models. But Lang pulled from the old school, tailoring his playing to the song and never overstaying his welcome on the bandstand. The soulful chops of Albert Collins and Luther Allis make up his template, a refreshing approach informed by a humility of purpose that draws other great musicians to Lang.

B.B. King was impressed enough to invite Lang on stage to trade a few choruses. Lang, who shares King's technique of answering his own vocals with short bursts of guitar fills, learned something just from standing on the same stage with the master. "He's such a great influence," said Lang. "We toured together for a month and he invited me up on stage to jam. We had a blast. I'd look over at him and realize that I was sitting next to a God." B.B. returned the compliment in the *Los Angeles Times*, "Jonny Lang's 16, so he's got youth and talent with it. When I

was young, I didn't play like I do today. So these kids are starting at the height that I've reached. Think what they might do over time."

One glance at Lang's tour-de-force cameo in "Blues Brothers 2000" reveals his unselfconscious panache, the ability to rock out and make it look like he's skating along effortlessly. Lang's development is instantly apparent on "I Am", an amazing vocal workout on a tune co-written by David Z, who produced Prince and Jonny's LIE TO ME and WANDER THIS WORLD. "That was fun," said Lang. "It was more of an R&B thing which was pretty much what I was raised on, Stevie Wonder, Otis Redding stuff. Stretching me out musically. It just stays on one chord through the whole song and has a mysterious, ghost-like sound about it."

"David and I have a great chemistry together. We see eye to eye on a lot of stuff. He's a good source of inspiration for me also. I've learned so much from him. It's really great working with someone who can grasp what you're thinking, who can tell you what you were going to say before you say it. He has this uncanny ability to find the happy medium between what people like to hear and the artist likes to play."

When referring to "The Levee", Lang describes it as a song which is a good metaphor for WANDER THIS WORLD, "Because of the line that says 'I'm gonna throw my blues off the levee and let them go.' On this album, I'm evolving musically. Without a doubt branching out to new stuff."

Jonny Lang is the total package: a seemingly boundless talent matched by the desire to continually feed his creative fires and a self-awareness rare in adults, let alone teenagers. To quote the late Luther Allison, "Jonny Lang has the power to move the music into the next millennium by reaching the ears of a new generation. The great musicians have the power to break all of the 'isms' - race, age, sex, etc. Jonny Land is one of those musicians."

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