

AN INTERVIEW WITH Glen Burtnik Talking About Styx And Slaves

Six years ago, I was sitting at the front bar of an Asbury Park club interviewing the club's owners when Glen Burtnik walked in for the first time as a signed solo artist. Also a first that evening was my virgin assignment for *The Asbury Park Press*, which led to my first of many interviews with the subject at hand.

I distinctly remember that Burtnik, who had made the Stone Pony his home away from his North Brunswick home as a member of LaBamba & the Hubcaps and later on a Smooth Surface, was wearing feathers in his hair as bright as his enthusiasm. I also remember that Burtnik's home-away-from-homecoming was on a mellow weeknight. The few folks assembled in the bar immediately embraced the local rocker with congratulatory slaps on the back...

Burtnik's glory days come flashing back as the phone rings. Knowing it's Jim on the other line, I hand my newborn son over to my wife with a grin on my face as wide as Burtnik's that winter night in Asbury Park when he made it too hot inside to feel the cold. Burtnik's first words are ironic, especially considering he has to take time out of his busy touring schedule as the newest member of Styx.

Congratulations, man. **'eah, it's a great thing. I hear Rosie Burtnik's wife) has another one on the way.**

Yeah. Our third. She's due any day. I'm coming home for a few days, so I hope it's then. If I miss it, it's unfortunate, but it'll be a good father anyway. **'eah, that's cool. The road'll be over soon.**

Yeah, Sept. 1 is the last date on this tour.

ted by the listening public. How do you feel about that?

Well, during the war, the song took on a whole new meaning of its own. We didn't even know. In fact, I personally had mixed feelings about it at first, but after it hit No. 3, I didn't.

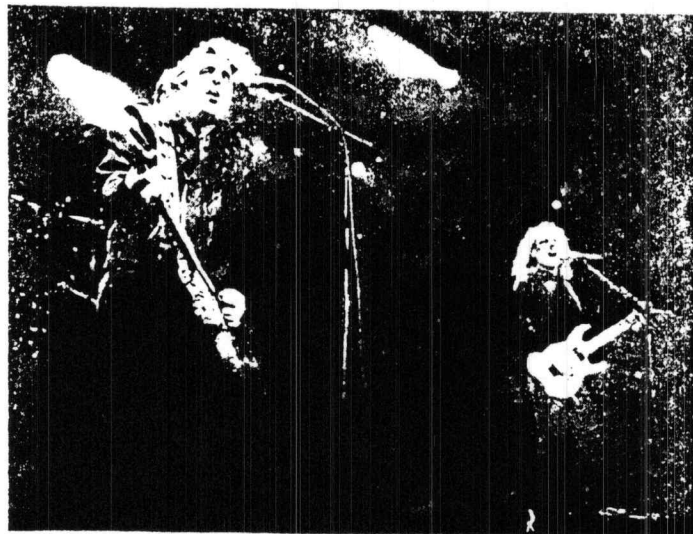
But you did have mixed feelings? In what sense, politically?

Well, just overall. Any time you put out a record, you don't want people messing with it. The other thing was I just thought things could be misconstrued. When I'm drivin' down the road and I hear a song on the radio, I assume, as everyone does, that that song is an expression of the artist, including samples. You know, if you sample a James Brown scream. Whatever it is, that's intentional, like Jimi Hendrix's feedback or something. It's not a mistake. It's meant to be.

In this case, there were some DJs who were adding things to the song that they thought were important. It was a little scary, because you've got to give up a lot of control and you've got to say, 'Well, gee, I hope some of these verses don't end up sounding like we're a warmonger group.' You know, the song is not a political statement, it's a spiritual one. So there was kind of a fear. It was kind of like making a movie and hoping that they edit it nicely; you know, not being invited to the edit and hoping it comes out the way you wanted the movie to come out.

How does the rest of the band feel about the response to the song and were they in support of Desert Storm?

The truth is it's a complete spectrum in this band. There's left-wing people and there's right-wing people. You get the



Burtnik belting one out with James (JY) Young during the opening night of Styx' "Edge Of The Century" tour. PHOTO BY MARK SULLIVAN.

heavy crisis, it was moving. It took on a whole new meaning. Better than that selling Coca-Cola.

Is there the slightest bit of resentment on your part that one of Dennis DeYoung's songs hit big, when the band initially intended one of your songs to be the single and the video?

I certainly don't regret that 'Show Me the Way' did well. I think A&M Records... you know, I really don't understand what it is about that record label, but they really don't like me. I don't think they wanted me to join Styx. I think they'd rather not hear another peep out of me for the rest of their lives. I don't know why, but I basically think it was a squash job by the record company. I myself think that A&M likes to play it safe, as I think a lot of record labels do now. It's a very conservative time and unless you're involved with a very hip label or a very hip type of music that's very alternative or on the fringes, people are playing it safe. So I think it was a very bold move on Styx's part to put out the first single being sung by a guy who had never been in Styx before. I know A&M did not like that idea, fought against it, but the band had first choice of the single. So the band wanted to put me up front first and for that I'm really grateful to the band.

It also took a lot of guts on their part to make your tune, 'Edge of the Century,' the title-track. I'm sure it must be nice now, having been a solo artist on A&M, to have this band situation to fall back on.

Yeah. Again, I just don't think they'll promote a record of mine. It's always going to be Dennis as long as we're on A&M Records.

What has some of the feedback been within the band regarding your replacing Tommy Shaw?

I'm sure that the band is very pleased. Every night, my big trial is the audience. Because of the way the record has gone, I know that when I walk out in the beginning of the night, there's a certain percentage of the audience that wishes I wasn't there and wishes it was Tommy. That's the old Styx fans. So I have the challenge of proving myself and I always feel real confident that by the end of the night I've won everybody over. There's a lot of people who've never heard of Glen Burtnik before, regardless of what it seems like in New Brunswick. So when we're out there, I work hard and people

realize by the end of the night the set's going pretty good. In a number of places, I've seen people holding up signs that read 'Tommy Who?'

I really admire Tommy Shaw. In fact, he was the one guy I knew in the band. I didn't know the other guys. Tommy was like my buddy and we were talkin' about writing songs together like a year before he started Damn Yankees.

What's also ironic is that the Yankees are at the Garden State Arts Center two days after Styx. You're kind of following each other around. Have you bumped into each other at all while on the road?

No we haven't. To tell you the truth I've never seen Tommy Shaw live. People have said that I'm more energetic, but I don't know. I don't think anybody walks away from our show disappointed. In fact, they're usually surprised. The feeling I get when people come backstage and I talk to them is that they're surprised. I don't know what they're expecting.

A very funny thing happened last night. Somebody walked up to Dennis and said, 'You were really great. I want you to know that you were really great up there. You didn't even know that anybody was missing. You took that guy's place really well.' In other words, this guy really thought Dennis was the new guy. So, I mean, that made me feel good.

And then he came up to you and said, 'So how does it feel to have written 'Babe'?' What Burtnik songs are you doing in the set? I'm sure as the tour comes East you're doing more of your own material, right?

We keep it pretty consistent. We're doing everything that I wrote on the record and a few Tommy songs. There was a decision to make this a Styx tour, not to do any of my solo stuff or Dennis' or J.Y.'s. So that kind of excluded anything from *Heroes and Zeroes* or *Talking In Code* or any of my other stuff. **Could that maybe be laxed a little bit?**

I have been thinking maybe at the Arts Center I should take a little longer at one point and fuck around a little bit and play a couple of songs, because I'm sure there's going to be a lot of people there to see me. I was disappointed during the first leg of the tour. There was no New Jersey people there. I was like, 'Wow.'

Yeah, but the Beacon Theatre is

"Well, as soon as I feel like I'm a rock star, I'll answer that question. It's great to go out onstage and have people standin' up and screamin' and clappin', but it's really just a job. It's just good hard work and it's a lot more fun, I guess, than delivering mail."

o you're comin' home a hero.

I guess. **Styx has been a happening thing for you.**

I know it's not a good Summer for concert business, and we're doing great. So that's okay. We're not doing arenas. We're doing a smaller scale thing, but every place we go, if it ain't sold out, it's close to it. So we're feeling pretty good about that.

Politically speaking, I don't know if Styx would have been able to do it without you.

I think the live thing. I blow a little fire to the old guys here.

Fortunately for the group, the song 'Show Me the Way' was misinterpre-

whole political spectrum in terms of how people feel about this particular issue, as well as all kinds of issues. The thing is I think we were all very pleased that the song did well. None of the versions of 'Show Me the Way' that were redone by these radio guys were too goofy. Put it that way. So I didn't really mind it that much.

It was just a scary thing that people were messin' with it, but ultimately, we were all moved by it. To think that this song... we were in the studio working on it, sayin', 'Geez, is this too bold to talk about this, to talk about a spiritual thing in a pop group sense?' To see it construed as a song to kind of heal the nation at a time when we were going through a

kind of a drag to get to here.
I know. Besides the first night I was sick as a dog. I couldn't sing. It was really embarrassing.
Is there a good chance some folks from Asbury might hear 'Herc Comes Sally Now' or 'Spinning My Wheels'?
Maybe. We'll see how I'm feelin' that night.

What about the new stuff? What is the current creative process like within Styx?

We're writing songs.
On the road?
Yeah, we're tossin' ideas around. I've got a couple of songs that I wrote before we went out that looks like we're going to record. Then there's some new things that I'm writing with Dennis and by myself. We're going to do that balance thing like we did last time, which was get a certain amount of the Styx sound, get certain amount of J.Y., get a certain amount of Dennis, and get a certain amount of me, the new guy. There were some people concerned with this last album that my songs sounded like my records, Dennis' songs sound like his records, all this stuff. But I think that's really the cool part about Styx. They were always that way. There were Tommy Shaw's songs...they were kind of a versatile group.

Like 'Angry Young Man' versus 'Babe.'

Right. Live, people are always surprised. We're aware that there's a certain feeling out there that Styx is kind of a ballad group, but it's really not like that live at all. It's a hell of a lot closer to a hard band than it is a wimpy band.
Before you do the next Styx album, what actually will be coming out is Slaves of New Brunswick. Tell me all about that from getting the jam together to the release date of the album.

I don't really have the release date. I think it's coming out some time in October. It's just a pet project of something I've always wanted to do. I think I talked to you about it when I first started to work on it a long time ago. I just started to write some songs about life in the New Brunswick area, having grown up there and stuff. And every Wednesday night there for a while, we had a jam session at The Melody Bar in New Brunswick and we called it the Slaves of New Brunswick. So kinda outta that jam, I picked some of the players and took them into the studio and we threw together this album of songs about New Brunswick for the most part. I guess there's a song or two that isn't directly about New Brunswick but about people who are in New Brunswick.

It's a real New Jersey project. New Brunswick is a town that's had a lot of different bands and musicians come out of it. A lot of different styles. Everything from The Smithereens to "Brandy, You're a Fine Girl" to Lenny Kaye of The Patti Smith Group to the *Dirty Dancing* soundtrack. Frankie Previte, who got an Academy Award for that, lives in New Brunswick. I mean, there's so many different types of music. There's a lot of techno pop and a lot of thrash bands. It's just a really cool environment that never really got the attention that Asbury Park got or even in North Jersey, because the Dirt Club had a thing going there for a while. But now thanks to a guy named Matt Pinfield, New Brunswick is slowly getting on the map as an alternative headquarters.

Who's in the Slaves of New Brunswick?

Man, we've got over 60 people on this record. It's like a dream come true. It's like I always wanted to throw a party and instead of being the kind of party where everybody stands in the kitchen and drinks cocktails, it's a party where everybody walks into the recording studio, picks up an instrument and plays a solo. It's pretty wild.

So like I said, Frankie Previte; Lenny Kaye, who produced a Suzanne Vega record. He's like the godfather of the New Brunswick area in a lot of ways. And we've got Ivan Kral, who was in Iggy Pop's band and wrote a couple of John Waite songs. From a lot of alternative bands, there's Wooden Soldiers, there's Tina Maschi. Certainly Tony Shanahan does a lot of the work with me. He played bass with David Bowie and John Cale and he had a real good New Brunswick band called the Buggles, so we've got a lot of the guys from the Buggles.

Who else? Everybody that's ever lived in New Brunswick. A girl named Patti Maloney, who's a real dear friend of mine; David Prater, who produced Firehouse, which is doing pretty good; a guy named Bernie Brausewetter, who's one of the best guitarists in the whole world and lives right outside of New Brunswick. He's got a band called BB & the Stingers. They're incredible. You've gotta see this guy. He's a terrific blues player, but actually, he can play anything. He's like a monster motherfucker guitar player.

Let's see, there's Dave LaRue, who's been playing with Steve Morse. You've got Jay Pounder from Crossfire Choir. Then there's Jiggs & the Pigs and Plinky (Giglio, Burnik's brother-in-law, who co-owns Trax East in South River). I couldn't have done it without them. Then there's some guys I consider from the New Brunswick area because they record at Trax East, like Rocco Fury from American Angel.

There's a guy named Ernie Scott. He's pretty interesting, like a local hero. He teaches in the New Brunswick school system and is just an unbelievable jazz pianist who's been on Broadway. He's an amazing talent. Now he's not a young rock guy, not to make him sound old or anything, but just to show how diverse putting these people together was; getting a guy from the Whirling Dervishes together with a guy from American Angel put together with Tina Maschi. Then you put them together with Ernie Scott. It's just like a spectrum, a wild thing.

I honestly don't know what we're going to do live. We're getting ready to do a big promotion of this record when it's out. The Slaves of New Brunswick occasionally show up places to jam. They've been doing a regular thing at the Melody in my absence. We are discussing when the record comes out doing a lot of these songs, but up until the record comes out the Slaves are like a boogie

Southside Johnny & the Jukes

La Bamba & the Hubcaps

Holmdel, N.J. Garden State Arts Center (5,000 seats); \$22.50 top. Promoted by Ron Delsener. Reviewed July 27, 1990.

Southside Johnny Lyon gathered what is left of the Asbury Park music scene for his annual trek back to the shore. Though no longer a Jersey shore resident himself, Lyon perhaps best represents the area's contribution to the music world.

Backed by the Jukes and some of the Hubcaps, and joined by special guests Jon Bon Jovi and Steve Van Zandt, Lyon turned the Arts Center into a giant barroom.

band. We just do favorite old songs. But when the record comes out, it's all new, original stuff, so we want to be able to perform this for people. We'd like to hit all our favorite drinking wells.

So that's going to be in between the Styx record?

Yeah, as soon as I get off the road with Styx, I'll come home and play some Slaves of New Brunswick shows. Then I go back out and put together this Styx record.

Again in Chicago. So you're going to be pretty busy, man.

It's a busy life.
Now the Slaves of New Brunswick seems to be an epic thing, even more than that Christmas Choir was. But the songs—as well as the poetry which is interspersed between the songs—are personal. So I'm wondering how you can have this epic band without losing the intimacy?

Well, first of all, there's never more than 10 people playing on one song. I just felt, having jammed with the Slaves at the Melody and down in Asbury Park with Springsteen and all those guys, that it's always best if there's a core, something that ties it all together, which are the songs and the point of view. So I wrote most of it and I had a vision to have this material to promote my attitude about the town and about some of the people and what it's like to live there. And in the process, I realized I didn't have to play guitar on every song. There's a lot of great guitar players from New Brunswick, so I said, "Let's bring some in." Till finally, I realized let's get some of my favorite singers to come in and sing, because I'm busy enough with Styx. I've had a solo career. It's not that important to me that I sing lead on every song. I think the concept would be much hipper if you could buy a record that was kind of a big cult of crazy people from New Brunswick all steered by one direction. **It's kind of funny that they're called 'Slaves' of New Brunswick because it seems to me, based mainly on personal experience, that once you come here, however temporarily to live, you can't leave. You become bound to the town.**

Everybody's kinda tied here. Very few get away. The title track talks a lot about that. It's an amazing place. But there's good and there's bad. There's a lot of bad. New Brunswick is not to be confused with Nirvana, but it's home and it means a lot to a lot of people.

I also think that ultimately there are a and never-say-die stage presence creates a party-like atmosphere wherever he plays, and this homecoming was no exception.

The show was a mixture of the old and new, with Lyon and the Jukes representing days gone by, while the likes of Bobby Bandiera and Glen Burnick represented what's to come. The only one left out was Bruce Springsteen.

Lyon came out rocking and got right into the Springsteen-penned "Talk To Me" before rolling through such band classics as "Tell Me (That Our Love's Still Strong)" and "Fever."

Lyon mixed in a few tunes from his work-in-progress album but chose to stay with proven stuff most of the evening. The new songs, from Lyon's second venture without the Jukes, has a harder, more heavily guitar-laden sound.

lot of people who aren't from New Brunswick who will be able to appreciate the point of view anyway. The record talks about growing up in this area, I don't think growing up in New Brunswick is that radically different from growing up in Eatontown or Bloomfield. It's just that point of view. Like this song about somebody who passes away, this beautiful girl who I used to see every Friday night at the local bars. So not with us anymore. I think everybody once you've hung around a little bit any kind of town, you get to know people like that. I don't know what makes Bruce Springsteen when he talks about Asbury Park so universal for everybody, but I think there's a common thread in everybody's lives about how they feel about the town they live in.

So Slaves of New Brunswick could be Slaves of Anytown?

I think so. There's specific referents like the Melody Bar. But I think the important thing is the cast of characters who are very tied to the town.

It's pretty amazing that when it started it was sort of an excuse drink with some old friends now it's gotten to the point where this local independent label gotten involved.

It's a pretty ambitious project but not a major label we're putting it out. **But they've had previous success and what's nice is the label (New Wood Entertainment) is based in Edison.**

Yeah, I think it's cooler that we're out on a label based in Central Jersey. We'll see. I'm not going for a gold platinum record with this. I'm interested in making a small statement about my home.

But, of course, on a larger level there's Styx, which takes you out from home. So my last question: you is being a rock star every day you expected it to be?

Well, as soon as I feel like I'm a star, I'll answer that question. It's going out onstage and have people stand up and screamin' and clappin', but really just a job. It's just good hard and it's a lot more fun, I guess, delivering mail.

Styx will be at the Garden State Center in Holmdel on Thursday, Aug. 22.

While not the best vocalist gives it his all. The combination of the Jukes and the Hubcaps way through the show with horns onstage. None of the was perfect, but that didn't matter.

The evening's last six numbers

were the best, featuring Bob and Van Zandt, who is credited with helping create the Jukes' in the '70s. The show ended with "This Time It's For Real," which Van Zandt dedicated to Springsteen and Patti Scialfa's new

Opening act La Bamba and the Hubcaps is a hodgepodge of veterans who tour with some of rock's biggest acts and return the Hubcaps in their downtime addition to their own version of blues classics, the band serve backup for Bobby Bandiera, Bruce John Eddie and Chris Janney. Jersey boys trying to strike it on their own. — Skid.

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