

Jonny Lang's Turn Around - The Story

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Jonny Lang has a message for you.

Sure, he's been in touch before, speaking often with his guitar in the language of deep blues and searing rock & roll.

But Turn Around is different. The guitar is still there, whispering sometimes, occasionally even screaming. Now, though, it's just one voice in a chorus of sounds—the tight band, the passionate singing, and lyrics that conjure beauty as well as pain and speak the truth, all at the same time.

The GRAMMY-nominated, former prodigy instrumentalist, who topped the Billboard New Artist chart with his first album at age 15, stands now as a mature creative force, made more sensitive yet also toughened by life's adventures. He's learned what it means to rise above hard times and to find meaning where chaos seemed to rule.

These insights, and the emotions they unleash, makes Turn Around the pivotal album of Jonny Lang's career to date—a passage that links the triumphs of his past to the promise of his future.

A soul-stirring organ, played by GRAMMY-winning producer Shannon Sanders, forecasts the surge of music that follows on Turn Around: the stomping funk of "Bump in the Road," the startling climax that closes "The Other Side of the Fence," the electrifying vocal exchanges with Michael McDonald on "Thankful," and on the opposite extreme, the work-gang chant that drives "Turn Around" and the profound intimacy of "Only a Man."

Turn Around is all of this and more, a tumble of musical colors that dazzle and soothe. And in the end, they achieve coherence through the meaning that Lang conveys so urgently.

"With this album I want to focus, more than ever before, on my purpose in life," he explains. "I've been so incredibly blessed. My wife and I just had our fifth anniversary. I get to do what I love for a living. But it wasn't so long ago that I was spiraling downward in a lot of ways, until God touched my life and set me on the right track. I feel a huge debt to give glory back to Him for everything He has done for me."

That said, Turn Around is not slotted only to listeners who have—or have not—undergone this kind of transformation. It inspires, excites, and gets people on their feet—but it doesn't preach. "I understand that not everybody believes as I do," Lang says, "which is fine. I just want to sing about what's going on in my life and let people make up their own minds about that."

For all the conviction that Lang brings to Turn Around, the album began almost as an afterthought. Lang was in the studio one day with his producer, Ron Fair, who is also president of A&M/Interscope Records. There wasn't anything pressing on the agenda; they were doing routine work on the final stages of Lang's previous record, Long Time Coming. Then, out of the blue, Fair said something completely unexpected.

“He looks at me and goes, ‘Dude, you need to make a gospel record,’” Lang says, laughing at the recollection. “Now, I hadn’t really mentioned much to Ron about that side of my life, but for some reason he knew where I was at. So I thought about it for just a second and said, ‘Yes, I do.’”

There is plenty of gospel in *Turn Around*, especially in the choir that riffs through “Thankful” and “It’s Not Over.” But rustic country (“On That Great Day,” with guests Buddy Miller and Sam Bush), Motown funk (“One Person at a Time”), jazzy folk (“My Love Remains,” co-written with Steven Curtis Chapman), and other influences flavor this music too. In this varied setting, “gospel” has more to do with the spirit that animates these tracks than any category it might inhabit.

Again, the unity in this diversity comes from Lang himself. A professional musician since age 12, Lang rocketed from his hometown of Fargo, North Dakota, to international renown in his mid teens. While kids his age were still playing high school gigs, he was touring with giants like the Rolling Stones and Aerosmith, trading licks with mentors like B. B. King and Buddy Guy, and being lauded by U.S. News and World Report for having “the voice of a grizzled blues veteran ... and guitar skills to match.”

Turn Around proves that, unlike many one-time wunderkind performers, Jonny Lang has grown to exceed the expectations that heralded his ascendance. Produced by songwriter/performers Drew Ramsey and Shannon Sanders, and Lang, and anchored and elevated by former Prince NPG rhythm dynamo Michael Bland, *Turn Around* is Lang’s fifth album—but it’s also the first of what will become his most moving and enduring works.

“Every record I’ve done has felt progressively more and more like the real me,” he sums up. “But more than anything I’ve done, this one comes straight from my heart.”

That, then, is the message of Jonny Lang: To *Turn Around*, you move ahead. It’s that simple—and powerful.