

OTIS TAYLOR EXAMINES THE DARKER DIMENSIONS OF LOVE

Pentatonic Wars and Love Songs due at retail on June 23, 2009

No one ever accused blues singer/composer/multi-instrumentalist Otis Taylor of overindulging in the brighter and happier aspects of the human condition. His songs are often peopled with characters whose emotional landscape – no matter how raw or dark – is laid bare for all to experience, and the story is often less than pretty.

But if love – in any or all of its joyous and painful variations – is somewhere amid that confusing emotional swirl, he'll go there too. The result will by no means be syrupy, oversimplistic ballads obsessing over romantic love. Instead, Taylor's love songs take a hard, realistic look at the relative benefits and costs of what is perhaps the most confusing and unnerving of forces within the human heart.

Taylor's new recording, *Pentatonic Wars and Love Songs*, throws a light on the complexities of love in all of its forms. The album is set for June 23, 2009, release on Telarc International, a division of Concord Music Group. In addition to Taylor's trademark haunting vocals and simple but stirring guitar riffs – a combination often referred to as trance blues – the album also features guest appearances by Irish blues-rock guitarist Gary Moore (previously heard on Taylor's *Definition of a Circle* in 2007) and jazz/hip-hop pianist Jason Moran.

Within these songs of love are tales of tragedy and loss, misunderstanding and deception – but often a glimmer of hope as well. “That’s just my nature,” says Taylor. “I may write love songs, but they aren’t always going to be happy and pretty. Look at songs like ‘Teen Angel’ or ‘Ode To Billy Joe.’ Those are love songs, but they aren’t exactly happy. So why shouldn’t my songs be considered love songs?”

The set opens with the pensive “Looking for Some Heat,” the story of a man looking for some love and sunshine. Moran and cornetist Ron Miles provide enough subtle riffs to serve as counterpoint to Taylor's more edgy vocals. “I met Jason in Germany once, but I didn’t really pay that much attention to him at first,” says Taylor. “Then I saw him in concert in West Virginia, and I was really amazed. I wanted to get him on one of my records.”

The melancholy “Sunday Morning” features lead vocals by Cassie Taylor (Otis' 21-year-old daughter), backed by Gary Moore's understated but potent flamenco guitar lines. The power of the song lies in the simplicity of the lyrics, as they draw attention to the images and rituals of what is often the quietest and most introspective day of the week.

“Lost My Guitar” was inspired by the tragic true story of Emma K. Walsh, whose preschool-age daughter was killed in a car accident in Boulder, Colorado, in 1974. The singer in the song laments the loss of his guitar, but “the guitar is a metaphor for the child,” says Taylor.

“I’m Not Mysterious,” a tale of puppy-love between two eight-year-olds, seems innocent

enough, but the difference in race between the two children makes for an undercurrent of tensions. “That’s something I’ve lived, so I decided to write about it,” says Taylor, who grew up in Denver in the ‘50s and ‘60s. “When I was a little kid, this little girl sent me a note telling me she loved me. So I followed her home to see where she lived. Then one time I visited her at her house. That was when I had to stop seeing her.”

The hypnotic “Mama’s Best Friend,” sung by Cassie fueled by the odjembe drumming of percussionist Fara Tolno, is a glimpse into the life of Taylor’s mother – a sort of followup chapter to “Mama’s Selling Heroin,” a track from his 2004 recording, *Double V*. “My mother was gay, and she eventually hooked up with one of her girlfriends,” he explains. “My father left and went to California. I put these stories out there for my children.”

The closer, “If You Hope” is a story about a ghost who wants his lover to join him in the afterlife. “If you listen to the very end, you hear it build up beautifully,” says Taylor, “sort of like a grand finale to the entire album. It brings the various elements of my music together – the jazz, the blues-rock, all of it.”

Pentatonic Wars and Love Songs follows Taylor’s 2008 opus, *Recapturing the Banjo*, and album that celebrated the African roots of an instrument whose origins have been largely obscured by its subsequent associations with Appalachian folk music.

“This is a different kind of endeavor for me,” he says of the new recording. “I found myself saying, ‘What can I do after making a banjo album? What will people want to listen to?’ My answer was love songs. I’m doing things here that I didn’t have the opportunity to do on previous albums, things that people wouldn’t normally expect from me, compared to what I’ve done so far. I think it’s one of my best works because it has such unusual elements.”

Otis Taylor’s *Pentatonic Wars and Love Songs* (CD-83690) is due at retail on June 23, 2009.

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