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Rene Marie: Invisible Strings of the Heart

An interview with the singer about her new album *Black Lace Freudian Slip*

Rene Marie's new album *Black Lace Freudian Slip* on Motema Records is a celebration of love, dance and a catharsis to the vicissitudes of life. In my recent interview with Rene Marie, we discuss those narratives that are metaphorically transparent, as well as the preoccupation of idealism.



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Rene Marie



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Rene Marie

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Daood: If you could explain this tongue-in-cheek, slip of the tongue work of art?

Rene Marie: How does one explain a Freudian slip? Most often we try to deny whatever the slip signifies anyway. So...I really don't know how to explain a Black Lace Freudian slip. I've tried before and failed miserably. A Black Lace Freudian slip is more a feeling than an idea; what I'm trusting in is your emotional intelligence; your ability to listen to the CD and feel it rather than have you agree or disagree with whatever I say it is...or isn't.

Six minutes and 29 seconds of pure delight with "This For Joe." But there is an emphasis on you creating your own songs and "Please don't compare... "As the lyrics go, and if you could elaborate further upon the significance of not wanting to be juxtapose to other vocalist and creating music.

This is such a fun tune. I get to express my musical philosophy, tell a story and sing - all at the same time! Seriously, though, most people consider it a compliment when they're told they sound like some famous singer. But my approach to music is very similar to my approach to lovemaking. So if my lover said to me, "y'know, baby, the way you do that thang when we're making love? You remind me of so-and-so." Well...I would not be flattered by that. Would you? I'm not trying to be hard; admittedly, critics have a difficult job. They listen to more music in a month than most of us do in a year! But...for a critic or reviewer to compare one musician to another means, to my mind, that they don't know what to say. Why not just admit that instead of falling back on meaningless comparisons? Unless the musician deliberately sets out to imitate someone else, how can one musician be compared to another? We all experience music in our own personal way. And, as much as I enjoy listening to the

singers to whom I'm sometimes compared, I don't consider these comparisons complimentary to either of us; certainly, I do not consider them true.

“Wishes,” is folksy, country, bluesy, craftily written with the genius of Bob Dylan and Joni Mitchell, accentuated by harmonica playing, giving the impression there is no formula in your approach when constructing a song.

It's interesting that you used folk, country & blues to describe “Wishes”, because those are my 3 favorite genres of music. They are my default styles to compose and sing in. then comes jazz. I first recorded “wishes” on the 2004 Maxjazz album, *Serene Renegade*. It was in 4/4 timing and I avoided singing with a country accent. But when I sang it at home, and when I initially composed it, I always sang it with a southern country accent. It took me a while, but it dawned on me that folk/country music is my default genre. The way I sing “wishes” on *Black Lace Freudian Slip*, in a slow $\frac{3}{4}$ waltz with a folk/country feel allows me to express a certain emotion that I'm somehow unable to express otherwise. I don't have a formula, but I do have a goal when I compose and that is to express the exact emotion that I'm feeling at the time the lyrics and music reveal themselves to me. It's scary being true to myself in that way sometimes, because it may not necessarily fit a “theme” that other folks sometimes think should be there. If anything, I try to avoid a formula at all costs.

When singing ballads like “Thanks, But I Don't Dance,” is it an issue of putting yourself in a certain frame of mind?

I'm at the point in my life that I sing only the songs that move me in some way. The lyrics of “thanks, but I don't dance” are written from the perspective of a musician who is always onstage playing/singing the slow, romantic love songs and never gets to dance to them. But the ‘dancing’ in this song is really a metaphor for falling in love. I wish I'd written this song—it is incredibly beautiful in its vulnerability, isn't it?

To answer your question...Yes it is! Even though, “Ahn's Dream,” is co-written with Mr. Nils Petter Molvaer, is this from your diary or personal journal?

I first heard this instrumental tune back in '02 or '03 on Mr. Molvaer's CD, *Khmer*. The original title of this hypnotic and compelling tune is “on stream”. When composing the lyrics I sat down, listened to this music over and over and just wrote whatever stream-of-consciousness phrases came to my mind. I whittled those phrases down into complete sentences to match the exact musical phrase of Mr. Molvaer's melody. It's really a song about a woman, Ahn, who is having very strong doubts about her upcoming marriage, but she's unable to face the truth of those second thoughts because she's in love with, not her partner, but the idea of a wedding: the engagement ring, the invitations, the wedding dress and veil, walking down the aisle, the gifts at the reception! It is only in the dead of night during her dreams when she can no longer suppress them that those truths come bubbling up to the surface. The rest of the time she is unable to face those truths; she is pretending to be awake.

Songs such as “Free For Day,” should be played on all radio stations for its happy message. Exactly what is your philosophical approach to life?

Isn't it a lovely song? I adore the way the musicians capture the sunny, light-hearted mood of the precious lyrics penned by Patti McKinney. Quentin's brushwork veritably skips, spins & hops over his

snare. Satchel Paige once said, “How old would you be if you didn’t know how old you are?” I would be 12 years old. My philosophical approach? Don’t know that I have one, but a lyric from “free for a day” comes to mind as a good one: “...always play nicely with others.”

“Gosh, Look At the Time.” Is another example of your ability to take words and phrase them in such ways that takes the listener on a journey that we never want to end; writing at what stage of your career did it become apparent that you’ve perfected the art of writing short stories?

Oh my goodness—if you only knew the angst I suffer through each time I write a song! An aid in moving past the angst is a phenomenon I’ve been aware of since childhood: it’s a sensation of being automatically connected to someone else’s inner spirit when I first see them—even total strangers. It’s hard to describe, but it’s as though there are invisible strings connecting my heart to the heart of every other person I see, and a sense of instantly “knowing” something very deep and true about them. I don’t know what this is, but instead of denying this sense of “knowing,” or pretending it’s not there, I allow myself free (and safe) expression of it by writing songs about whatever it is I’m sensing from another person.

Hitting the drum and the hoop at the same time brings me to your next song, “Rim Shot.” Is your drummer using the “Cross-Stick,” “Power,” or the “Lay-Over,” rim shot for this song?

Hmmm...you’ll have to ask HIM that! All I know is that it makes me feel so good when he hits it. Ouch!

“Fallin’ of a Log,” fiction or non-fiction?

Every song I write is non-fiction. It may not be my personal experience, but it’s somebody’s...

Can one come to the “Serenity Prayer,” after deciding not to go back to “Deep in the Mountains?”

I deliberately arranged “serenity prayer” to follow “deep in the mountains” because of that very reason. “Deep in the mountains” is from the perspective of someone who’s been on a difficult, challenging journey and lived to tell the story. Immediately after its telling comes the prayer of serenity, to be aware, not only of our own challenges, but of the challenges others are dealing with; to be compassionate, gentle and mindful of how fragile we all are.

Wow, “Rufast Daliarg,” musically and lyrically is magical but there is no way for me to avoid asking as to how did you come up with that title?

I’m so glad you like that song. It makes me happy every time I sing it! When my youngest son was a freshman in college, he’d often call me to talk about some of the challenges he was having in school and life in general. Since I’d never attended college and had lived quite a sheltered life as a young adult, I often felt unqualified to give him any advice. However, the lyrics of the song came to me after one such conversation and i wrote it down as a poem at first. The melody came to me about 10 minutes later. we debuted the song at a concert he was attending. It was a lovely moment. As to the meaning of the title, there are lots of verbs in the song and the title is formed from the first two letters of most of those verbs:

RUN. FALL. STAND. DANCE. LIVE . ACHE. RISE. GROW.
rufast daliarg. It means: “begin again”

The last song requires a bottle of whiskey (and I don’t drink) and this album would be incomplete without the sassy, hilarious, Saturday night on the town leaving you with Sunday morning blues titled “Tired.” Having a sense of humor must be paramount when it comes to working with Ms. Rene Marie?

Yep, you best believe it! We have so much fun onstage, it’s a wonder we haven’t been arrested! Laughter, kidding, teasing, jokes, tall tales and little black lace Freudian slips—our music is interspersed with all of this! The lyrics for “tired” are kinda tongue-in-cheek because, honestly, we give our all up there on the stage. I mean you never know when it’s gonna be your last opportunity to make music, right? So why hold back? With that kind of approach, by the time the set is through, we are completely spent. Empty. Ain’t nothin’ left. I wouldn’t have it any other way, of course. So I thought it would be fun to add some self-deprecating humor.

Pop and R&B artists usually are this risqué when it comes to an album cover but a jazz artist? It’s very eye-catching (guys like me will be wondering are there any other photos) but is the concept solely based upon the title of the album?

Oh my god. I absolutely LOVE that cover! We had so much fun on that photo shoot. I can’t say much more than that - everyone on that photo shoot had to sign vows of secrecy. But I will say this: yes, there are more photos. And even though I’ve never even smoked a cigarette in my entire life, I always wanted to be the kind of woman who smokes a cigar. You know...*that* kind of woman. Yeah, *her!* It’s not about a concept. It’s about following your urges and seeing where they take you. I mean, who knows where Black Lace Freudian Slips originate? Certainly not me...

Rene Marie, if you could end this most interesting and dynamic interview with words that you live by?

“It ain’t what you done lost. It’s what you got left.”

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About Daood "Soul Detective"

My love for music goes back to the days of wanting to be a musician. Attending Fairfax High School I played a variety of instruments: Acoustic Bass, Saxophone and clarinet. After high school I attended a number of music conservatories, one of them being...

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