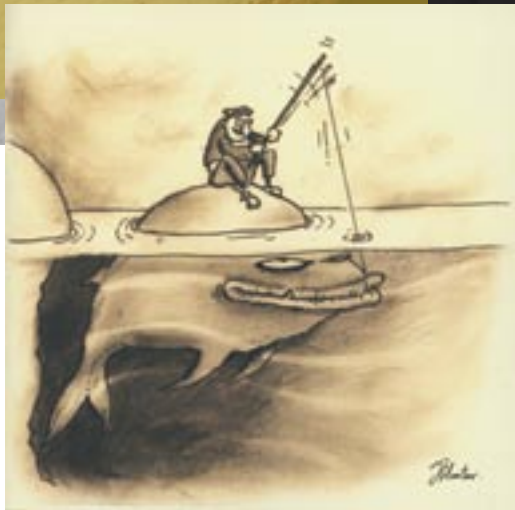


people gonna talk

James Hunter chats about his new record, his tour and his favorite sauce

INTERVIEW BY BUCK QUIGLEY



British R&B artist James Hunter has been making a big splash on this side of the pond this year, touring in support of his great album *People Gonna Talk* (Go Records/Rounder). He opens a free bill with Susan Tedeschi at Artpark on Tuesday, June 27. *Artvoice* caught up with the humorous Mr. Hunter in the midst of his heavy touring schedule. Here's what he had to say...

Artvoice: You started out as a busker—a street performer. What was that like for you? Did you have any tricks to get people to stop and pay attention?

James Hunter: Uh...yeah. We used to play loudly. (*Laughs.*) That used to get 'em!

AV: You've played in Van Morrison's band and he has said of you: "James is one of the best voices, and best kept secrets, in British R&B and soul." What do you think of Van Morrison?

JH: Well, he's pretty good himself. You know, for a relative newcomer. I think he'll catch on.

AV: I like the illustrations you did on the inside of your CD. Did you study art?

JH: Well, I've been doing that for...long before I ever did the music. I think I been scribbling away, you know, drawing, since I was about five.

AV: Did you ever do that professionally?

JH: No. I made the odd desultory attempt to send them away for publication, but it never happened. And out of sheer laziness I never bothered to pursue it.

AV: Well, it's good to know you have something to fall back on.

JH: Yeah! You never know—it might catch on.

AV: You've got a remarkable voice and you're a strong songwriter, but you can also really play. Who influenced you as a guitarist?

JH: The first person I listened to on guitar was Eddie Cochran. And then I went on to one of my favorite guitarists at the moment—that I got into later—was Lowman Pauling from the "5" Royales.

AV: Who was that?

JH: Lowman Pauling. That's L-O-W-M-A-N and "Pauling," P-A-U-L-I-N-G. He was with the R&B vocal group the "5" Royales. That's "royal" with an "e" on the end. Yeah. They did the original version of "Think" that James Brown did. Not the Aretha Franklin one. And then they also wrote "Dedicated to the One I Love" that the Shirelles and the Mamas and the Papas did.

AV: You can hear a lot of Sam Cooke in your music, and of course he came to R&B through gospel music. Have you ever thought of taking that the other way, going from R&B to gospel?

JH: Well, I'd have to have an epiphany first, you know? If I see more, sort of, tangible proof that there's somebody up there—maybe. (*Laughs.*) Stranger things have happened. Of course, if I did that the R&B community would be up in arms. And I might be excommunicated.

AV: You've been promoting *People Gonna Talk* here in the states for several months now.

JH: Yeah. I've had one week off since January. I went back to see me girlfriend, you know, for one week. It wasn't nearly enough, but she's been over here a few times, so that's good.

AV: And how's the tour going for you—are the people responding?

JH: Oh, yeah, totally. It gives me the feeling that I must be doing something right.

AV: You recorded the record the album at Toe Rag Studios in London (White Stripes' *Elephant*). Toe Rag—that's cockney, isn't it?

JH: Cockneyland. Yep. The place is called Hackney. Cockneys are the people that live over there.

AV: Aha!

JH: See, there are these bells at Bow Church—and technically you're a cockney if you live within the sound of the Bow bells. There you go.

AV: What does "toe rag" mean?

JH: Toe rag is a general term of disparagement. It's like...I think it means somebody who's an undesirable or a scruffbag. That's generally how it's used. So in keeping with us being there—I suppose it was called that before we played there—but I think we've reinforced its meaning.

AV: English breakfast vs. American breakfast—which one wins?

JH: Personally—I'm not just being diplomatic here—I think I'd have one or the other alternately. I'd have each on alternate days to be honest, because they've totally got things over on each other. I feel some black pudding wouldn't go amiss in the American one.

AV: But still, would you kill for a steak and kidney pie right about now?

JH: (*Laughs.*) I think so yeah. What is it... what is it I'm missing at the moment? I'll tell you what—HP sauce. You cannot get it over here. It's an acquired taste.

AV: I've had it.

JH: What did you think of it? It's good stuff.

JH: It's not bad, is it? Got a bit of a kick to it. It wouldn't work on a salmon bagel but, you know, you can put it some places.

AV: Thanks for chatting with us. Is there anything you'd like to add?

JH: No, not that I can think of. I hope everybody comes to the show and enjoys it and everything...but other than that, no. Just say hello to everybody for me.

AV: Well, break a leg out there. And you know what that means?

JH: I do. I didn't take it the wrong way at all. Cheers

James Hunter plays at the Artpark Outdoor Amphitheater on a bill with Susan Tedeschi on Tuesday, June 27 at 6:30pm. Visit www.artpark.net and www.jameshuntermusic.com for more information.

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