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COVER

STUCK'S ON THE...



**TAYLOR
MADE**
Actress Lili Taylor

ART

ALEX KATZ
DONALD SULTAN
JUDY RIFKA

MUSIC

CONCRETE BLONDE
RADIOHEAD
DRAMARAMA
COUNTING CROWS

FILM

NEW YORK FILM FEST
TELLURIDE FILM FEST

POETRY

LEWIS WARSH
VALERY OISTEANU

**BIZARREIST
JIM ROSE**

CONCRETE BLONDE

Interview with

Johnette Napolitano

By KK Kozik

Concrete Blonde's Johnette Napolitano has a throaty laugh that rings through the restaurant Unwinded as an accompaniment to our world-weary discussions about life and work within rock and roll. Napolitano's laugh can trail off equally abruptly. At an honest thirty-six, Napolitano has not changed her clear-eyed opinion of them, but since when her former mentor Lenny Kravitz painted shaped an ongoing pool.

Nevertheless, Concrete Blonde's newly released *Mercian Moon* marks a rare antindustry friction. Inspired and bold like its primary author, the album surges from the dark, disturbing "Lamentation" to the late track, a somatic, hip-swaying single and, well produced, the album is a commitment to energy expended. It's not the work that bothers Napolitano, it's the business.

Things have changed now to the point where people like a band of the caliber of U2 or R.E.M. are changing the industry by their very existence and the way they do things and perceive things.

Scale?

Well just the way the business is done. The standard way you make a record — you're on the road, you're on the road, you're on the road, okay. You've got six weeks in September and October to make your next record. Okay, great, so you go in for six weeks and you do your basic tracks, you do your demos, you do your live. Then you do the guitar overdubs and then maybe I get a week to do vocals and then you go to mix the thing. And I don't like that. The thing that makes great records is having time to experiment. So this time we opted to produce ourselves, we cheaper studios, take a longer time and I think it shows. I really was able to experiment with a lot more voices, play a lot more guitar than I had done since the last album. I want to do more with my

voice instrumentally, I love sound effects, spoken word.

Capitol bought us out of IRS, out of our last record, thank goodness, and now we are able to do pretty much what we want and not let anybody down either. I don't intend to not sell records, I enjoy my career. I really like making music and getting it out there. I'm not obsessed by it, I like to paint. I did the album art on this one and I like to do other things. I just opened an art gallery around the corner from my house. I was more nervous about that than my gig I've ever done, but it went really well. The riots were a whole wild west thing that really was heavy and I decided I had to spend some time in my neighborhood. I opened up my gallery and really had a lot to do with what happened. It is really a community center, people stop for art, have coffee on Sunday. I took that very seriously. I put my money where my mouth is and I didn't see a lot of people do that. Where the hell is everybody from East L.A. with money? Why aren't they reinvesting in their own neighborhoods? Everybody in this neighborhood is involved in this gallery. It's fucking great. There's a coffee shop two doors down and during the opening her business went up a hundred dollars. There's a street scene in SoHo and the band donated lots of money for paint and all these gang kids got together and they painted beautiful murals all over the city. That can be done by anyone and instead everyone moves out. Ice-T moved up to the hills.

On the last album and this one too there are lots of specific references to other cultures. There is something about some songs that is almost folk-like. I could hear other cultural influences in the music — other languages and spiritual influences. I thought it was an unorthodox factor for today but related somewhat to the Fairport Convention sense of rock and roll. It seems like you have a certain kinship with a peasant mentality.



MUSIC

Neither blonde nor concrete, Johnette

Oh, definitely, definitely, I always, always will. It's never be able to completely be rich. It's a big fight for me. "Artists don't need money. They do what they do because they like to do it." It's just not my thing to go back to the MTV awards and that. Ideally I'd just love to make my records and be left alone.

And you're the real brain behind the band, right?

Yeah, but Concrete Blonde is one thing... it's a band. I couldn't write 'em without Jim [Minkley, guitarist] contributing. Jim wrote "I Call It Love." I really trust Jim's taste and his integrity more than anybody I know and he's a genius of a musician so if I have an idea or if I'm in trouble, Jim is like a Rock of Gibraltar.

As a matter of fact, I had a long talk with Jim the other day. It seems like the band was my outlet for my art, and it seemed like, when we really started making it and happening, everyone else was getting to do the fun stuff and we were paying for it. Not that I don't like who I work with — we have a great director who we've worked with a lot. But the next video I want to co-direct. I really do. I know what I want to do.

What's it been like being the leader of the band and having one in the forefront role? Oh, what's it been like for them?

For them it's easy. If you consider a man's relationship with his mother, it's very, very easy. [Laughs] It took me a long time to figure that out. We did an interview in Vienna and the guy looks at Jim and he goes, "So you're it like taking order from a woman?" I've never come so close to jumping over a table and killing someone, but Jim said, "It takes her

her will me something that have some man tell me something stupid to do."

It was cool, we can handle it, but it's changing. The younger bands, the girls, they are very aggressive and I can look back on that now and see how aggressive I was when we started touring when I was 24. I've done that whole party-before-of-the-guy and rock and roll thing and I've had to withdraw and let everybody take care of themselves.

"Mercian Moon" is the video I want to direct the next time around and I want to do a bilingual video. I got in a huge fight with IRS. We went on tour with Song who is a big Anne Rice fan. And so we were doing the vampire song and we all had a day off in New Orleans, a great-looking set, and I wanted to make a video. I wanted to play and I wanted the hooded figure following us — Song doing that "Innocence and Treachery" thing. Then Miles Copeland told me they didn't have any money and I threw a dollar at him. I actually like Miles in a strange sort of way, but they can just kiss my ass. That was a real creative idea, two languages with the same video and it really infuriated me that I wasn't able to be given the tools to work with the album that I had. I was furious about it and I've

I got started when I was nine years old and somebody owed my father some money and couldn't pay him so they gave him a piano. "The Wizard of Oz" came on and I went over to the piano and I picked out all the songs. My parents decided they'd better do something with this so they gave me a guitar. It was interesting because when I was little, at all the birthday parties and stuff, everyone would be like "Sing a song, sing a song," but the minute that I turned eight and started wanting to do it for a living my father and I partied. It was not the father thing to do... at all. They still don't know why I'm not making spaghetti sauce all day. But the answer is, "Guess what? I have to work!" I've loved to sit on my fat ass and make spaghetti sauce all day long, but I think the worst thing you can do to someone is to kill their dream.

never been paid a dime in royalties by IRS and we've done five records. They sent us royalty statements this thick and the bottom half comes to an eight zero. Not even 26 cents one way or another. When getting it checked out. My accountant's wife says, "He's like, 'God, I wish they'd do my tax returns.'" Jim thinks they launder money for the CIA. I believe him.

Well, wasn't Copeland wrong in the CIA?

Oh yeah, he co-founded it. Miles was the first one to get a hotel in Beirut and in Egypt. What was his dream musician? When we went to Capitol, I was paranoid about turning anything in and everything we had been really good. We got so damaged, we used to everybody having everything we do and having something wrong with everything we've done and blowing it. We're not used to people saying, "God, this is great." I was pretty grateful to be told to them.



Jim Minkley, Johnette Napolitano and Harry Rishakoff