

Joe Corso, *Only a Man*

by Jonathan Widran

When it comes to creating meaningful songs like the kind we are blessed with on singer/songwriter Joe Corso's insightful, poetic and deeply soulful Woodward Avenue Records debut *Only a Man*, there's something powerful to be said about an artist living fully and fearlessly, experiencing hard knocks, glorious triumphs, lots of "almost famous" moments and doing thousands of gigs before the perfect opportunity knocked.

The roots-rock, blues, Americana and country tinged collection is a full expression of Joe's fascinating, topsy turvy life, rich with personal introspection, poetic and insightful storytelling and thoughtful moments and anthemic joy that calls to mind the greats of the 70's singer-songwriter era like James Taylor, Jim Croce, Gordon Lightfoot, Billy Joel, Bob Seger and the Eagles. *Only a Man* was produced by 2-time Grammy winning, chart-topping producer, urban jazz artist and blues guitarist Paul Brown and features a dynamic batch of studio and touring greats who have played with countless legends of that era – including pianist/organist Brother Paul Brown and Mike Finnigan (Garden of Love), bassist David Santos and Bob Glaub (Garden of Love), drummer Tony Braunagel, Davey Johnstone (on mandolin) and engineer Johnny Lee Schell.

One of the key tracks is the thoughtfully nostalgic "Young Lovers and Friends," which features Joe's well lived, whiskey coated drawl fronting the band in two distinctive versions – the first a gentle acoustic ballad featuring Brother Paul's simmering organ harmonies, the reprise an amped up, high octane rocker that captures the explosive chemistry and fullest potential of the singer and band. Sharing intimate autobiographical details that touch on his past struggles and newfound hope, Joe sings: "Wide eyed and fearless somewhere inside me/Fighting off the loneliness and finding the keys/Now I'm climbing mountains and spreading my wings/Remembering the good times and all that they bring/Each day a new blessing..."

This is the kind of been there, done that, ready for more tune that could only be crafted and shared by a well-traveled musician who had been in hair bands and started jam bands, who balanced residencies at Venice hotspots and The Viper Room with gigs at farmer's markets and convalescent homes, and who stuck it out over 30 years in L.A. until Brown invited him to capture his full creativity and musicality in the studio.

When Joe's not singing about his own colorful life and times, he's sharing the tales of intimates like his dad, whose real-life heartbreaking romance in Cuba circa 1957 inspired the slow simmering ballad "Havana Winds." Joe's mastery of lyrical metaphor comes to light on the spirited pop/rock influenced "Garden of Love," a romance filled with the aromatic imagery of innocent summers and foreboding winters. His sweet, lovelorn ways continue on the lively, mid-tempo "Starlight Chandeliers," one of his fans' favorite live songs and one that will earn Joe some favorable comparisons to Bruce Springsteen on a multitude of levels.

Switching gears, and most likely paying whimsical homage to his countless bar gigs, Joee fashions the ultimate rowdy singalong anthem with “Last Time Around,” which begins as a bluesy acoustic guitar ballad before evolving via an energetic organ solo and Braunagel’s marching drumbeats. The next two tracks showcase the range of Joee’s musical personas and personalities. With touches of haunting melancholy, “My Love” is an ambient and slow building, mystically bluesy meditation looking back on a lost relationship, while “We Gone” – inspired by an offbeat experience of being fired from a day job in a most unusual, abrupt way - is a raucous, country-funk jam that finds him gleefully embracing freedom and the great possibilities life now holds. Joee wraps the main set with a good old fashioned, classic styled, cheatin’ heart rock blues ballad (“One More Shot”) and the lonesome sorrow and regret filled title track “Only A Man,” whose themes of repentance, redemption and hope have made it a popular request for weddings and funerals alike.

These days, it’s hard to find original songs that not only become an instant part of our musical soul but that also provoke emotional and spiritual insight as they work their melodic “earworm” charm. Yet that’s what you’ll get when you hear Joee Corso’s *Only a Man*. As you listen over and over – and believe me, you will – you’ll be grateful for all the crazy years of playing music in L.A. which he had to go through to make it possible.