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# FIREWORKS ROCK & METAL

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## THE QUEENS OF ROCK AND METAL:



EXPLORES THE  
BRIGHTEST VOID AND  
THE SHADOW SELF

LITA FORD AND DORO  
INTERVIEWED INSIDE

Plus: Blues Pills,  
Scorpion Child, Witness

PAUL GILBERT ♦ DARE ♦ FROST\* ♦ JOE LYNN TURNER



influenced symphonic duet. The album has something for everyone. It consists of ten distinctive originals and even one cover of the Bee Gee's 'To Love Somebody'. "CAU Dog Records allowed us to share our vision of keeping our live show sound as present on the album as possible while still producing a polished product," she explains to me.

The new album 'Rise Up' was recorded in Chicago at two locations. The band recorded as a full band back in March at The Workshop Jones and then all the overdubs, mixing, mastering were done at Angel City. Angel City belongs to their producer, Ellis Clark. Michael Teach is executive producer on the album and also the head of CAU Dog Records. "The label to which we are currently signed. 'Rise Up' was released on September 20th, 2014 along with the music video for the single 'Run Daddy Run'. Roughly from start to finish it was a six month process. However, the songs themselves have been in the works for over two years," she says with satisfaction.

This band makes more and more progress every year. Not only with a growing fan base, but also getting tighter as musicians within the band. Lauren is blown away when she looks back to where they started less than five years ago with their first album 'All My Secrets' and how far they have come since then. The new album 'Rise Up' is truly a work of everything that the band has been through together professionally and personally. Both good and bad. "We have made it through as a team. We are currently in full blown promotion mode with hopes that we can take our music to the next level. That would mean reaching the music audience on a more widespread scale. We will be playing live shows throughout the entire year along while promoting ourselves on every medium possible," she concludes.

Check the band out at  
[www.reverbnation.com/laurenwolfmusic](http://www.reverbnation.com/laurenwolfmusic)  
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Isn't it lovely when an album comes from nowhere and you just end up falling in love with the songs? This is what happened when the guys from Banjo Bones introduced me to singer/song writer SANDS HALL from Nevada City. Sands' music has a deep roots-based vibe, Americana crossed with folk and blues, a very organic record. The album is just incredibly endearing and earthy and also passionate and uplifting, a gentle gliding record full of diversity. Think along the lines of, say, June Tabor, Joni Mitchell, and Loreena McKennit through to Alanis Morissette and even Carly Simon, with Sands' Gospel-tinted 'Light A Candle'. Sands Hall's music is a delight, with every song telling a story.

One of my fave songs is the beautiful 'Dancin Through The Heavens,' complete with its violin and bass clarinet, whilst 'Chippewa Street' is both haunting and captivating. Joining Sands on her album are: Randy McKean: clarinet, sax, bass clarinet; Maggie McKaig: guitar, accordion; Pat Jacobson: bass, fretless bass; Murray Campbell: violin, oboe; Luke Wilson: tenor guitar; Louis B. Jones: dobro; Elena Rayo: violin; Saul Rayo: percussion; and Tree: upright bass.

Growing up, Sands Hall was immersed in the sounds of folk: The Weavers, Leadbelly, Peter, Paul, & Mary, and of course the soaring vocal purity of Joan Baez. Then came Judy Collins and—importantly, Joni Mitchell, whose increasingly jazzy sound was formational. When Sands was fourteen, her father purchased, for \$125 from a hard-up grad student, a 000-18 Martin, and Sands started writing her own songs; this battered, wonderful guitar is still the instrument that she mostly plays today. Sands was deeply into songwriting and performing in her 20s, but other careers grabbed focus: theatre (she is a director, actor, and playwright), as well as publishing

a novel and stories and a book on writers craft. A few years ago Sands returned to her roots, began to perform with some amazing musicians, and made this album, 'Rustler's Moon.'

While Sands was deeply influenced by early folk singers, including Dylan, she tells me, "I was not so shocked when Dylan went electric; what galvanized me into understanding that folk music could be, well, different, and compelling, was the electrified re-release of Simon and Garfunkel's 'Sounds of Silence,' Judy Collins's cover of Leonard Cohen's 'Suzanne' was also of huge interest to me: that songs could accomplish that kind of meditative, even spiritual magic worked its way deep into my psyche." Into this mix came Carole King, The Band (especially 'Long Black Veil' on Big Pink), Bobby McFerrin, the Eagles. Joni's musical shift during these years was both confusing and inspiring. "I didn't know a thing about jazz," Sands explains to me, "but the sound of those asymmetrical chords—ninths, diminished, flatted minors, whatever they were!—and the push of a sung line held beyond the boundary of the measure that was supposed to contain it, affected me deeply, though it took some time to figure out how to get that into my own music."

Sands eventually (and briefly) married a jazz musician who, unfortunately, made her come to believe that her kind of music (folk-based singer/songwriter) wasn't music, jazz was music. "I pretty much stopped playing. But about a decade ago," she tells me, "I met the brilliant Californian and Canadian musicians Maggie McKaig and Luke Wilson, and they were, like, 'Sing your songs! They're great!'" So she started writing again. Sands also began to collaborate with the reeds player Randy McKean, which allowed her to begin to add a jazzier feel to her tunes. "Imagining his sound on my tunes is a huge muse for me," she smiles. "Randy and other cherished musicians are on the album, and are the reason I felt the time had come for me to finally make it."

Sands is a professor of English and creative writing, and she feels very lucky to engage with words, and writing, and with students. "I am another: my novel, 'Catching Heaven', was published by Ballantine, and my stories make their way into various literary journals; I also have a book of writing essays and exercises called 'Tools of the Writers Craft'. And I've had a long career in theatre, first as an actor, with a number of American Shakespeare festivals (Shakespeare is a huge love), and then as director, and eventually as playwright," she explains.

Sands has been told that her lyrics create a moving picture that allows the reader to take part in the experience being painted, and that her guitar playing and melodies serve that effect. When she performs and sees audience members weeping, or grinning, or swaying, or singing along, "I appreciate knowing that they are engaged in my storytelling," she says, "and that they're following me where I hope to take them. I also think that while Americana is what it is—roots music of all kinds, comprising a particular sound—my songshave a bit of a jazzy feel, especially when I play with some of the musicians featured on the album."

On one level, the album took decades. "I joke that it could have been an LP," she tells me. "It could have been an 8-track (god forbid); it could have been a cassette; but here it is, a CD—and downloadable!"

On another level, the CD took about a month: "I'd recorded three tracks a few years ago, and one twenty years ago! But the other six were recorded over three days, then mixed and mastered and printed and delivered. I was suddenly on fire and just wanted to have the album done and in the world."

The song mentioned earlier, 'Light a Candle,' was the one recorded twenty years ago. It was produced and engineered by Randall Tobin at Theta Sound in Los Angeles. Luke Wilson produced three of the tunes, 'Hope We Find You,' 'Leanin into Loneliness,' and 'Stars Fell Down' at Flying Whale Studio in Grass Valley, California, with Bruce C. Wheelock engineering. "The rest of the tracks were recorded in a beautiful studio, Ancient Wave, outside of Nevada City, California; produced by Saul Rayo, with the same engineer, Bruce Wheelock," she explains to me. "And in what was an incredibly fortunate piece of serendipity, Oz Fritz (Tom Waits' 'Mule Variations,'

alone or with others) was available to master. Working with Oz was an absolute pleasure, as it was with every person involved in making the CD. I feel fortunate to have produced such a fine album my first time out," smiles Sands.

When producer Saul Rayo heard 'Light a Candle,' he insisted it be included on Sands' new CD. But the recording she had was basically a CD copy of a cassette tape and they needed the original. "I contacted Randall Tobin at Theta Sound," Sands tells me, "and to my delight he still had the tracks—three voices, acapella. However, we'd recorded that tune long before digital; it was on tape, and Randy had to 'dry the tape,' which he did in a vegetable dehydrator. He transferred those tracks to Dropbox from his computer in Southern California, and moments later, at Ancient Wave studios in Northern California, we were downloading them, and Oz got to work remastering. I love that it was kind of like the career I'd 'put on hold' a few decades before; it just needed a little reinvigoring and I could be on my way again," she tells me. "So that song holds a lot of special meaning for me."

Sands performs as much as she can and is already gearing up for her next album, which she hopes to record this spring and summer. "I plan to take more time with this one, however!" she concludes.

Check Sands Hall out at [www.sandshall.com](http://www.sandshall.com)



From Sacramento, California, we find bluesy groove based classic rock/Americana artist BANJO BONES, who has a fabulous, very catchy smooth twelve track CD out now called 'The Place of Dead Roads' that is well worth checking out and runs in just under fifty minutes long. Banjo handles all the vocals and instrumentation.

When he was ten years old Banjo Bones saw his grandfather playing an acoustic guitar, he was taking lessons and wasn't very good, but Banjo was floored by how amazing it was to be able to create music with one instrument and for it to sound so beautiful, that was all she wrote," he smiles. The following Christmas he got a guitar and he never stopped after that. Forty years later he is still floored by the amazing music one single person with a guitar can create and how endless the possibilities are.

Although I am not a huge Springsteen fan, he is responsible for the most influential album in the Banjo Bones realm: the album 'Nebraska' from 1982. Banjo was also deeply impacted by Tom Waits, especially the period from 1983 to 1987 where he took a direction for the more experimental and seemed to be purposely bucking the jazzy lounge sensibilities he followed in the Seventies, as evidenced in Swordfishtrombones, Rain Dogs, and Franks's Wild Years. "My record was partially inspired by the William Burroughs book 'The Place of Dead Roads'. I am fascinated by the dark side of the human condition, especially as expressed in the context of the very basic and primal survival focus of the Wild West in American history," he explains to me.

Outside of music Banjo loves to read, just about anything. "I particularly love western pulp fiction ala Elmore Leonard's early work," he tells me. He is currently reading a great little book called 'Heart of Darkness', not the Joseph Conrad story that inspired Apocalypse Now, but a critical essay by David Burke on the album 'Nebraska' by Bruce Springsteen. "I am reading this as research for a project I am planning in which I will play the entire album to a live audience next year, on the date of the thirty five year anniversary of its release," he explains.

Well, when he came up with the concept of Banjo Bones he did not want to restrict it to the format of a

solo act or a band. "I thought of it more as an aesthetic concept. So when you attend a Banjo Bones show, whether I am presenting it solo, duo, trio or full band, it is all Banjo Bones," he says. "The aesthetic can be summarized as dark lyrical content to music that is based on American music traditions without being restricted by the boxes created by labels (i.e. jazz, or blues or country or folk), but has all or any of those elements at any given time. I think what differentiates Banjo Bones from other artist is that anyone trying to box it under a nice little descriptor label will have an impossible time doing so. Right now I catalogue the work under Americana, but one listen to the album and you'll know it sounds like no other Americana album out there," says Banjo.

While the album was not meant to be a concept album, the work is loosely based on the previous mentioned book by William Burroughs. "The opening song is meant loosely as a tribute to the main character of the book, but that is really the only literary reference. The rest of the record captures the essence of the book in that the characters in the songs are all anti-heroes," he explains.

In Still Life with Woodpecker, Tom Robbins made a brilliant distinction between outlaws and criminals, where he proposed that criminals are victims of the society, whereas outlaws live completely outside of it. "In the songs of the record you will find both types: there are disgruntled employees, forgotten veterans of war, lovers from opposite sides of the tracks, dreamers that pay hefty prices for dreaming... all characters that have been somehow deeply impacted by the systems and societies we live in. To some extent, it is a study of the times we live in, but through characters that lived possibly in different times in history," Banjo tells me.

The album was recorded at Boneyard Records studios in Sacramento, CA. It is a small studio owned by the label. Banjo wore the producer hat himself, which is something that he will try to avoid for his future albums. "Although I enjoy producing other people's work. The songs were written and recorded over a two year period between 2013-2015," he adds.

Banjo had an amazing and transcendental moment at a gig about a few months ago in a small town called Placerville, CA. "About halfway through my set, a woman that was sitting about three rows back from where I was standing starting calling out one of my songs by name. Given that is the first time that had happened to me in a place nobody knows me, I went ahead and performed the song 'Snowy Mountain', which she was so enthusiastically demanding. She proceeded to sing along to the song (she actually knew the words), and at the end of every verse she would shout in her best southern minister voice, 'that's true, that is so true!' A friend who was helping out as tech for me that night actually caught it all on video and her passion was both inspiring and hilarious. I was humbled beyond words and at the end of my show, I went straight to her, thanked her for listening, and gave her one of my CDs, for which she was incredibly grateful. This was my first super fan, or at least the first one I know of, a concept I had not understood until that night," he smiles.

In addition to the 'Nebraska' project mentioned above, Banjo has been working very hard at building on regional presence to hopefully establish momentum for touring over the next couple of years. "Given my sudden and surprising presence in the UK, perhaps I will start there! I have also written twenty one songs since the release of the album, so in theory I have my next album written. But it will be at least eighteen to twenty four months before I release it as I have too many balls in the air the next year or so," he concludes. Check Banjo Bones out at [www.banjobones.com](http://www.banjobones.com)