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Interview: One-on-one with Folk/Punk Rock singer Frank Turner, part 1

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Over the past few years, singer [Frank Turner](#) has won the hearts of the punk and folk rock community all over the world. A Winchester, UK native, he's been enjoying great success in Europe, headlining major venues and drawing huge crowds at various major festivals including Lowlands and Reading/Leeds. He has also begun to make a name for himself in the U.S., having totally sold out two shows at Bowery Ballroom (Wednesday night's show and his upcoming November date). He includes Iron Maiden's "Killers", Nirvana's "In Utero", and Johnny Cash's "American Recordings" among his musical influences and has started to become an influence himself on younger bands. With honest, straight-forward lyrics about life and love set to music that ranges from danceable upbeat rockers to gorgeous melancholic acoustic numbers, people of all ages have fallen in love with his songs. After seeing his passionate live performances, which include a good dose of Turner's humorous stage banter between tunes, casual fans immediately turn into loyalists who return to see him again whenever he's in town.



Lorraine Schwartz

This past Tuesday, Turner kicked off his North American tour with a stellar opening night at Danbury's Heirloom Arts Theatre (read my review [here](#)). That night I was fortunate enough to sit down with Frank before the show to talk about Brooklyn hangovers, why punk rockers love the Boss and subjecting his bass player to GWAR-trauma.

The last time you were in the New York city area was for the Bamboozle Festival and a show at the Knitting Factory in Brooklyn. How were those experiences for you?

The Knitting Factory was great! It was cool. It was a sold out headline show and I played with my buddy [Franz Nicolay](#) who's one of my favoritest people in the world. That was a really fun show, it was a good vibe. The Bamboozle thing- it's a really big festival but I hadn't heard of it before being booked for it. I had a great show, I had a good time but I must admit it made me feel quite old. For two reasons: first of all I really hadn't heard of any of the other bands. I mean, Gaslight obviously were playing. But there was just all these bands I'd never heard of before. There was this band I met, Transit. Really nice guys. But it was just kind of weird because it's like, they are a fair deal younger than me but they were kinda slightly treating me like an elder statesman (Turner is 29). I've been on tour since I was 16 which is part of it I suppose. They were all sort of like "Oh man it's so great to meet you!" Sort of treating me like punk-rock-racy you know what I mean? That's kind of a new feeling for me. That was a bit like "Um, ok." But it was a good festival, good time.

Having visited New York a few times now, do you have any favorite things to do in the area? How have you found Danbury since you arrived?

I've seen a little bit of Danbury and it seems quite nice. In New York it's mainly social stuff. I have some good buddies there who I like to catch up with. Some friends of mine run a bar in Brooklyn called [Matchless](#). I have had some appalling hangovers after being there. Like realllly bad feelings.

Was free liquor the culprit?

Well it's basically Artie, who works the bar. He's the kind of guy who drinks AT you rather than with you. He's just like "DRINK THIS! NOW!" and the next thing you know you're kind of holding the bottom of the toilet and crying. Good times!

Yeah, Brooklyn is the place to be right now.

We recorded some of [Poetry of the Deed](#) in Brooklyn actually. Alex Newport has a studio there, on Greenpoint Avenue, so we did some of the album there.

The last full tour you came through town with was Social Distortion. Any fond memories from that experience?

We've done two tours with Social D now and they've both been great and they're lovely lovely guys. Mike is a really nice dude. I can't say I've got massive crazy stories about Mike simply because as a recovering addict he's mellowed out a bit out of necessity. People who've been through that stuff don't really get to go wild anymore. But yeah, Danny McGough, the keys player, is the nicest guy.

The last show on the American tour was in Phoenix. Johnny 2 Bags's Dad died that afternoon, so he just literally up and outed there. Social D canceled but us and Lucero decided to do the show anyway. So we were there playing and it was the last song in our set, a song called "Photosynthesis." We'd been doing it with Danny playing accordion. So Danny was up with us. Then sort of half way through the song Brent (Harding) came on and took my guitar off me. Dave (Hidalgo, Jr.) got off and was behind the drums and Nige, my drummer, came out and I had the tambourine. Then Mike Ness came up as well and got the mic. So basically everyone in Social D apart from Johnny was on stage with me and all of my band and then we played the end of the song. They all knew it! They'd all been kinda secretly rehearsing it. As a kid who grew up listening to Social D, that was kind of a serious moment for me.

I wanted to ask about your relationship with two musicians who've also toured with Social Distortion: [Chuck Ragan](#) and [Brian Fallon](#). You've done some touring with both and have recorded with Ragan. Is there an actual friendship there or is it just kind of a mutual respect between musicians?

Yeah we all know each other certainly. Chuck is a dear, dear friend of mine and I respect him as a musician enormously. He's just a great friend. And, I should add, he is single-handedly responsible for things happening for me in the United States on some level in the sense that he took me out for some shows over here when nobody had any idea who I was. It was kind of on the back of that the Epitaph deal came together. So thanks Chuck! Chuck's come out with me on tour in the UK as well. Me and Chuck are good buddies.

Brian- great guy. I haven't seen him as much recently as I did. I spent most of 2009 on tour with The Gaslight Anthem and it was a great time and Brian's a great dude. Obviously Brian and Chuck have done their stuff together, and I did backing vocals on Chuck's "[Wish On The Moon](#)."

With our relationships, I think it's a combination of the two; it's definitely that we're all friends. But also, anybody who does what we do for a living, you're kind of keeping an ear out for what your friends and peers are doing musically. When the new Chuck record came out, I listened to it and went "Damn!" a couple of times cus he came up with great s*** that I didn't come up with. There's a little bit of friendly one-upmanship there too.

There's a shared influence among you all with Bruce Springsteen. For me personally, I've always had him musically grouped in with artists like Billy Joel, Paul Simon and John Mellencamp. However, I've never heard a punk band credit any of those singers as an influence. What is it about Springsteen that connects so much with the punk community?

That's a good question. I should incidentally say that I'm not somebody who grew up with Springsteen when I was a kid. I'm an enormous Springsteen fan, but I got into Springsteen later in life, kind of in my mid-20's rather than as a kid. I obviously knew who he was when I was growing up, but I think my conception of him was he was this slightly cheesy American stadium rocker like John Denver or somebody, not that I'm slagging John Denver. It was almost kind of an epiphany for me in a way when a friend of mine turned me on to the [Nebraska](#) record. Suddenly I was all "Holy crap. Bruce Springsteen's amazing." But you know what? I like Paul Simon. Well I like Simon & Garfunkel. Paul Simon's great but he's quite kind of middle class, know what I mean? It's quite kind of neat and tidy and "coffee table."

I think there's something slightly grittier and kind of dirtier about Springsteen. There's something a bit more kind of down in the mud about him, you know? It's funny. It's sort of become a bit of a thing that the whole entire punk scene seems to have a total crush on Springsteen for the last couple of years, which is interesting. Funny enough, I was having this conversation with somebody the other day and we all reckoned that Dylan's next for the punk scene. Suddenly every punk band's going to be covering Dylan songs. It'd be weird. We'll see.

It's the law around here in the Tri-State Area to be a Springsteen fan.

Yeah of course! I think it's a generational thing just in the sense he was so big in the 80's that I think that it was almost inevitable that he would become uncool to some degree in the 90's.

Growing up as an 80's kid, the major album was the "Born In The USA" record. It was good, but as you said with an album like "Nebraska", the sound is just so different.

For me, "Born In the USA" almost eclipsed "Born To Run." Certainly in the UK a lot less people know "Born To Run" than "Born In The USA." And that's kind of a shame. It's funny, because nowadays he never f**king plays "Born In The USA" live anymore anyway. At least I haven't ever seen him play it. It's almost like he's got this one anomalous record in the middle of his career that completely distorts everything else around him. But let's not have a massive conversation about Springsteen. We'll be here all day!

Understood.

To read more, click [here](#) for part 2 of my interview with [Frank Turner](#).

To check out Frank Turner's music, click [here](#).

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