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Interview: One-on-one with Folk/Punk Rock singer Frank Turner, part 2

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Here is part 2 of my interview with singer [Frank Turner](#). To read part 1, click [here](#).



Lorraine Schwartz

Performance-wise, the great thing about your shows is you're able to move a crowd by keeping it simple and just relying on yourself and the music to do the entertaining. Do you have any opinion on bringing theatrical elements to a show such as Lady Gaga or Beyonce? Does it take away from the music, add to it, etc.?

Certain people can pull off theatrics well. Have you ever seen Rammstein live? They'll blow your f***ing mind.

I haven't, but I do know there's a lot of fire involved.

You know, I can't give two s***s about Rammstein on record. But, man they know how to put on a show. Similarly, Iron Maiden who are one of my favorite bands of all time, put on great theatrical shows.

I mean, it can be done well and entertainingly. Like GWAR for example. We played at Download Festival this summer (in the UK) and **GWAR** were playing so we went over to see them. Tarrant, my bass player (of Turner's backing band The Sleeping Souls), had never seen them before and didn't really know anything about them. We were like "Oh my god. Just come and watch them!" So we went over, and the very first thing they did in their set was they brought the Queen on stage and cut her t**s off. Tarrant was stood there with his mouth open going "WHAT the F**K is going on?!" It was very funny. But anyway, I'm not sure (theatrics are) something I'm really gonna get into myself.

I don't think you have a need for it.

Yeah. It's funny the bands you mentioned, I mean, Lady Gaga I really don't have any time for. I could deal with and be interested in the whole performance art side of what she does if it wasn't for the fact that the music she makes is such tepid bulls**t, you know? A friend of mine was like "It just sounds like Ibiza dance music." I was like "No it doesn't. It sounds like the kind of s**t that people, who are too f**king socially timid to go to Ibiza, listen to in their cars on the way to their estate because they're too f**king SCARED to go to Ibiza." It's coward pop. It's so safe musically. Which annoys me, because stylistically and everything else she's not safe at all and I kind of respect that and think that's kind of cool. But it's just a shame that she has all of this crazy weird s**t going and then it's like "I was born this way!" It just sounds like Whigfield, like chart pop from the mid-90's. It's just tediously s**t.

So in other words, you feel she's missing an opportunity to do something edgier?

Yeah. I mean, if she was making really challenging or kind of scary and interesting music—and I don't necessarily mean unlistenable or not pop—but I mean if she made something that was more weird, then that would be interesting. The fact that it's so safe makes me think she's clearly got an eye on being commercially successful before she's challenging. So then it's like, how integral is this as an artistic project? I have spent quite a bit of time having intellectual conversations about Lady Gaga and then I occasionally have to smack myself and say "I don't actually give a f**k." Cus I don't.

Well I asked, so you had to discuss it! On to your relationship with your fans. You've made yourself very accessible to them via Twitter and regular interaction on your forum. Is there a downside to that for you at all?

The first thing I should say is that I'm not all that comfortable with the word "fan" per se. To me it seems like a slightly derogatory word, you know what I mean?

Oh, ok. Well what term do you prefer to use?

Just..."people at my shows." I know that's kind of a clumsy way of putting it. I guess growing up with the whole slightly Bon Jovi-ish "We're doing it for the FANS man!" thing. In that context, that word to me has the same ring about it as "proles." Kind of like "the little people" who pay their money and enable me to be some f**king coke-boshing, jacuzzi-trashing ass.

It makes me uncomfortable because to me, the whole point of punk rock certainly is that there's continuum between the people in the audience and the people in music. It's community music. That ethos incidentally is why I think that punk and folk have kind of embraced each other. Punk has embraced folk as an idea recently because of that idea of it being an equal community. So the two slot into each other quite neatly.

I love hanging out with people at shows and stuff. I like meeting people, I'm a gregarious person, so it's cool. I've got a lot of friends who I've met because they like my music. We hang out, I stay around their house when I'm on tour and they stay at mine. Well, when I have a house, which isn't very often.

There are moments when there are occasionally people who, and I'll try to phrase this as politely as I can, are bad at identifying social boundaries. I think some people view me as a construct more than a person, therefore their behavior around me can be difficult and annoying. One of my absolute pet hates is if after a show, I'm sitting around with a bunch of people having a conversation with somebody and somebody else walks over and just starts talking to me like I'm not already in the middle of something. It's like, "Really? I mean I'll talk to you the minute I'm free, then you can have my full undivided attention and all my time. But I'm actually literally midway through a sentence with someone right now." That's just mind-bogglingly rude. I think people kind of view it as "This is a CD that I'm talking to" rather than an individual. That I find difficult. Then there are some people who start trying to find out where I sleep and s**t like that.

I mean, I want to be completely available and on the level with everybody. But the flip side of that is that I request people treat me normally as well. Occasionally I think the problem is that there are people who think that the rules of social engagement when they're talking to me are different because I just played a show. And the whole point for me is that's not true.

I was about to ask why you though some other artists choose not to get too close with their fans, but I think you've already kind of answered that in a way.

The thing about it is that, and not that I'm saying that you're doing this, but there are times when sometimes in interviews people are essentially trying to get me to say that people who don't interact with their fans the way that I do are all automatically rock star a**holes. But I'm not saying that you're doing that.

No, definitely not. To clarify what I meant, as an example, Jay-Z doesn't take the time to post on his forum and answer people's questions like you do. But I never took that as he looks down on them. I just wondered why some artists choose not to get too involved with their listeners.

I think part of it is some people just aren't gregarious people. I know plenty of people who play in bands who are very, very shy and introverted and find dealing with large numbers of people, and new people, very intimidating. What they want to do is play and go home. I think that's a perfectly legitimate approach to take. Then there are moments sometimes when, after a show, I really just am not in the mood to hang out and people kind of give me s**t. I had that a couple of days ago. I was a little sick after a show in Belfast and I really needed to just go to sleep because I have more shows coming up and I don't want to jeopardize that. There were some people who were all "Aw, come on man!" And it's like "Really dude? I'm trying to do the best I can here. Cut me some slack." End: Rock Star Complaining Moment.

No, that's all understandable. So, other than spending time interacting with fans and on your music, do you have any other creative outlets?

I'm working on a book of tour diaries at the moment. That's kind of creative. It's me just kind of writing down all the boring drunken anecdotes I have. It's also taking me a really long time. I thought it was not going to take me that long and it's taking me forever. But, we're getting there. That's about it. And I don't know if this really counts, but I edit our video tour diaries, which is actually an enormously time consuming thing to do as it turns out. But they're really fun.

Last question. How do you know when a song you've written is good enough to go on record or alternatively, is not for public consumption? Do you consult friends or is it a visceral feeling whether something is working or not?

It's a gut feeling, although I have to say it's far from true that I always know the answer to that question. One of the problems particularly is because I write on my own and I work myself into the ground over the details. I mean I really do go into the details of the lyrics, like tenses and pronouns and all that kind of s**t.

As a small aside, I really wish that there were people out there who didn't think the line "There never was no god" (from "Glory Hallelujah") was an error of omission on my part and that I just didn't notice that I put a double negative in the song. It's like, for f**k's sake, I thought about that an awful lot! It's there for a very specific reason. I'm not going to sit here and explain what it is, but it really annoys me when people are like "Oh yeah, great album but just so you know there was a mistake in that bit" I'm always like "You really think I didn't think about that?!" End: rant.

But yeah, sometimes I'll finish something and I'll know it's finished, but I'd spent so long drilling myself into the ground on the f**king details that I then stand back and go "Is this any good or is it complete bulls**t?" and sometimes I have no idea.

Do you have someone who will tell you whether a song is any good?

I have a couple of friends. Also, I just did some shows in Ireland with a guy named Ciaran Lenehan who's just a buddy. We were in soundcheck and I played him a new song I just finished. I said "I can't quite figure out if this is kinda bulls**t or not. I kinda think it might be bulls**t." Ciaran was just sat there staring. I asked him "Are you alright?" He was like "That's the best song you've ever written." I was like "Is it?!" He was like "Yes. F**k you man. I'm going to tell you it was s**t and I'm gonna f**king steal it!" I was like "Ummm ok!" So I guess look forward to that one!

Indeed we will. Check out Frank Turner and his [music](#) on his official [site](#). Follow me on Twitter at [@concertexaminer](#)!

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