



WIN ★★★★★
ZOOM AC-2 ACOUSTIC
DI WORTH £169

Breedlove

TESTED CONCERTO BODY
SHAPE TAKES FIRM IN A
BOLD NEW DIRECTION



ACOUSTIC

The UK's only dedicated acoustic monthly. Only £4.99

FRANK TURNER

HAS THE SINGER-SONGWRITER
TAKEN ACOUSTIC MUSIC
AS FAR AS HE CAN?



Sigma Guitars
Is the stylish
new SG model more
than just good looks?



KATE RUSBY
Tips from one of the best-
known voices of UK folk

INTERVIEWED

- CC SMUGGLERS
- MARTIN SIMPSON
- AISHA BADRU
- JACK RUTTER
- LANKUM

Future



9 771745 446057
ISSUE 139 JANUARY 2018 UK £4.99



FRANK

TURNER

He's one of the most-loved modern singer-songwriters. But has Frank Turner gone as far as he can with acoustic music? Dan Hobson finds out...

PHOTOS: JORDAN HARRIS

Frank Turner has been described as one of the hardest-working musicians of our time; the number of shows he has played in the last decade has become the stuff of legend. Tonight he will perform gigs 2,122 and 2,123 in Kingston upon Thames. Turner has decided to play two shows after receiving messages from upset under-18s who can't attend his full-band show at the Hippodrome. He will, therefore, perform a solo acoustic gig at Banquet Records store nearby after finishing soundcheck for the main gig... "I'm a sucker for punishment and I like keeping everybody happy," he says with a laugh.

When we sit down for a chat in the venue, Turner explains that he is, in fact, taking things easier these days. "There was a long period in my life where I was engaged in this very macho arms race to be the hardest working, hardest touring guy," he admits while his band, The Sleeping Souls, soundcheck in the background. "But I realised it was killing all of us – and not in a good way. I want to do this for the rest of my life and I can't do it like I did in my 20s forever."

Now 35, Turner is "being a civilian most of the time", spending time at home with his girlfriend and cat. "Having said that, I'll never stop touring because I love it – performing is the thing in life that I'm definitely good at," he laughs. "There is an endless list of things I'm not very good at, but this is the one thing I can do well. I'm lucky because not everybody gets that in life. I love entertaining a crowd, I love being on the road, I love being in a different place every day; it makes life go by more slowly. And that's cool!"

At the time of speaking, Turner is on the cusp of releasing new album *Songbook*, which will bring together highlights from across his six albums alongside 10 reimagined versions of some of his most popular tracks. The release will also include new song 'There She Is' and

the deluxe version includes his 'Get Better' documentary film.

While this album is essentially a 'best of', Turner does refer to at least two new albums in the pipeline. He explains that he was writing a concept record about women who have been forgotten by the history books, then shelved it amid recent political revelations. "I wrote that record, then 2016 happened – Brexit and Trump – and I thought, 'Oh fuck, I'm going to have to write another album!'"

However, he is cautious to call it a political record, possibly due to the fall-out in 2012 when *The Guardian* published – somewhat unfairly – a collection of political comments he made in various interviews, ensuing in hate

thought about dancing before. As an angry teenager who hated rave music and would listen to NOFX, I would have found the very idea of even saying that slightly reprehensible. But I am intrigued by the idea of making a record at least parts of which could be played in a club.

"I just want to make a record which doesn't sound like something I've made before. It might well be that it comes out and everybody says, 'Oh it's another Frank Turner record! Or alternatively everybody goes, 'Jesus Christ! I can't really judge what the reaction will be. Artists have a duty to exist out of their comfort zone, though. I could quite happily turn in another *England Keep My Bones* or

“There was a long period in my life where I was engaged in this very macho arms race to be the hardest working, hardest touring guy. But I realised it was killing all of us”

mail and death threats for the performer. "I'm in two minds whether to say it's a political record," he explains. "I don't have a problem with provocation as an artistic strategy, but it's not a Billy Bragg record, it's not a Rage Against The Machine record."

Perhaps more controversially (for this magazine anyway) I ask Turner about an article I read where he said that he had taken the country/folk/punk thing as far as he could – and fancied recording an Electronic Dance Music record. "Sort of..." he says with a laugh. "Now just feels like the time to do something else. I've never made records which have any

Positive Songs for Negative People and I don't wanna do that – I don't see the point. Those records already exist and we still play songs from them."

But then, Turner's journey to becoming one of the best-loved contemporary singer-songwriters began a fair way from the acoustic guitar. Aged 10, Turner happened upon the Freddie Mercury Tribute Concert – and could not find a VHS tape to record it on fast enough. "I watched it with my older sister with our jaws in our laps," he remembers. "It was quite an introduction, you had Metallica, Guns N' Roses, Queen, Zeppelin, Spinal Tap,

INTERVIEW



© Getty Images

who we didn't realise were a joke and couldn't understand why everyone kept laughing when they said something."

He got his first guitar for his 11th birthday, after being bugged by a friend with a drum kit who was looking for a jamming partner. "My parents got me the Argos starter kit with a black and white Strat copy and a little 30-watt amp. I still have that somewhere. My mum

Kneejerk drummer Ben Dawson. In 2005, after four years and two albums, the band announced that they were parting ways.

In his song 'The Ballad of Me and My Friends', from *Campfire Punk Rock*, Turner hints that, following the split, he only went solo because he "lacked the friends to form a band". How much truth is there to that lyric? "That was a slight dig at quite a lot of people,

strays," he remembers. "It's funny, a lot of successful musicians came out of that place: Laura Marling, Marcus Mumford showed up every now and again. There's a line in 'I Knew Prufrock Before He Got Famous' about English boys with banjos which was specifically a rip on Marcus because he used to play banjo at the open mic night and we thought he was an idiot... then he sold a million records! There was Justin [Hayward-Young], who is now a singer in The Vaccines. There was just a lot of people, we were all young, and we didn't know what we were doing – we were just playing acoustic shows."

I tell Turner how Beans on Toast remembered the Nambucca scene fondly in *Acoustic* a few issues ago. "It was all of our halcyon days. And Jay was the centre of it, actually. He was one of the big reasons why I picked up an acoustic guitar because he was playing these Beans On Toast songs. With Million Dead it took us six months to write a song then we'd try and make it more obscure and more complicated. Then Jay played three chords and sung a song about last weekend, and that was a very sudden realisation about what folk music should be. It's a form of communication within a community and Jay was a real eye-opener to me."

Since then, Turner has essentially been on one long tour; from tiny venues to selling out arenas. There are too many highlights,

“I told everybody that I was going to be a professional touring musician for the rest of my life and everybody laughed”

also got me the *Bert Weedon Play In A Day* book. The first song I learned was 'Knocking On Heaven's Door', which I firmly believed was a Guns N' Roses song at the time," he admits.

Turner's musical career began at school, with the short-lived alternative band Kneejerk. The group released three records and played several shows around the UK. In 2001, Turner joined London post-hardcore band Million Dead at the invitation of former

not just myself," he says with a chuckle.

"Towards the end of Million Dead I'd started listening to a lot of different kinds of music: Americana, folk, and country. It was also very liberating to be a self-contained musical unit after being in a band."

Another massive influence was performing – and hanging around with musicians – at Nambucca on Holloway Road, in London. "It was full of a conglomerate of waifs and



Gear Box

For the live shows I've settled on Gibson Hummingbirds. Having learned to play in a punk rock band, I play very hard. You can beat the fuck out of a Gibson Hummingbird and they're generally alright. I went through a lot of different types of guitars in my early days. I played Patrick James Eggle acoustic guitars for a while, which are phenomenal but could not take the battering.

The second main part of my arsenal is my Fishman Aura Spectrum DI. It's great – it makes an acoustic guitar sound like an acoustic guitar. I have a Boss T2 tuner as well, and that's it. Very simple, but very specifically chosen gear. I also play a Gibson LE hollow body electric guitar.

In my personal collection I have a 1957 Gibson Country and Western, which is a fucking beast of a guitar. It was bought by a businessman as a kind of trophy and never played. It's in mint condition – as it would have been in the 50s. It's the ideal acoustic to me; not fancy but it plays like a dream and it sounds great.

My absolute fucking top-of-the-pile pride and joy, though, is a 1942 D'Angelico archtop which used to belong to Loudon Wainwright III. I was in a vintage guitar shop in Oslo, Norway, and I saw it on a stand and thought, "That's a really nice guitar" and started playing it. The owner came over and told me Loudon used to own it.

Loudon Wainwright is a massive songwriting inspiration for me, I'm a huge fan. I didn't believe him at first, but I managed to get a picture of it to Martha Wainwright, who confirmed its authenticity. Then the shop owner explained that he shared a flat with him in New York and when Loudon moved out, he gave him this guitar as a parting gift. I absolutely love it. I would never do a show with it – it never leaves the house. It's just got gravitas. You pick it up and your fingers go to new places.



he explains. Performing Wembley Stadium and finding out his music was on Bruce Springsteen's iTunes playlist – "that was pretty fucking cool" – are some obvious highlights. But the thing Turner is most proud of strikes a little closer to the heart.

"When I was a kid playing guitar in my friends' bedrooms and doing shitty DIY tours in the school holidays, I told everybody that I was going to be a professional touring musician for the rest of my life and everybody laughed and said, 'Grow the fuck up. A lot of bands get to release one, maybe two, records. And I do this for a living, I'm about to release my seventh record next year. I've got several projects on the go and I'm fucking proud of that. I'm actually doing what I said I was gonna do. I know this makes me sound like I'm flipping off my teachers still, at the age of 35 which is slightly undignified. Nevertheless, it's like, yes, I'm fucking doing this actually – go fuck yourself!'"

Surprisingly, however, Turner does not take full credit for his success. "It so completely comes down to luck," he explains. While Turner might feel like he's doing a job that "lots of people could do", I suggest that there's more to it than simply luck. "You need to have the three things: talent, luck, and drive," he concedes. "Two of those things you can control and one of them you can't. So you've gotta just recognise your fortune in life, I suppose. I don't have an office job, I don't have to wear a suit, I don't have to get up and commute at 9am on a Monday and that's awesome," he chuckles.

On the subject of commutes, I was unable to catch Turner's show at the Hippodrome because it would have meant missing my last train to Bristol. However, I was lucky enough to get along to his acoustic set at Banquet Records' store, who were hosting both shows.



Player Tip

Pick an artist whose songwriting intrigues you and figure out the chord structures to their songs. It's like going underneath a car; you observe the internal infrastructure of what you're interested in.

© Getty Images

“Marcus Mumford used to play banjo at the open mic night and we thought he was an idiot... then he sold a million records”

Turner's short – but heartfelt – set was incredible. It reminded me of the first time I saw him play, supporting The Levellers in 2008. So moved was I by Turner's solo acoustic set then, that I purchased his album *Love Ire & Song* the following day – and it became my favourite CD for a good while.

The 20-or-so lucky fans in attendance hung onto Turner's every word and sung back every lyric (aside from the two new tunes he played). That's the great thing about Turner; he speaks the truth as he sees it in his songs – and it connects with people. How does he go about penning them, though? "If I had a short answer to that question I would write it in a book and become a millionaire," Turner chuckles.

"Songwriting is a multi-stage, multi-layered process. It's partly an art and partly a craft. You can learn the craft. The art side of it remains indecipherable – and I think it should stay like that. There is a phenomenon of modern pop songs which sound so overwritten; like somebody who knows a bit too much about the craft side and isn't concentrating on the art side enough. But, sometimes those songs sell a million copies, so what the fuck do I know.

"Then sometimes you just get an idea that fills you with joy and excitement and you just can't wait to find a pen and paper." ■

Songbook is out now.
Info: www.frank-turner.com