



W.E.T: The downpour has only just begun...

Time to talk to the mastermind's behind this year's classic debut album - W.E.T. Jeff Scott Soto, Erik Martensson and Robert Sall...

I guess the starting point of an interview at this stage must be the critical and fan feedback on this amazing album you guys have managed to write and record. You must all be pleasantly surprised with the acclaim?

JSS: Well I guess some cheers to you as well as jeers for that, haha. You certainly started an upheaval of opinions on your site which was fun for us to watch on the outside. I get on there once in a while to dig & jab with some of the regulars but this time I decided to watch the debate. It was great fun reading as well as nice to get so much attention, good or bad! We had no idea this thing would get much attention past our individual fans but we've stepped on a landmine here, this thing is outselling a lot of my past endeavours, I guess people really found a click with W.E.T. I am very proud of my comrades here on the little monster we created!

From a one-off project as things started, it seems this is now a band and has taken on a life of it's own?

JSS: Yes, especially now that were discussing the prospects of touring now. I said from day one we would consider it if there was interest...well, were considering it!

Going right back to the start - what was originally pitched to you from Frontiers guys?

JSS: Yes, Serafino Perugino, the president of Frontiers as well as my bastard twin separated at birth, haha, came to me with this idea. I knew of Erik's music with Eclipse but only heard some Work Of Art songs without having met Robert at that point, but was very impressed with their vbe thinking this could be pretty cool. Once I got the 1st batch of songs, I couldn't wait to dive into them, even though I didn't co-write them, it was almost like copying Erik's vibe from his vocal demos & making them my own, it was really cool.

Erik and Robert - you had not written together before right? But instantly it seems there was great chemistry between you.

Erik: I've known Robert for over ten years and we have always discussed that we should make a melodic rock album together. But we never got together and actually made one. Thankfully, Serafino gave us a very good reason to make one! And things went surprisingly smooth when we started to write together. There is absolutely no prestige between us so if one had a better idea then the other one just backed off.

Robert: Since Erik and I have been friends for years, we were both familiar with each others music and I always felt that if we just could find the right situation, we would come up with some pretty exciting music. I think the WET album is a proof of that. It was almost too easy writing these songs with Erik and I know we're gonna write lots more music together in the future.

How did you work the initial stages of writing?

Erik: We just sat down in my studio and wrote almost everything on acoustic guitar. When we had the first basic idea of the song I started to demo the song the same day. More or less all the bass guitar and rhythm guitars from the first demo are what you hear on the album. I really believe that the energy you give a song when you record it the first time has something special that is really worth keeping, even if it isn't played perfectly.

Robert: We usually got together in Erik's studio around 10 o'clock in the morning and most of the time; we had a complete song by lunchtime. That's how quick most of these songs were written!

And Jeff, for an album of such importance to fans of "AOR Jeff", you left all the writing to the other guys. You were obviously comfortable in their abilities to deliver for everyone?

JSS: Yes, as I said earlier, it was all about trust & respect to those guys, especially to Erik for making sure he would impress me with some great melodies. Every song became better than the last as I started knocking these out on my home studio. Remember, we did NONE of this stuff together, like Talisman, were worlds apart yet right next door when it came to knowing exactly what to do with the songs.

Jeff - you passed some early demos on to me in 2008 and I was immediately blown away at what you guys were going to do - but the end product is even more amazing!

JSS: Yes, I am glad I stepped into some of the production process as I was so pleased with how it was coming out but didn't realize the work files I had which were recorded to drum machines was the final drum product we would have in the end! There simply was not enough in the budget to use a live drummer & I went to Serafino insisting if this album is to reach its potential in the end, we MUST have a real drummer playing on it. He added to the budget & that's how we brought Robban (drummer from Eclipse) in. Same at the end, Erik mixed the album brilliantly but as he had never mastered an album in his life, I thought we should play it safe & hire someone I trust with all of my mixes, John Ellis, to give it the final touches. Again, Serafino opened the check book & we got what we needed.

Erik - as producer and main musician on this album and the recent (also amazing) Eclipse release - talk us through the process of working up a song demo and then moving onto a full blown mix...

Erik: Thanks for you kind words Andrew! As I said earlier, the first demo version is very close to the final album. I think that when you record an album you must know what you aim for when you start to write and record. I had a pretty good idea of how I wanted this album to sound like from the start. This means that you can make the right decisions of how to record it. If you want the guitars to be really massive and fat then you better have that guitar sound in you amp. It sound really simple, but too many musicians forget this. So many times I've been given the master tapes to mix an album and it's recorded really poorly.

What is your particular secret to getting the tunes to sound so amazing without the \$100K budgets?

Erik: A good pair of ears and good songs! Simple as that. And you can record and mix albums with the help of computers today and that really help to keep the costs down. The old, big studios cost a fortune to hire. But you still have to know how to mix and record and that is harder to get cheap. And all the guys on this album are great musicians and that really helps a lot too.

How was the recording process done with Jeff's participation? Jeff - did you fly in to do the lead vocals?

JSS: Nope, all vocals done separately & nowhere near Stockholm :)

Erik: But since we all are Jedi Nights, we could sense each other with the help of the force all the time!

Jeff - the vocals on this album are outstanding and some of the highest range you have done in years. How hard were they to do? Has your constant touring over the last several years helped in this regard?

JSS: I hadn't sung this range since my touring with Journey, I knew it would take some warming back into it as Beautiful Mess was a complete departure vocally. It actually became a bit easy because I had Erik's guide vocals that almost assisted me in revisiting my earlier years sound. I enjoyed sounding 26 again, it was fun, should be interesting to do live, haha.

At the same time - there are some truly heavy tunes here also. A truly great balance I thought...

Erik: Personally, (and I think that many on the melodic rock site disagree with me on this but), many melodic rock albums tend to bore me after a while. You put the album on and I'm really impressed with the great melodies and great performances but after a few songs they start to sound exactly the same. I turn them off and put something else on. I think it's very important to have a variety on an album to keep it interesting for the listener.

Robert: Nowadays when 12 songs on an album is almost standard, I think variation is the key to making an album interesting to listen to from the first to the last song. I think this album as really good mix of songs.

I agree. There are some obvious nuances in there to Steve Perry (vocally) and to Journey (musically) - Erik and Jeff - views on this?

JSS: I'll take this one...there are songs that naturally lean towards the Journey style, as I am & always will be heavily influenced by Steve Perry & his predecessor Sam Cooke, that vocal style naturally comes out in me without having to try or copy Sir Perry! Hence my statement on how this is what could have been in terms of my continuance with Journey, not song or genre-wise per se, mainly in that Perry influence is in the blood but well never know what it could have been.

If I Fall is the most obvious and seems to be a real fan favourite!

Erik: I love that song too. We re-wrote it a long time before it sounded like that album version. The original idea sounded nothing like the final version. This was the only song that we re-wrote a couple of times but it seems it was worth it. And yes, it sounds very much like Journey even if it was not planned.

Jeff - did you feel as if you had something to prove to a certain group by recording a dedicated melodic rock/AOR album?

JSS: Not at all, remember this was all Serafino's idea, he was the one that wanted me to follow up with this kind of album for my solo career after Journey but I want my solo sound to be me 100%, not lean or borrow on the AOR side of things I've already done. With WET its fine to head this way, the shoe fits better on that foot!

So how about you guys - favourite songs on this album?

JSS: The 3 songs we did vids for, One Day At A Time, If I Fall, I'll Be There...too many to list!

Erik: Brothers In Arms, Invincible, If I Fall, Comes Down Like Rain

Robert: The 3 video songs.

How about the videos - nice to see you went to the effort to create 3 videos, giving extra life to the album as each one is released... It is obviously much easier these days to create a decent video without another \$100K to waste!

JSS: Serafino asked me if we would do videos for this release as it is becoming a standard for my albums with Frontiers. I believe in giving the listener more bang for their buck, even if the videos are not 6 figure productions, it adds to the basic CD release as well as, I believe, how well Gary (Schutt) has grown as a videographer & editor although I give all the shooting credit to my friend Lasse in Sweden for getting the footage for us.

What is the immediate touring plans for the band? I know that with 3 busy schedules that making time for this when you are all free at the same time will be challenging, but can you make it happen and when?

JSS: Were discussing it now, timing & scheduling. I won't be doing the TSO Spring tour in 2010 as originally planned so now I have the whole 1st half of the year to see what we can do with WET.

Jeff - will you co-write on album 2 and how could that influence the sound differently - If at all?

JSS: Who said there would be a 2nd album? :) Yes, I plan to be more involved with the next one, we will naturally bond touring & hanging on tour so with that comes capturing this on a new album. Talisman started exactly this way, completely separated & not really a real band, became my main squeeze for nearly 20 years & look at the coincidence, both bands are Swedish!

These songs deserve to be heard live. How would you work up a set list? Songs from everywhere you guys have been recently or just off the album?

JSS: It hasn't even been discussed but I am sure would visit the 3 bands that comprise this one...I would love to sing an Eclipse song maybe & have Erik sing a Talisman one, that could be cool! Robert has no voice so we might have to split vocals on a Work Of Art song :)
But I would imagine it would be primarily songs from the album.

And a potential line-up, who would round out a live band?

JSS: Exactly as you see it on the videos of course minus Marcel (RIP). I imagine Erik might play bass so we can remain a 5 piece band, I might play bass on some songs so Erik can play 2nd guitar, maybe Ill do some keys.....who knows how it will configure but well make it entertaining!

Erik - back to Eclipse now for you this year? And Robert - back to Work Of Art for a highly anticipated new album?

Erik: I will surely return to Eclipse this year. Magnus and me will start to write for a new album as soon as possible. I really look forward in writing new material for Eclipse. We've been showing each other a few ideas already and it looks (sounds) very promising.

Robert: We're almost done recording the new Work Of Art album and I expect it to be mixed and done no later than March.

Robert - Work Of Art was an amazing debut - what have you planned for the new album?

Robert: The new album will more or less be in the same style as the first one. It might be slightly more west coast oriented at some places since we do realize that our first album attracted a lot of west coast music fans as well. And now when we have WET, I don't worry about exploring our west coast sound a little bit more. I think that's one of great things about WET that both Erik and I appreciate. With Eclipse, Erik gets to do the heavier Hard Rock stuff and with Work of Art, I can lean towards a more west coast-ish style. And then with WET, we mix both our styles and come with something that is 100% pure AOR :-)

And Erik - the last Eclipse was a masterpiece also - so where to from here for you guys?

Erik: I think we will take it even one step further towards hard rock with the next one. Another fine album with just killer and no fillers and absolutely no ballad!

Jeff - you are the ever busy workhorse of the business. TSO duties....solo dates with the new band...WET...what else have you got up your sleeve for 2010?

JSS: So far, only to follow up on things out there, which is quite a bit now. Gonna chip away at the stone in 2010 before diving into anything else new.

Jeff - you like mixing things up and the recent move to JSS brand and the Beautiful Mess album....do you maintain that image and sound when returning for the next solo album and how far along is your thinking there?

JSS: Haven't thought that far ahead yet, who knows what will inspire me next? :)

Jeff - When is Queen going to see sense and get out there with you up front? :)

JSS: Haha, those guys have an agenda in mind, if I am to be part of it, they know I would love it, that is the last & only band I could foresee being a part of that already has its own past, I was once known as the guitar players singer, the last thing I want now is the replacement singer for well known bands!

Or how about an Eyes reunion? LOL

JSS: Umm, yea right!

Everyone - obviously there is going to be a huge demand for a follow-up album - when could that possible be started and delivered? Sometime next year?

JSS: One day at a time bro, let us have some fun with this one 1st, I would imagine that could be in the cards.

An album like this obviously excites a lot of the core fans within this scene - but truly - for those that wish for Melodic Rock music to rule the airwaves again, how big is our scene in your view and how many record can a great album sell in 2010?

JSS: I see it slowly creeping back in with the new bands, so many of the new artists coming out were listening to Def Leppard & Whitesnake when they were kids in the 80s, now they're all grown up & emulating the old sound with a new vibe. Listen to Onanithi, guitarist for Michael Jackson's latest line up before he passed, she is bringing back the whole guitar hero thing with melodic songs that you might hear Avril Lavigne doing, I think its great & about time, everything comes back full circle!

So it's back to work this week - where are you guys all at right now and what's on your "desk" so to speak?

JSS: I am literally about to make the final curtain call on the last show for the TSO winter tour then off to LA for the NAMM before returning to London.

Erik: I'm in the final process of writing another album for Frontiers and I'm working with a couple of other new Swedish bands at the moment.

Robert: I just got home from another writing session with Erik earlier today. Also, I'm writing songs for some new Frontiers projects and I'm currently writing songs for some Swedish artists.

Any message you would like to leave for the fans of the album and you guys individually?

JSS: Yea, buy the album, get rocked & see you on the road!

Erik: I couldn't have said it better myself!

Robert: I'll drink to that!

What have I left out - any last comments?

That you are responsible for keeping this music alive in a big way, our thanks go to you & THIS site!