

# John Nemeth

by Keerthi Chandrashekar

**What was your involvement in the forming of the Love Light Orchestra, including the roles of guitarist Joe Restivo and trumpeter/arranger Marc Franklin?**

I remember visiting Joe at a Susan Marshall gig in Itta Bena. I stopped in to see Susan, and Joe was playing guitar. That week I had been listening to a lot of the Memphis blues singers—Bobby “Blue” Bland, B.B. King, Little Junior Parker—and I mentioned that to Joe and he said he’s a huge fan of all those guitarists from those bands. I think Joe mentioned something to Marc about those songs. Marc used to work in Bobby “Blue” Bland’s band as a trumpeter. We all loved the music so we all decided to start the band. Everything was coming together really easy and Marc and Joe mentioned it to a handful of players in town and all the guys jumped at doing the project. Marc made all the arrangements and we got together and did some rehearsals and started gigging. We had no idea that this band was going to be as popular in town. We were just getting together to do this for fun.

**Why did you choose to record a live record as your debut album with the Love Light Orchestra at the DKDC bar?**

This producer in town, Matt Ross-Spang, wanted to record the band and Ward Archer from Archer Records was really hip on the band as well. I think it was really Matt Ross-Spang that wanted to do a live record. There’s always been talk of those great Memphis horn bands and how great they were live. We had done a couple gigs at DKDC and I think there was some talk about how great those gigs sounded in there. I guess that’s probably how Matt came to the conclusion he wanted to do the live gig. It’s an interesting place to play. There’s no stage and the band sets up on the floor. There’s not a lot of room because there’s nine guys set up in this small room so I just started sitting at the bar and would sing. I’ve never done a gig like that where I sit at the bar. The people enjoyed it and I liked hearing the band from that angle. They would be to the left of me while I’m sitting at the bar, and between the band and the bar is the

door to the place. So everybody that walked in could see the band and see me.

**Can you tell us about how you and Love Light Orchestra decided on the songs for the album?**

I guess we just picked the ones that really moved us. Marc loved the horn arrangements from a song and Joe really loved the guitars from a song and I loved the vocal performance on songs. It was really easy to agree upon the tunes. Pretty much every song each of us selected we’re doing in the show. I guess it’s just inspiration. All the songs come from our individual inspirations of what we loved about those Memphis singers and their big horn bands. We all love Bobby “Blue” Bland and B.B. King and Little Junior Parker. I know Joe Restivo really loved the guitar performance on *Sometimes* by Little Junior Parker. That song is the main reason why we got the band together. I’ve always loved *I’ve Been Wrong So Long* by Bobby “Blue” Bland. Marc really loved this song *Love and Happiness* and created this great arrangement.

**In the album’s liner notes, Scott Barretta describes your version of *Love and Happiness* as “reset with a shuffle.” Tell us about that.**

When Marc said we should try a blues version of it with a shuffle we all heard it in our heads too. When I hear the song put to a shuffle, I immediately hear hints of Harlem blues swing like Cab Calloway. The vocals groove really close to the same take on the original melody with this new arrangement. I think that’s where it starts. Marc heard the melody and the song and realized it could go another place. I think that’s great insight into the history of music—how you can see some songs decade to decade. Everyone’s looking for a different way to do it and they’re all pulling from their influences. It’s cool to see that a song from the ’70s can actually go back to the ’50s or ’40s.



LISA MARC

**In the liner notes you say, “The Memphis sound of the ’50s put in the sophistication of the horns, but it never lost that gritty aspect of the blues.” What is the “gritty aspect of the blues?”**

It’s that rough, reckless abandon, especially of the guitar. If you listen to the music from that era the guitar still has that nasty Delta energy in it. It’s tough and it’s beautiful all at the same time. And then you have the drums. They’re really drawn from shuffles and slow blues—6/8, 12/8, those rhythms that were really popular in the style before the ’50s. A lot of the songwriting didn’t lose the poetic similarities to the Delta blues. Bringing the horns in was a new thing. All of a sudden you have these horns that are feeling that backbeat that is the Delta blues experience. It’s that hard time. It’s that patience in it. Opening those holes for a great guitar riff and horn lines.

**What do you and the Love Light Orchestra plan on doing next?**

We want to make another record for sure. We’d like to tour as well. We’re all in different bands and have a lot of different things going so I guess what we’ll do is wait and see how successful the record is. If it catches on then we’ll try and get the band together and go out and tour. We’d all love to do that. I think it’d be awesome to take this music around the country and around the world. *LB*