FOREWORD

by Johnny Depp

As I sit here before a most cacophonous piece of blank onion skin, which I ever so delicately stuffed into my sturdy Olympia typewriter, and which surely deserves a more appreciative and well-balanced operator, but alas, such is its lamentable fate to be clubbed by my inept and clumsy digits, the paper screams for me to make the first move.

My thoughts are charged with the challenge of writing a few words on a man. An artist. A significant, nay, eminent artist, not only for me but for many others. A guitarist extraordinaire. A hero whose immeasurable ability has sent him high onto every Greatest Guitar Player list going ever since he sliced through some of the most tasteful and raging notes to be unleashed on an unwitting world. A hero who I’ve been given the honor to call both friend and brother.

Pondering him—the man, the mentor—the flood of imagery is astounding. I am swarmed by visions, swept away, almost, happily catapulted backward into fond memories of a fucked-up youth, with everything and
nothing to look forward to. Did I delve into all those clichéd Things That I Shouldn’t Have as a kid? Indeed, I fucking did. With great passion, pure ignorance, and fucking gusto. For a good while there, life for me was an endless, rickety, and dangerous train wreck just waiting to happen. But no self-medication, no booze or chemical what-have-you, has ever done what a solitary sliver of music could do. Not even close.

You see, this middle-aged fuck-up was once that fucked-up kid. Aged twelve, or thereabouts. Sitting in the backseat of my folks’ car. We were caught up in traffic outside the Publix supermarket and Eckerd drugstore, where there was some local to-do occurring in the parking lot. A band was playing. As we hit the stoplight, I watched the colors change around the musicians in silhouette with rapt attention. I was captivated. Wholly. And as the sound and vision imposed themselves upon the provincial, compact folds of that spun-out little brain, I knew. Suddenly, everything was in order. The song they were playing was “Dream On.” Never more had I needed that moment, that song, or that bat-shit realization, clarifying the very reason for my existence and what I needed to do in order to stay sane and alive: I needed a guitar . . . and quick!

With hard green cash never having bothered my pocket before, I managed to wrangle twenty-five bucks from my mom to pick up a Decca electric. The first Aerosmith record and a Mel Bay chord book had to be stuffed down my trousers and jacket. (Desperate measures and all that.) I played that record and studied the chord book as if it were some holy language. Puberty went by almost unnoticed. I shut myself off from the world, holed up in my little room, practicing, practicing, and practicing again. . . . I had to be note perfect.

And thus my life began.

Now, for me, as a shy, scruffy teen, the name Joe Perry would invoke a reverence for a species I had never known, especially in those early years when all teacher types, no matter how hard they tried, could not penetrate my brain enough to command any respect. Nothing in the world existed aside from the guitar and those who had mastered it as the ultimate form of expression . . . the perfect medium for a reclusive twelve-year-old to vent some serious spleen.

Joe Perry was one of the very few names back then—aside from everyone’s ultimate music maestro, Keith Richards—who could inspire any
sense of genuine awe into my adolescent mind, galvanizing body and spirit into actually giving a fuck. They were of an ilk never before encountered. The idea of meeting these untouchable heroes in real life was absurd—akin to ordering government-approved marijuana and having it delivered to your door personally by Mr. Obama. Unlikely . . .

But every tinder needs its flint, after all, and in this case, the genius of Joe was able to fully bloom when fused with another musical genius, that of the profoundly fervent, nigh-evangelical showman Steven Tyler, who just so happened to harbor one of the finest, most soulful set of pipes ever to have existed, all accompanied and brought to the fore by the brilliant musicianship of Brad Whitford, Tom Hamilton, and Joey Kramer. One other, sometimes unspoken member of the band that I would like to salute is the legendary producer and all-around wonderful human being Jack Douglas, who sat at the helm for those early records, guiding them, directing them. No doubt his input proved to be beyond integral to their incredible success. Over the years, the band has suffered its ups and downs, as you will read much of here, but all in all they’ve outlasted the vast majority of their peers and are still going strong today, having survived and ultimately surpassed the many brief epochs and trends tended to far lesser entities than themselves.

Cut to 2010. Hollywood, California. Swing House Recording Studios, just off Sunset Boulevard. Steven Tyler prowls about the room like a high-octane jungle cat. He had kindly invited a friend and me to watch the band record a few tracks for the new album. And there is Joe Perry. Right there, in the corner, just visible in the dark. He called me over and we sat there, he indulging me, discussing guitars and showing me the effects he was using for what would eventually become Music from Another Dimension! It was a huge moment for me, to sit there in a room full of idols, with this particular idol paying me any attention whatsoever, let alone confiding in me. And since then, that impossible afternoon, I’ve experienced the immeasurable pleasure of playing the Hollywood Bowl, among other stages, with Joe, Steven, and the boys. Although the night that holds the most special place in my heart was when that formerly toxic twosome came and played music with my son, Jack, for his birthday party a few years ago. He and I were like a couple of fans—in total awe! I was that little kid again, nearly the same age as my son.
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A poetic life was Joe’s fate. He was born with a style. He may have gleaned from the greats before him, as everyone must, but he transformed all that learning into his own signature sound. The way he uses musical notes is as personal and unique as any conversation you could ever have with the man. It’s how he communicates. He is a master of feel, and with guitar in hand, his muscular, rhythmic tones soar effortlessly, seizing all those in earshot, reflecting the inherent unpretentiousness of his ability. There is something primordial in the nature of his grooves that just flat-out fuckin' rocks, inviting everyone to witness and experience. There’s no elitist guest list here. No VIPs. No backstage pass is needed.

If you’re holding this book in your hands then, aside from the music itself, you have all that you will ever need. The heart and soul of the man himself, hurled faithfully at the page. The wise, silent one finally speaks! You’ll note the sagacious nature of a wholly sapient man. No bullshit. Devoid of it. Plain and simple. All the shyness, the honesty, the love, sweat, tears, and humility of this mysterious creature awaits you, friends, from his beginnings all the way to the here and now . . . and whatever might still be to come.

This book is a gift. A sacred tome, even. A hitherto secret slice of life, beamed in directly from one of the greatest guitar gods to have ever walked the earth, or stepped on a stage, or raged inside the mind of a young soul searching for what the fuck it all means.

Before I leave you I have one final thought that I feel impelled to convey. While I was reading this tale I could not help but continually hear, as if on a loop, the last lines of William Saroyan’s brilliant preface to his play The Time of Your Life. Saroyan’s words beautifully sum up Joe the husband, the father, the man: “In the time of your life, live—so that in that wondrous time you shall not add to the misery and sorrow of the world, but shall smile to the infinite delight and mystery of it.”

—Johnny Depp
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