

NI ROCKS Interview with JEFF SCOTT SOTO (2019)

Written by NI ROCKS

Friday, 26 April 2019 00:47 - Last Updated Friday, 12 July 2019 16:29

Singer Jeff Scott Soto is involved with many projects including Sons of Apollo, W.E.T. and the Trans Siberian Orchestra. He also releases solo work under his own name and fronts a band called Soto. That band releases its third album, entitled "Origami", through Inside Out Music on 24th May. I'd recorded an interview with Jeff when he played in Belfast back in 2013, but felt another interview was long overdue and jumped at the opportunity to speak to him about his latest album. We spoke via Skype on 23rd April. At that point only one single from the new album had been released, but the title track has now been released as well and I've included it on the Friday NI Rocks Show for 26th April along with the interview. You'll find that Show on our MixCloud site here - <https://www.mixcloud.com/NIROcks/interview-with-jeff-scott-soto-on-the-friday-ni-rocks-show-26th-apr-2019/>



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The interview has been transcribed and posted below.

Track list for the Friday NI Rocks Show 26th April

WHITESNAKE – Hey You (You Make Me Rock)

GASOLINE OUTLAWS – Livin' This Way

BURNING RAIN – Beautiful Road

TRUCKER DIABLO – Other Side of the City

KISS – Reason to Live

LITA FORD – Blueberry

LOVE/HATE = She's An Angel

SOTO – Origami

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Interview with JEFF SCOTT SOTO Part 1 (7 min)

SOTO – BeLie

Interview with JEFF SCOTT SOTO Part 2 (7 min)

SONS OF APOLLO – Signs of the Time

Interview with JEFF SCOTT SOTO Part 3 (7 min)

JEFF SCOTT SOTO – Retribution

W.E.T. – Elegantly Wasted

BLACK SABBATH – Heaven and Hell

DROWNING POOL – Numb

DIAMOND HEAD – Our Time Is Now

ACCEPT – Life's A Bitch

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IN FLAMES – Call My Name

SISTER SHOTGUN – Sacred Heart

TORME – Star

TYGERS OF PAN TANG – Running Out of Time

ROBIN GEORGE – Heartline

CONJURING FATE - Apocalypse

The 2013 interview can be read here - <http://www.rockradioni.co.uk/interviews/1185-ni-rocks-interview-with-jeff-scott-soto.html>

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{youtube}n6ekK2HLC4Y{/youtube}

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NI ROCKS – Hi Jeff, thanks for taking some time to talk to Rock Radio NI.

Your new album “Origami” is released through Inside Out Music on 24th May. Can you tell us where and when the album was recorded?

JEFF – The majority of the material was written during the latter part of last year as we inked the deal with Inside Out Music. We were initially going to go independently after the last label we were on and we thought maybe it’s just best that we take matters into our hands. But with the whole boost that I got from Sons of Apollo we ended up discussing with the same label and ended up under the same umbrella so I couldn’t be happier. We have a major label, some great people working the record and I really feel we’ve got something to work with here.

NI ROCKS – Soto bass player David Z was killed in a tragic accident in 2017 so you’ve brought Tony Dickinson into the band. What is the full band line-up for the “Origami” release?

JEFF – Well, Tony has been part of the band, pretty much as a writer, since the inception. He wrote the first singles from both the first two records. He wrote a song called “The Fall” from the first album and “Freakshow” from the second album. So he has inadvertently been a part of Soto, the whole machine and even the creation of our sound from the get go. A fantastic musician, fantastic writer and even producer. It was a no-brainer when we finally decided that it was time to get this machine rolling again and I think David Z himself would be proud that Tony is taking over the helm there. Tony is such a proficient writer and he brings an element of that contemporary side to Soto and obviously that is very important for me; because I don’t want Soto to sound like any of my JSS releases, or anything else that I’m a part of. It’s gotta have it’s own legs; it’s gotta stand on its own, because I need people to realise that Soto is a band; it’s not just a Jeff Scott Soto solo project or something like that. Since the inception it has been a band and it has to be perceived as that. Eventually I want to get away from everybody expecting us to do Talisman and Yngwie songs in our live songs. I want Soto to stand on its own and Tony has definitely helped us provide that into the future for the band.

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NI ROCKS – And who else is part of the band now?

JEFF – It's the same line-up since the beginning. Actually these guys were my back-up band from when my solo stuff came out in 2009. Jorge Salan from Spain (on guitar) and I've got two guys from Brazil, Edu Cominato (on drums) and BJ (on guitar and keyboards) and then obviously on bass we've got Tony Dickinson rounding off, from Denver, Colorado. So we've got three continents represented in this band and I love the idea of the international side that the band has to offer. We encapsulate where everyone is from.

NI ROCKS – And who did you work with in terms of production, recording etc?

JEFF – As I said we all live in different continents, different time zones etc so we have to take advantage of technology. Everybody working up their end and doing their bits, with everything coming together later. Everything was pretty much done in our home studios and then we compiled everything and sent it to our ace engineer in Brazil, a guy called Adriano Daga. He's a fantastic engineer and he was able to make heads and tails of everything and it came out fantastic.

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NI ROCKS – You're obviously involved with a lot of different bands, how does the writing process for a SOTO album compare to your solo project or Sons of Apollo for example.

JEFF – When Sons of Apollo is certainly more suited to the prog end and I wanted some of that prog element to be represented in the new Soto record. I told the guys don't hold back – if it gets a little proggy-woggy go for it because to all intents and purposes we are on a prog label. Inside Out Music is a prog label, but luckily we have Century Media who is now associated with Sony behind it, so we've got the best of both worlds. We can tap into the commercial end, the heavy end, the prog end and especially the contemporary end because I realise that I'm not really going to draw a lot of the JSS fans into this project, this band. So it's probably best that we aim towards bringing in a new audience and bringing in our own fan base for this particular band. And the ones that have been with me for the past years and decades, they're welcome to come and join in just the same.

NI ROCKS – The band have show shows in South America during May. Are there any plans for more tour dates – especially in Europe and the UK?

JEFF – Yes, we are currently wrapping up the initial routing and making sure that we hit as many as can; in September I believe, we're going out to Europe. The rest of the world, we're just going to have to wait and see what the reception is like on the record, what the label is able to do in terms of making some noise and this is what I'm here for – to make as much noise as I possibly can doing interviews and talking about the record.

NI ROCKS – Will you make it to the UK in September?

JEFF – Absolutely. When I say a European tour, I believe we're starting in the UK. I wouldn't miss that. No way!

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NI ROCKS – The first single from the new album “Origami” to be released was called “BeLie”. We’re going to play that next. What can you tell us about that track?

JEFF – One of the early conversations I had with the label president was.....he wasn’t telling us direction wise how to do it, but he said I’d like to hear something like an “Operation: Mindcrime” kind of element in the record. I discussed that with my drummer who is the co-producer on the album, Edu, and he went to another song-writer in Brazil; a guy called Leo Mancini who is a very talented guy who I’ve been working with since some of my latter solo records. He’d also co-written on the first two Soto albums. Edu went to him and they came up with a Queensrÿche-esk kinda of tune. As soon as I heard it I knew that the label were going to love it. Even though I don’t write or thing or sing like Geoff Tate, it kind of has that “Operation: Mindcrime” kind of vibe to it; and I just added my element to it and it became a Soto track. That’s probably why that was the first one to come out. The next two are going to be completely different from the first one, but again that’s what I want this band to be. I want diversity and I want it to have a little something for everybody and I think people are going to dig the whole element of influences that we’re going to be throwing out there.

{youtube}httACwv8ioI{/youtube}

NI ROCKS – As we mentioned the new album “Origami” is due for release on 24th May. Will there be another single released ahead of the

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album release?

JEFF – I believe the next single is coming out this Friday, in a few days. Unfortunately, the video for it, the actual band video, will not be out until just before the album is dropped. We're saving that for when the album comes out, because we're kinda giving you hints and sound-bites of what is going on initially. Then when the album is dropped that is when you get to see the full band video. It's quite dark and heavy and pretty cool!

NI ROCKS – The album is released in several formats including a limited edition blue vinyl. There's a growing demand for vinyl and a lot of musicians seem to be collectors. Have you caught the vinyl bug as well?

JEFF – Absolutely! I'm a vinyl freak and I still have all my original vinyl. I latch onto as much as I can when bands go the vinyl route. It's quite funny and I didn't even realise it myself – you have to master differently when you're doing vinyl releases. A lot of bands think they have one master and that they can just take that master and put in on the acetate, but it doesn't work that way. You have to actually master according to the spec of what vinyl actually takes as far as the frequencies and the sounds. Thankfully we were on top of that game and the mixes we set for the vinyl as well. We will have a limited edition blue vinyl in addition to the regular black as well.

NI ROCKS – You've played in Belfast quite a few times over the years. The last time you were here was with Sons of Apollo last year. How did you hook up with the other four members of the band to become the frontman for Sons of Apollo?

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JEFF – This was all Mike Portnoy's doing. On my birthday in 2016 he sent me a text saying happy birthday and said he was going to send me an e-mail to tell me what my birthday present was. I thought wow, I gotta wait for an e-mail! It must be big, maybe I'm getting a trip to Paris or a new car or something! No, actually, it was a phone call, my bad! He said I'm going to call you and tell you what it is! So he rang me and basically invited me to join forces with the earlier version of what Sons of Apollo was; which was a band called PSMS, an instrumental project that was the same line-up basically without Bumblefoot. It was Tony MacAlpine that was part of that. They wanted to do a vocal album and it was going to be very proggy and very jazzy infusiony. And somewhere along the way, before we actually wrote one song, the switch was to get Bumblefoot involved because he was more of a hardrock influence. That was when they decided that we weren't going to be strictly, primarily prog; we're going to do something that is a little more accessible to the hard rock / metal world as well as the prog world. That where Sons of Apollo was born.

NI ROCKS – I recorded an interview with Bumblefoot last June ahead of the Belfast gig. I'd asked him what he thought about the "supergroup" label that obviously gets applied to Sons of Apollo. Part of his response was that one of the key things about the band was the personal friendships and relationships that reflected a long history of working together. What are your thoughts on that and the "supergroup" term in general?

JEFF – Yeah, I personally hate it! When I hear the word 'supergroup' I picture us wearing tights and capes (laughs) and I'm certainly not going to be putting on tights and a cape anytime soon. I get the usage of the word, I just don't agree that it needs to be used, especially because, like Ron said, you have to have a chemistry and a relationship with the people, otherwise the idea of a supergroup is basically now just something that you throw out and see if it sticks. And if it sticks they'll continue and if it doesn't then they won't. We knew going into this, that do or die, we all wanted to do this and we went into this with exactly that notion. If we didn't sell one copy we'd still be trying and still be pushing for people to accept this band. That's one of the things that really got me keen on joining. I wanted it to be a band, an outfit, that I could be proud of and not something that was pieced together by some record company executive.

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NI ROCKS - There have been a few social media stories about writing starting for the second Sons of Apollo album. What can you tell us about progress as far as a second album is concerned?

JEFF – We are in deep progress at the moment. As I'm on the promotional trail and about to start touring with Soto, I'm about three or four songs deep vocally. And guitar over-dubs are being done and created. Yeah, we're cruising! This thing is sounding great and it is kicking ass and I think people are really gonna dig it!

NI ROCKS – Any idea roughly of when we might see it?

JEFF – You're probably going to get your first taste, single-wise and all that towards the end of the year, but I believe the idea is for it to come out at the beginning of January and then we're going to be on the road all year in 2020.

NI ROCKS – That brings me on to my next question. Obviously, you're all involved in different projects at the moment. It must be hard trying to schedule any kind of time for Sons of Apollo? Particularly with touring when you all have to be there at the same time.

JEFF – It is difficult, but as long as you do things well in advance it's easy enough. If we were trying to put a tour together in the next four months it would be impossible. Especially for somebody like Mike or myself! We plan things so far in advance so that we make sure we are free for the other things that are coming up. We all put aside 2020 for that reason. If I find any holes or any pockets I am definitely going to keep Soto on the road because I think this album is going to make some noise and I want to do as much damage as I can on the road with these guys.

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NI ROCKS – We'll play something from the Sons of Apollo album "Psychotic Symphony" now. Do you have a favourite track or one you can tell us something about?

JEFF – "Signs of the Time" is one of my favourites from the record. It's one of the ones that I had a go at on my own vocally and lyrically. It's one where everything you hear is exactly how I wrote it and recorded it. So it's one that I'm really proud of.

{youtube}6edyMJONks8{/youtube}

NI ROCKS – I recorded an interview with you in Belfast back in 2013 when you played here as part of the "Damage Control" tour. A gig organised by Davy Warren for Rock Radio NI. I know you're good friends with Davy and share a birthday!

JEFF – Oh yeah! You've probably heard all the piss-taking that we do then (laughs). I love Davy!

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NI ROCKS - Since then you've released another solo album – “Retribution” in 2017. When might we see another solo album? When will that fit into your schedule?

JEFF – Well, I'm leaving in two days time for Milan for the Frontiers Rock Festival. I'm doing a JSS show there as well as a W.E.T. show and I know that I have a meeting with the heads of the company there. So we'll probably discuss what is next in our future together – future releases and what we're going to be working on next. At the moment my priorities are Soto and Sons of Apollo. The solo albums are great because I don't necessarily have to tour for them and I might knock out another JSS album sometime next year, but let's see what these guys have in mind before I speak too soon!

NI ROCKS – We'll play a track from “Retribution” at the end of the interview. Which one would you want to play?

JEFF – The song “Retribution” is a great one. It's one that I heard the most because we did a video for it. It was one of the earlier tracks. When we were putting the songs together, Howie Simon and I, it was one of my favourites when we are at the early demo stages of putting the album together. So it's just one that became a personal favourite.

NI ROCKS – Following the release of both “Retribution” and “Psychotic Symphony” in 2017 you released a new album called “Earthrage” with W.E.T. in 2018. The band, as you mentioned, is playing at the Frontiers Rock Festival this weekend, following your own appearance the day before. W.E.T. and Soto both played the Monsters of Rock Cruise recently. Do you enjoy doing those gigs where you are doing two different shows with two different acts?

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JEFF – I do enjoy it, but the only thing that I have to be wary of is those cruises! You've heard the term 'booze cruise' – it's pretty difficult to stay sober on those things! Knowing that I have so much vocal responsibility I really have to watch myself! Either that or not have as much fun as I normally would! I love it...to a degree. Obviously I have to watch my intake and I can't go too crazy, so I find a nice balance and do have a blast doing those.

NI ROCKS – After Italy you head to South America with Soto, have you anything else planned with W.E.T. for the remainder of 2019 and when do you think work will start on a new studio album? Normally there is three or four years between W.E.T. albums!

JEFF – Again, this is a discussion that I'm going to have with the label. We can plan until the cows come home, but it truly does come down to scheduling. Aside of me being as busy as I am, Erik Martensson with Eclipse and all the other things that he has got his hands on! Once they lock me down, then they have to lock him down. We'll see when and where we are able to get the next one done. I absolutely have a blast doing this with the guys and it is unfortunate that we don't have the kind of time that we would like to be able to follow up with touring. Again, maybe that will change in the future, but at the moment it is still just a studio project that we all love and enjoy. It will remain that for the next record whenever that is going to be.

NI ROCKS - We'll also play something from "Earthage" later on in the show. Again, the same question – which track and why?

JEFF – There's a track on there called "Elegantly Wasted" that I wish had been released as a single. It's a bit cheeky and it's just a fun track.

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I'm singing it for the first time this weekend and I'm looking forward to that alone!

NI ROCKS – Another project that you're still very much involved in is the Trans Siberian Orchestra. You were part of the recent winter tour and I presume that will be part of your schedule again later this year?

JEFF – Well, according to management, yes I'm a part of it again. It's eleven tours and running. It's probably the longest running situation that I've been a part of, that I can remember, besides the band Talisman. I'm proud to be part of this organisation and I'm proud that they call on me every year. I hope to be carrying on into the future with these guys because it truly is a blessing of a situation, being able to be involved with them and this whole machine that they have created.

NI ROCKS – It's been 4 years since the last TSO album. Is there likely to be another album any time soon?

JEFF – That I don't know and even if I did I wouldn't be privy to discuss. TSO are their own machine and they put out there, what they want to put out there, when they want it out there. At the moment, I don't know of any and if I did, as I said, I wouldn't be able to share that information regardless. The answer is no I don't know of any new releases or any works, but you just never know with these guys.

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NI ROCKS – The priority obviously at the minute is the new Soto album and with all the projects that we've mentioned, it's hard to imagine that you have much spare time or indeed time for any other projects? Is there anything else you're doing that we haven't talked about?

JEFF – I'm constantly doing sessions and favours and appearances. One has to realise that it's not like the old days where if you get involved in a project you have to fly out and learn the stuff and you have to sit there, create it and work it out. That can take weeks and even sometimes months. Nowadays you send an MP3, you learn the song within a few minutes, you knock it out within a couple of hours and you're on with the rest of your day basically! I don't look at the kind of work that I'm doing, especially now with the technology and science that we have to be able to do things; I don't look at it and think 'oh my god, I'm so busy I don't have time to breathe'. To me it's like going to the gym or making a nice dinner. It truly is something that you just do because you have all those tools and accessibility at your disposal and you can just do it anytime and anywhere. I'm a musician, I'm a writer, I'm a producer, I'm an artist by trade so it just comes naturally. I could literally churn out an album a month if that was something that was required of me. Just because that is what technology has given us today. Of course I don't want to do that; I'm just saying that I could and that's why I don't look at it like I'm too busy to do this or do that. I'm only as busy as the project itself takes to complete.

NI ROCKS – That's all the questions that I have for you, again thanks very much for talking the time to talk to Rock Radio NI. We'll play those tracks from "Retribution" and "Earthrage" next. Good luck with the upcoming gigs in Italy this weekend and then South America the following week.

JEFF – Thank you so much, good talking to you again Nigel.

NI ROCKS – I'm looking forward to the release of the new SOTO album and to playing some more tracks.

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JEFF – Fabulous, thanks so much for your support.

{youtube}x0hA9b-MuhQ{/youtube}

{youtube}2qhr4hvHvEs{/youtube}

{youtube}i_Ee-DerwfU{/youtube}