

## Tom Jones

### Carrying a Torch

By Dan McCue

Originally published in The Island-Ear on July 13, 1992

Tom Jones has always been cool.

Perhaps the only person the planet who could have sang an innocent line like “It’s not unusual... to have fun with anyone” and have a monster hit at the steamy height of the sexual revolution, he’s always relied on talent and style and undeniable charisma – not to mention an uncanny knack for recognizing a good song – to carry the day.

At 52, he’s a grandfather a couple of times over and yet can’t resist dropping songs like Cinderella’s “Shelter Me” and Primal Scream’s “Moving On Up” into his set.

Never let them see you sweat? Honey, Tom Jones made sweat a cottage industry a quarter century ago.

All this and more is going through my mind as I await his call from Bally’s in Las Vegas, where he was wrapping up a two-week engagement. But as I roll his story over and over in my mind, the thing I keep coming back to was probably the silliest aspect of it – the ladies underwear that’s constantly thrown in his direction while he’s onstage.

Better to just get the subject out of the way, I decide. A moment later, the telephone rings.

“At one time I would capitalize on it,” he says after I asked about the phenomena. “If somebody threw me a pair of underwear, I’d pick them up and do all sorts of things with them. But after awhile I was getting review on how many pair of underwear were thrown up there and I thought, ‘Christ, they’re losing the point here. The music is second in their minds and it’s the bloody fiasco that’s being made important.’

“I never meant it to be like that,” he continues, a hint of recognition creeping into his rich, Welsh-accented voice. “So if somebody throws something at me now, I won’t do much with it. I mean, (laughs) I’m not going to say I kick it to one side or anything. I’m not saying don’t throw things at me. It’s just that I know I have to concentrate on the music. That’s the point I have to put across.”

What few people remember about Tom Jones is that he began his career as a singer in a rock and roll band, Tommy Scott and the Senators, and that he spent his early days – after “Delilah” but before “Green, Green Grass of Home” – opening for or playing alongside the Yardbirds, the Beatles and the Animals, among others.

For all his past success and current drawing power, however, his most recent album, 1991’s *Carrying a Torch*, has inexplicably yet to be released in this country.

Featuring four tracks written and produced by Van Morrison, the album is a treasure that got lost amidst a wave of upheaval in the American record industry.

Fans, eager to own what is arguably one of the finest album's Jones has ever made, are having to write to Tower Records in London to get it.

Speaking of the album's genesis, Jones matter-of-factly confessed that it all came down to Morrison's persistence.

"I kept getting these messages at my office that said, 'Van Morrison want to talk to you.' And I said, 'Well, fine. What does he want?' (laughs) He wasn't telling anybody.

"Finally, I spoke to him while I was in London and he said, 'I have this song. It's called 'Carrying a Torch,' and I've recorded it myself, but when I listen to it back it sounds like a Tom Jones record to me.'"

A short time later, the two met to listen to everything Morrison had recently committed to tape.

"I really did listen to everything he had," recalls Jones, who ultimately decided not only to do "Carrying a Torch," but also "Some Peace of Mind," "I'm Not Feeling It Anymore," and "It Must Be You."

He then asked Morrison to produce the tracks, all of which were recorded live in the studio.

"I didn't want him to hear the songs later and say, 'Well no, I didn't really see it like that.' I wanted him to be satisfied with what we were doing to his material," Jones explains.

Although never a composer himself, Jones credits his longevity in the business to his approach to finding new material.

"Some people walk into the studio and say, 'Well look, we'll get a groove going, and then just add this and try that.' I don't see that. I have to hear something and think, 'That's a bloody good song,'" he says.

But Jones goes on to admit that he's sometimes been too quick to rush to judgment.

"Burt Bacharach wanted me to do a song for this Woody Allen movie and he was in London, doing the music, so I went to his flat. He sits at the piano – and Burt Bacharach is not the greatest singer in the world anyway – and he starts romping out hits bloody, 'What's New Pussycat?'

"When he finished I said, 'You're pulling my leg, right?' Jones remembers. "I said, 'This is not really the song, is it?' He said, 'Yeah.' Well, my manager was there, and he just went white. The music publisher was there, and he was twitching. I said, 'I can't sing that.' I mean, it just sounded crazy to me.

"But then he explained it," Jones says, chuckling. "Look, this is for a crazy movie. You're not making a rock and roll statement here; it's just a crazy song.' After that I could do it.

"It was different. It was definitely different" he says of a song that would eventually reach XXX on the charts in XXX. "'It's Not Unusual' was the same way. Nothing else that was out at the time was like it. 'Delilah' was another. Even 'Green, Green Grass of Home.'" They were all really different records at the

time of their release, and that's what made them hits, I think. And in the long run, that's why songs become classics. They stand out."