

Joe Bonamassa performing at the Rory Gallagher celebration show in Cork, July 2025



RORY POWER!

When the family of much-missed Irish blues-rock legend **Rory Gallagher** asked **Joe Bonamassa** to put together a celebration show in July of 2025, the next-level guitarist almost said no. As the album 'The Spirit Of Rory Live From Cork' is released, he tells *Howard Johnson* why he eventually agreed, and why the project is so personally meaningful to him...

"I USED TO BE in a band called Rock Candy Funk Party for 15 years," laughs Joe Bonamassa when I tell him the name of the magazine his interview is for. "We played our last shows back in December. The records I made with those guys sold in the *hundreds*."

OK, so now we know that Joe isn't a man to take himself too seriously. What he does take seriously, though, is his appreciation of Rory Gallagher, the fiery Irish blues rock guitarist who died in 1997 at the age of just 47. So much so that Bonamassa is releasing 'The Spirit Of Rory Live From Cork', a live album and film recorded in Gallagher's hometown last summer.

Does this feel like a strange move for a five-times Grammy-nominated guitarist and vocalist who's a big enough noise in his own right not to be bowing down and paying tribute to anyone? Possibly, but the 49 year old has always been quick to acknowledge the many players, more British and Irish than American, who've inspired a career that now runs to 17 studio albums and so many live recordings that frankly we've lost count. And amongst the plethora of musicians Bonamassa pays regular homage to - including Paul

Kossoff, Peter Green, Eric Clapton, and Gary Moore - Rory Gallagher holds a most special place on his heart. Joe's debut studio album, 2000's 'A New Day Yesterday', opened with a cover of Rory's 'Cradle Rock', which Bonamassa first heard kicking out the jams at the start of 'Irish Tour '74', Gallagher's legendary live album from that same year and the record that sparked Bonamassa's full-blown obsession with Rory.

Eight of the ten songs that appeared on 'Irish Tour '74' are reprised by Bonamassa on 'The Spirit Of Rory', alongside another six Gallagher classics that shine a light on the varied work of a man once dubbed "the greatest guitarist you've never heard of."

We at *Rock Candy Mag* can't be put into that category, having long admired the 11 studio albums and three live recordings that formed Rory's body of work as a solo artist between 1971 and 1990 following his departure from the band Taste in 1970. While Gallagher never reached stellar heights of popularity despite playing more than 2000 live shows, he has nevertheless notched up global sales of more than 30 million, which isn't too shabby for a man who played music that was never

fashionable, and who had no time at all for any of the glamour and glitz that many other musicians willingly embraced in order to become *bona fide* stars. Rory's stage clothes were nothing more than the jeans and pumps he wore throughout the day, and the primary tool of his trade was a battered old dependable Fender Strat.

"It's one of the things I love so much about Rory," Joe tells me. "He was totally relatable to the general public. He wasn't a rock star at all. He was a blue-collar, working-class hero."

The idea behind 'The Spirit Of Rory Live From Cork' is both to pay tribute to a guitarist whose catalogue contains endless gems, and to introduce him to rock fans who have never previously discovered William Rory Gallagher. If you fall into the latter category, we say lucky you. There's a whole world of guitar excellence out there just waiting for you to discover...

JOE, TELL US WHEN RORY GALLAGHER FIRST CAME INTO YOUR LIFE?

"I was probably nine years old, maybe 10, just starting to get really interested in my dad's record collection. I used to go through them all and pick albums out that I wanted to listen to based on nothing more than the covers. My dad had Rory's 'Live In Europe' album [from 1972] and there was a photo of Rory on the cover wearing a flannel

shirt and playing a really beat up '61 Strat. And I said to my dad, 'This guy looks like all of the guys you hang out with.' And then I played the album and it was full of this blue-collar, guttural, blues rock. Right away I was all over it and quickly discovered that I was way more drawn to British and Irish stuff than American music. I don't mean any offence to anyone when I say that, but music from over there was absolutely what I gravitated to as a kid."

WHAT DID YOU KNOW ABOUT RORY'S HISTORY?

"Only what my dad told me. He said that he'd seen Rory opening for this person and that person, and he told me the story of how Rory had Rush opening for him one year, and then a few years later the bill had flipped. Now I realise that even though he wasn't a big name in the States, Rory still did a lot of work there. I'm a poster collector, and his name is on a lot of bills. But of course it wasn't until later that I discovered what he meant to the people of Ireland, especially at a time when there was so much trouble on the island. Rory was one of the few artists who would regularly play in Northern Ireland then. He really brought people together through his music."

CAN YOU PUT YOUR FINGER ON WHAT IT IS ABOUT RORY'S MUSIC THAT TOUCHES YOUR SOUL?

"I love the fact that Rory always gave 100 per cent of

"I KNEW THAT THERE WERE PEOPLE OUT THERE WHO'VE STUDIED RORY'S SINGING THEIR WHOLE LIVES AND CAN DO RORY WAY BETTER THAN I'LL EVER DO IT. BUT THAT'S NOT WHY I WAS CALLED."

Photo: Marcus Bird