

By: [Dr. Matt Warnock](#)



Though the Blues was born and raised in the U.S., the genre has grown and spread out to be a truly global phenomenon. While the first generations of blues musicians cut their teeth in Chicago, Austin and the Mississippi Delta, since migrating across the pond back in the '50s, some of the best blues and blues-rock artists have come from places with names like Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester.

Guitar legends such as [Rory Gallagher](#), [Jimmy Page](#), [Eric Clapton](#) and [Jeff Beck](#) are just a few of the countless U.K. artists who were influenced by American Blues, and who built their careers off of studying and emulating the music of Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker, Robert Johnson and others.

Since many of these first-generation, post-war guitarists have reached their golden years, or left us early along the way, their music has begun to inspire a new group of U.K. musicians who are turning to the blues as their source for artistic inspiration and the vehicle for their musical output.

One of these young musicians that is taking England, and now the U.S., by storm is Birmingham native [Joanne Shaw Taylor](#), and her latest record [Diamonds in the Dirt](#) is a

thoroughly entertaining collection of blues-rock based songs that is sure to satisfy the musical appetite of even the most seasoned fan of the genre.

As a guitarist, Taylor mixes many different genres into her blues-based music, including borrowing the best attributes from rock, funk, soul and pop as sources of inspiration in her writing and playing. Though she has enough chops to keep up with the best in the business, she tends to rely more on groove and emotion to draw in her audience, holding their attention until the last notes of the song fade away. On top of this, she possesses a sultry voice that only accentuates her playing and adds another level of musicianship to her artistic palette.

*Guitar International* had a chance to catch up with Taylor as she prepares to open up for [supergroup Black Country Communion](#) for two shows in December to talk about guitars, her new album and her diverse influences.

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**Matt Warnock:** You'll be finishing 2010 by opening up for Black Country Communion for two shows. That's a big push into the new year, how are you preparing for these shows, do you treat a big show like this any differently than any other gig you do?

**Joanne Shaw Taylor:** I think you approach every show as if it has to be your best, regardless of whether you're playing to 2 people or 2000. However, with the higher profile gigs there's obviously a greater sense of opportunity, perhaps.

By the time we play these two shows, we'll be fresh off a six week European tour where we performed the new album material every night, so of course that's the best preparation we could have hoped for. Then it's just a case of forgetting it all and just playing like we know we can.

**Matt:** You play acoustic guitar on "Can't Keep Living Like This," do you bring the acoustic on stage with you live and what brand of acoustic guitars do you prefer to play?

**Joanne:** I don't actually own an acoustic, and to be honest, I rarely play one. It's a different style of guitar, one I don't feel I play as well as electric, mostly because I haven't dedicated a great deal of time to practicing it.

That said, I still have at home my first guitar from when I was a child, a nylon-string classical guitar which is my favorite guitar to play at home on my time off. I've written some songs in that vein, which may or may not be included on the next album, we'll have to see where they lead me.



Photo Courtesy of Joanne Shaw Taylor

**Matt:** That same song has a great groove to it, very blues-rock in the classic sense, but with a modern tinge to it. How important is groove to you when you're writing and arranging music for the band?

**Joanne:** Very important. At the end of the day, I don't consider myself a straight ahead blues artist, more a combination of blues, rock and soul. I think in all of those genres you have to approach the songs with feel and soul in order to really reach the listener, and obviously the way in which a track grooves is fundamental to that.

**Matt:** A song like "Dead and Gone" has a main riff that sounds a bit like it was influenced by Southern Rock or even country music. Do you check out much southern rock or country music for inspiration in your blues playing and writing?

**Joanne:** Yes, as I mentioned, I have quite a lot of major influences outside of the blues genre. I actually grew up listening to rock. Being from the Birmingham-Black Country area of England, we had bands such as [Black Sabbath](#), Led Zeppelin, Slade, ELO and Traffic. I like good music regardless of the genre. It's not something I really think about, to be honest.

I have quite a diverse taste in music from Metallica to Muddy Waters. I think you soak it all in whether or not you actually study it. It's still interesting to me when people pick out different artists they hear in my playing or songs.

**Matt:** What guitars do you use on the road and in the studio? Are you a one guitar gal or do you like to have a room full of guitars to choose from when you get on stage?

**Joanne:** I have a pretty simple set up, to be honest. Firstly, I'm a hard-core vintage Telecaster fan. I'm not a fan of changing guitars on stage. I like to get comfortable with my sound in soundcheck and then I keep it for the show, rarely changing a guitar unless there's a technical problem. I prefer to use my pedals if I wish to adjust my sound.

**Matt:** What amps are you using right now, and does your live rig differ from your studio set up?

**Joanne:** Right now, I just got a '72 Bassman head with a '68 Marshall 4 X 12 cabinet. That's pretty much what I use in the studio, or a reissue Fender Bassman from time to time.

**Matt:** The Blues and guitar in general have long been dominated by men. Have you ever experienced any negative pushback because you're a woman in a man's genre, or as a society have we gotten past that?

**Joanne:** You know people still bring it up, and only men may I add. It does seem strange to me that people would be shocked to see a woman play guitar aggressively. One of my famous quotes is, "Whatever women do they must do it twice as good as men to be thought half as good." I think that pretty much sums up being a female guitarist in a male dominated occupation.

**Matt:** With the new album out and getting great reviews, are you planning on touring for a while to promote it or is there a new album already in the works?

**Joanne:** Yes, we start touring in the States in January and we'll be continuing in Europe in April.