

An Interview with Marc Antoine
November 8, 2005 on the Holland America Oosterdam cruising in the Pacific
Interviewed by Susan Johnson

Marc Antoine is a man of the world. Born in Paris, he grew up with the guitar in his hands and played jazz and Afro-pop in smoky Paris nightclubs. Marc moved to Los Angeles and was a member of Solsonics, who toured with the Fugees and Queen Latifah. The Queen (Latifah) ended up asking Marc to play with her band for part of the 30-date tour. Marc has toured with Basia and played gigs with Dave Koz and Chris Botti and Sting. He won a Latin Grammy for his work on an album by The Latin Project. *Modern Times* is Marc's seventh solo album and his second with Rendezvous.

Smooth Views (SV): Tell us a little about the process that went into recording your new record, *Modern Times*.

Marc Antoine (MA): Well, you know I pretty much changed the process here. I used a deejay, somebody who... pretty much like Mark upstairs (deejay for pool party going on simultaneously on board ship) actually... who does a lot of remixes for people like Santana, Jennifer Lopez, a lot of things like that. But he's always been in love with jazz but has never done a jazz project. So we worked on something together one day and I said, "You know I'd like to try to mix what I know in the jazz genre and what you do with the deejaying." Miles Davis used to do this kind of stuff... like use people in a completely unexpected horizon.

SV: How do you determine when to use studio musicians and when to use the technology?

MA: You know... I don't like to use technology [myself]. I don't mind if somebody else is pushing the buttons, but for me... I use it because it's easy nowadays, especially with the new technology. You can really make a record sound good at home, you know. But I'm more of a player. For me, playing is the most important thing. I don't like touching [the buttons] too much. When it becomes interesting is in a case like *Modern Times*, for example, I'd been playing a lot and the guy is using some things and building things around that as well. Then it becomes an interesting process for me. I pretty much did everything as far as the instruments, apart from the horns that I can't play. I called Phillippe Saisse from New York to play some piano and that's about it.

SV: What do your French and Spanish connections bring to the music you write?

MA: I have no idea. (laughs) You know, I really consider myself to be a citizen of the world. French is handy and I can bullshit my way around in France. (laughs) Because you really have to. (laughs) And Spanish is a good language to know anyway because it's the second language behind

English. Sometimes I do miss LA, but if I spend too much time in LA, I miss Madrid. So I feel at home in both. People are really laid back in Madrid. They like enjoying life and life is really more important than anything over there, which becomes a problem if you want to do any business over there! (laughs) Forget about it! For living, it's great. For inspiration, in my case it's great. I like writing music over there. But to work, you've got to be in America.

SV: You successfully tackled some adversity when you tore up your hand in a plate glass window. You proved your doctor wrong when you were able to continue playing. How has that determination carried into your musical career?

MA: A good example for me was Jango Reinhardt. He burnt his hand to the 3rd level. I mean he was just... I think he had two of the fingers that he couldn't even move. If you see pictures of him when he was playing back in the 50s, his two fingers were always bent over. He really, really hurt his hand. Worse than I had actually. I think if you can go through this, you can go through anything. It gives you a lot of strength for the future. I was about 19 years old when it happened and now I'm about 22. (laughing)

SV: How does smooth jazz in Europe compare to the U.S.?

MA: There is no smooth jazz in Europe. None at all. Smooth jazz is an American term. I don't think it really represents what there is in smooth jazz and it's also really hurting certain kinds of music as well. So I don't have any comment on that because I think it's a very good commercial thing for a lot of people, but I think that's what it is. It's a word that is helping to... it's a vehicle to do some great business for the radios and the magazines and things like that. For me it doesn't mean anything. For me, what means something is music. Of course, if you want me to always do smooth jazz, I will never do smooth jazz all the time. I love classical music. I love flamenco. I love Latin music. I love electronic music. It can not always be smooth jazz. In this case, I think now they're pushing the limits into trying to be too commercial.

SV: Your devotion to your guitar won over your swimming career when you were young. And we're happy about that. Why did you end up in smooth jazz instead of staying in classical?

MA: No idea. You know, when I made my first demo tape, I had no idea what smooth jazz was. And, you know what? I don't think the "smooth jazz" words existed. It was just contemporary jazz/instrumental radio. The Wave existed. It just didn't become a smooth jazz thing like this. It had nothing to do with where it is today, which it is great today. It's like a big thing. But it could have gone anywhere else. It could have gone more world. I could have been on the world charts instead of smooth jazz charts. I didn't find smooth jazz. Smooth jazz found me.

SV: What brings you joy and a smile to your face?

MA: When I see my kid play around.

SV: Is there someone you wish you could go on stage with that you haven't already?

MA: Miles Davis, but he's passed so I'll never do it.

SV: Will you be touring in the States in 2006?

MA: Of course, if you let me.

SV: What is your most embarrassing road story?

MA: I don't have any embarrassing road stories. Well, I probably got drunk with Jonathan Butler once or twice and we probably embarrassed ourselves, but we don't care about that. (laughs) I mean, if my zipper is open...sometimes I'll think about it... "I just went to the bathroom before I went on stage. Is it open or not?" But if it's open, who cares? That's cool. If it's open, it's open. I'll sell more records! (laughs)

SV: What song do you enjoy playing the most on stage?

MA: I don't know. I have no idea. I like playing the solo stuff better actually. It just depends. For example, right now I'm into playing a little more of the electric guitar. I'm just enjoying playing music in general. It could be bass, guitar, piano, anything. I've enjoyed playing only percussion on stage as well. Music! Music, in general. I write on piano, on bass, on anything you can tap on.

SV: In closing, what's it been like working with your new label, Rendezvous?

MA: It's been great! These guys are really letting me do what I want to do. I think they're THE label right now because they are really open to a lot of stuff, like Praful. They're doing some lounge compilations. They have some almost classical-ish music. They have no limitations. Of course, they have to play the smooth jazz game like pretty much all the labels, but they like spreading their wings, which for me is great, because creatively speaking I like spreading my wings. So as long as I can have a label who understands what I want to do, then for me it's the right label. Usually an artist leaves a label when there is a misunderstanding of the artist by the label. I'm not in it for the money. I mean when the money is good, it's great. But I'm not going to go to another label because they offered me a little more money. It's not going to make that big a difference at the end of my career. I could never do my own label. I think it's a headache. I see these guys... Hyman and Dave and Frank... I know they're going through a lot of tensions. It's got to be horrible to be the head of a... you have to really know your job and only do this. Me, I'm an artist. I like to create music. We're talking about maybe doing a solo project. They're like, "Why not?" They aren't afraid of doing something that, in this case, would get no... zero... airplay.

SV: Thank you for taking time away from cruising the seas to talk with SmoothViews, Marc.

MA: No problem!

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