

-The Unexpected Jane

by Blase DiStefano

Singer Jane Olivor talks about gays, drugs, Weight Watchers, true love, and more

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This was not the easiest interview to obtain. Oh, Jane Olivor was quite willing, but it was difficult for her publicist to even contact her. After numerous setup dates, it was decided I would call her the same day and time as the premiere of The X-Files. I decide to conduct the interview from home so that I can record The X-Files while talking to the gifted songstress, who, by the way, has just seen the release of Love Decides, her first-full-length studio recording in 17 years. Wanna know why? It's in the interview.

Anyway, at 7:59 p.m., I hit the record button on the VCR, and then I make the phone call to the vocalist who has been compared to Streisand and Piaf. I get her recorder! Has she been abducted by aliens ... oh, wait, that's taking place on the other recorder. So I leave a message. The next day, I call her publicist—it seems that Olivor had to spend an extra day in New York. We set up more dates, and the interview finally takes place the day after the elections.

Jane Olivor answers her cell phone. After introductions, she says, "We finally meet." I ask her how she's doing, and she says, "I'm filling the gas tank right now, can you hold on?"

When I think of celebrities, I rarely picture them filling their gas tanks. In a way, this makes me less nervous and, though somewhat mundane, it helps the interview begin on a somewhat personal note.

Though The X-Files had been viewed three nights before, on this evening the talented singer/songwriter apologizes for her unplanned absence/abduction and then veers toward outer space: "Besides, Uranus moved forward," she says, "and you know what that means—the unexpected."

And unexpected is what I get. Actually, better than expected. Olivor is warm and open and giving.

OutSmart: So Love Decides was released on election day.

Jane Olivor: Yeah, I think that's what happened. I think the fact that my album was released caused all this stuff. They can't figure out who's the president.

OutSmart: But don't you think that the title of your CD...

Jane: That love decides the election.

OutSmart: Exactly. We can just hope that.

Jane: You're very poetic.



OutSmart: So, you sang a beautiful song at the March on Washington.

Jane: I co-wrote that song with a lyricist, a friend of mine.

OutSmart: What's the name of it?

Jane: It's called "Where There Is Love." I recorded it on the last album I did, which was Jane Olivor in Concert.

OutSmart: How did the March on Washington go for you?

Jane: It went very well. I was [on stage] toward the very end of it, but it really went very well. I mean for the few people who were there, they made a lot of noise.

OutSmart: Are you on tour?

Jane: Oh yes. As a matter of fact, I'm going to a rehearsal right now. And my pianist, who is a professor at Morgan State, lives in horse country, so that's about an hour from here.

OutSmart: Oh, my God.

Jane: Well, when you live in a state like Maryland, I feel like driving is just a part of the gig. You know when you live in open space, driving is a part of the gig of living there. Yeah, you just sort of accept the way it is and you go about... Well, you know something, some of the drive is on highway and the other part of it is backroads where there are huge horse farms. And so I get a kick out of that. If he lived in the city, driving into the city would be hellish.

OutSmart: So what inspires you to sing and write the songs you do?

Jane: I don't write a lot of the songs that I sing, but when I do, the same thing that makes me want to write is the same thing that makes me want to sing someone else's song. First of all, it's melody. I'm always listening to what the melody is telling me. Often the melody is not saying the same thing the lyric is. And you don't have a marriage there. At the same time, the lyrics have to be good, have to be well written; otherwise, no matter how good the melody is, I'd have to pass if I couldn't get a great lyric to go along with it. But really the first thing I hear is melody.

OutSmart: So, have you always been aware of your large gay following?

Jane: When I first got into the business, no, I just sang the songs I loved. And if I didn't love them I always found something in them to love. And as I continued to perform, I realized there was a gay audience and they are very vociferous, and they are quite ... what's the cliché?

OutSmart: Well, I don't know, we do have a tendency to love women, for one thing. I am not sure why. And...

Jane: Why not?! I'm not really sure what it is, but I've never been able to put my finger on that really. Well, let me ask you this, do you love strong men? Does the gay population love strong men, a Frank Sinatra, a Garth Brooks? Do they love them? I don't think so.



OutSmart: It's a very interesting concept. Yeah, I don't think so either ... generally, that is. And it might be—and this isn't the case of all women—that most women are less judgmental of gays. That women are more flexible.

Jane: Yes. Let's not go there right now, because I'm not dating a lot because I find a lot of the men need to go to manners school. I think that maybe that's part of it too – gay men and women tend to know that about men. It's called sensitivity. And instinct. And I'm sorry to say that I think a lot of men don't connect to the instinct.

OutSmart: Yeah, they just haven't gotten there yet.

Jane: No, they haven't.

OutSmart: Has AIDS affected your life or your music at all?

Jane: I cannot speak politically, although I did sing one song called "Unknown Soldier" [a commemoration of Leonard Matlovich, the gay Vietnam vet who was given a medal for killing 10 men, a discharge for loving one]. It was beautiful, but I thought, well, I wasn't in the military and I don't know anyone in the military going through that, and I thought maybe I was becoming a bell ringer of some sort or that I was becoming political in that way, although it was a great song. But I think everybody's been touched by it. Everybody has known someone who ... please, I know so many gay men that have succumbed. Oh, God, yes. It's so sad. You know, "Where There Is Love" was not written about AIDS. It was written about a place in your heart to go to, it isn't a physical place. And it seems to be apropos for some of the suffering that is going on today. Very apropos.

Out Smart: Now I know you've had to answer this question over and over again, but where have you been?

Jane: The only way I can answer that is that there were reasons I left the business. I don't think anybody leaves anything they're successful at, if it's successful all the way.

OutSmart: Meaning down to your personal life.

Jane: And it wasn't exactly my personal life, it was the business life that was very problematical. I took time for healing myself. Longer than I thought. I needed it. There's no way to measure how much time a person is going to take. But there were problems from the very beginning. I mean I was shot out of the cannon, landed on Carnegie Hall, and was told to be a superstar. That stuff didn't tickle me. Can you imagine?!

OutSmart: That would scare the shit out of me.

Jane: Well, that is exactly what it did, Blase. That's exactly what it did. And I became quite nasty, and I became very pressured. I couldn't take the pressure. And people were saying, "Oh, she destroyed her career." I did nothing of the sort. I saved my sanity, instead of destroying my career. I walked away. I said, "I love music too much to be hating it as much as I do." This is the "overnight sensation" they talk about.

Let me tell you something, it doesn't last; it can't, because you have no foundation. There is no such thing as an overnight success. And that is an absolute cliché. And I never wanted to get wherever I got as fast as I did. People around me were manipulative, and I thought I was stronger in that regard to say no.

But then a part of me also loved that I was succeeding. A part of me loved that I could move people, and that is so powerful and it's so beautiful. But in my heart and in my head, I kept saying, "I'm not ready for this. I'm not ready for this." And before I knew it, I was at Carnegie Hall and selling out the Greek Theater.

I just became more and more disenfranchised in myself. Nobody knows this. And I couldn't get away from this business fast enough, because there was so much love involved, so much true pure love of music that I felt I got really trampled on. So, I had to pack my suitcase and go. If I didn't love music as much as I did, I could have kept going. But you're talking about true love here.

OutSmart: And that was an unbelievably important thing to do, for your sanity.

Jane: That's right. It would be no career had I kept going anyway. So it would have been destroyed one way or the other. I didn't even do drugs, Blase! I wish I had at the time ... I wouldn't have felt anything [laughs]. No, I had to be straight and sober! [Laughs]

OutSmart: I wonder what it would have been like had you done that?

Jane: Oh please, I'm such a drug wimp, forget it. Scared to death of drugs. I took cocaine and I thought it would just kill me. I really did. But I was so nervous, I used to smoke cigarettes at this time. I'd put one cigarette out and start another. You know, this is how I dealt with the nerves. I never went to drugs, I don't think I ever will.

I went to food. Food is my thing. Since I'm a little girl. So you know, you pick your dance partner and you know whom you're going to dance with. So I'm on Weight Watchers now. It's a lot of food I'm not dancing with any more. I've heard that you can still eat pretty much anything, you just don't eat as much, right? Well, there's a point system. But you know, it used to be "Dances with Wolves," now it's "Dances with Bran Flakes." It's only two points. "Dances with Skim Milk," "Dances with Tuna Fish," "Dances with Salmon." "Dances with Lettuce," that's more like it. Yes, I've lost eight pounds, I'm really thrilled. And if you fall off, it's easy to get right back on it.

So basically, that's where I've been. I went down to Florida for three years and I enjoyed that very much. Started singing down there actually.

OutSmart: Do you care to get into the fact that during this time your husband died?

Jane: Well, there really isn't much to say. I took care of him for a long time.

OutSmart: And that was part of it too, wasn't it? The fact that when you take care of someone, that takes all of your time?

Jane: It takes all of your time and it takes a lot out of you and it's very bad. And it's hard to talk about it. He wasn't just this man, he was this doctor, he was very smart, he suffered terribly, and he died in 1986.

OutSmart: On a lighter note, just know that someone on our staff is still around after all these years and, in his words, unceasingly adores you and is one of your biggest fans, and he asks that you not stay gone for so long this time.

Jane: That is very sweet. I am very touched and tell him that I am touched and I'm not leaving.

OutSmart: Good, we're glad to hear that.

Jane: Thank you.

OutSmart: So here are a couple of stupid questions. If you were stranded on a desert island and you could have only one movie with you. . .

Jane: I would say Analyze This. That was a fabulous movie. Either Mr. Peabody and the Mermaid or Analyze This.



OutSmart: OK, now one song, or one record.

Jane: Oh, "Some Enchanted Evening" by Jane Olivor.

OutSmart: All right! And now one person, and this cannot be a lover or a friend or a relative.

Jane: Oh I know, he's not a celebrity, but he's very well known.

OutSmart: That's OK.

Jane: Jesus Christ. I would learn a lot from him. I would sit on an island with Jesus forever and just talk and talk. Can you imagine how much I'd learn? I don't care if I was at Twenty-One or the Four Seasons Restaurant, I'd still want to have lunch with him. I would really talk, and then I'd go have coffee with Kevin Costner. I'm no fool.