

Return of Flipper

Unplugging and Unwinding with Nils Lofgren at the Bottom Line
by Stephen Pitalo

Nils Lofgren celebrated his 47th birthday in June. Some know him as the 18-year-old guitarist singer who played on Neil Young's *After the Gold Rush* album. Some know him from the mid-80s stint with Bruce Springsteen on the *Born In The USA* tour. (He's the one playing alongside Little Steven in the "Glory Days" video). Some remember his band Grin and others remember his solo album "Flip" whose title track's video (featuring his trademark onstage gymnastic flip) showed up mostly in MTV commercials. Recently he added a stint in Ringo Starr's All Starr Band to his resume. As a guitar-for-hire, his chops are unparalleled.

On Aug. 22, he brings his 30 years worth of songs to the Bottom Line to support his recently released "Acoustic Live" CD. His years of backing superstars yielded valuable lessons in ridding himself of fear. "Even by the time I'd met Neil, I'd already written the first Grin album, and I found that our styles were from the same soup. The main thing I gained from both Neil and Bruce was confidence—to learn that what I do is real and valid, and being able

to tap into that helped encourage me and helped me develop my music."

Lofgren now has much more peace than the 1979 model. And in that mode, when Young asked him to play on MTV's *Unplugged*, the seeds were planted for this album. "Singing 'Tell Me Why' on Neil's *Unplugged* brought back many memories. And it did help me think about doing this, but acoustic has been a part of the repertoire for a while. My brother and I started doing acoustic about 15 years ago," Lofgren said, "and I got free of my record company a few years ago, so we saw we could make it interesting and put a new spin on some of these songs."

Alternating between homes in Maryland and Scottsdale (also hometown to old friend Alice Cooper), Lofgren still makes the road his home for most of the year. But he did slow down long enough to put together the album in his home studio. Life has put a million stories in his head, and his own brand of storytelling makes its mark on this CD. "Little On Up" is about raising a child by yourself. I have ten

nieces and nephews. I've never had any children [he has two

Lofgren had usually enlisted his brother Tommy on most of his recordings through-

out the years, but all three of his brothers contributed to this album. Lofgren is bringing brother Tommy to New York for the Bottom Line gig.

Though it's been difficult for Lofgren over the years, through it all, his love of performing has stayed with him. "You get frustrated with no big record in your career," he says.

"That has eluded me... You can get wrapped up in that, but when I am up in front of an audience it's all wiped away. They don't care. They are there to enjoy the music, and inside me that's a fresh and beautiful place

to be, a place I need to visit... I mean, if I had my drawers, I'd be on a major label that absolutely loved me and was ready to shove my record down everyone's throat," he laughs.

"But short of that, I'm just not interested. I'm in this 30 years now, and I've lost my patience for all of that. [With] my last record contract, it was a weird place to be, having no label, but I decided to work on this acoustic record, and then The Right Stuff [his new label] decided to pick it up and release it."

Lofgren credits his age as an influence behind his current, more somber and reflective collection. "I'm very excited about this record because it is very intimate, gentle and even soothing. I find that I put on Tony Bennett, Frank Sinatra, or Nat King Cole for a calming mood, and now I've made a record like that as well."

Just one warning: Don't expect any of his onstage flips, although Lofgren hasn't ruled them out entirely. "I stopped doing the flip in 1985 during the *Born in the USA* tour. And I haven't done it since. But you know, I don't think it's a mid-life crisis more than a mid-life evaluation. But I'm thinking about bringing it back. I've made all these changes in my life recently, and I'm starting to think that when I turn 50 I'm going to bring it back. I'll need to get into a gym, but I'm seriously thinking about this. If you'd have asked me last year, I'd have said, 'No, never again.' Now, I'm thinking, hey...."



Guitar Slinger: Nils Lofgren breaks out from backing superstars and goes solo

stepsons], but it's such a responsibility. And it's the hardest job in the world. Many of these songs are autobiographical themes, but fictional characters."

The oldest of four boys,

night out