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Bex Marshall Rocks the Blues in Moscow

By Peter Beck

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Bex Marshall will play two concerts in Moscow during the coming festival. **Ken Ansted**

"I think if you have a good record then you should make sure you give it a good walk," says Bex Marshall, and this week the highly-acclaimed singer/songwriter/guitarist will prove her point when she brings the music she is talking about to Moscow for three shows as part of the ongoing "Great British Rhythm 'n' Blues Invasion" festival.

The record she is discussing could be her much lauded 2012 release "House of Mercy," or it could be the new album she retreated to North Cyprus to work on over the recent New Year Holiday period. The latter is not quite finished yet, but there is a good reason for that. Two days before Christmas her island residence caught on fire.

"It was carnage, and we were lucky to get out alive," Marshall says. "The fire gutted the downstairs, my guitars were burnt, and smoke damaged everything else."

After the unscheduled time out for recovery and repairs, she got back to recording using some borrowed instruments and a small hard drive recording system.

"It went well," she says, "Considering ..."

Considering, indeed. Having got as much done as she could in the interrupted recording session, Marshall returned to the London home she shares with her husband, the legendary roots music promoter Barry Marshall-Everitt, to prepare for a lengthy bout of touring that kicks off in Moscow on Thursday. She will continue working on the new album while she is on the road.

"It is going to be an interesting year," she says, and her statement is backed up by her itinerary.

In April she will be playing the famous Juke Joint Blues Festival in Clarkesdale, Mississippi, and that will be followed by her second tour of Brazil in May.

She will then take a break from writing out her own set lists when she guest stars in the role of Janis Joplin for a summer "San Francisco Nights" tour with Sam Andrews of Big Brother and the Holding Company and a host of other west coast music veterans. Typically, the versatile Marshall is not at all fazed by the prospect of recreating the songs of such an iconic figure as Joplin. She says she's "not daunted at all, just excited."

As soon as that extravaganza ends, she will head directly to Spain for two weeks of headline gigs of her own again before another return to the U.S. It might be a fearsome schedule for many another, but not for Marshall.

"I love soaking up cultures from around the world," she says, "I have a lot of old gypsy blood in me. Travelling is a passion."

In Britain, Marshall plays with "a full seven-piece roots blues band with a gospel backing vocals." Bringing such an entourage around the world is not practical, however, so she usually plays with local musicians wherever she goes.

"I'm getting used to playing with different bands all the time now," Marshall says, and it is in no way a complaint because it usually means that she gets to "play with some of the finest musicians in town" wherever she goes.

In Moscow, she will be joined by Galina Kiseleva on bass and Alexander Polovinkin on drums. Kiseleva is known for her work with the Mishouris Blues Band among other projects, and she and Polovinkin provided the excellent backup for Eddie Martin during his recent visit to Moscow.

"Sasha and I are the usual rhythm section for foreign artists", Kiseleva says, and it is clear that she is very much looking forward to playing with Bex Marshall. For Marshall, the feeling is mutual.

"I am really excited to come to Russia", she says. "It is always totally inspiring to play with local musicians. I always learn so much, especially about the native music."

Given that it will be her first trip to Russia, Marshall is determined to pack in as much as she can while she is on stage here.

"I will be starting the show with the band and the first set will be all original songs selected from my last three records. The second set with be a solo semi-acoustic show where I will play my blues resonator, and the third set will be a mixture of great covers and originals."

Known for her mastery of multiple guitar styles and her unique vocal phrasings that incorporate a wide range of sources, it is clear that Marshall can take many a song on the "good walk" she proposes. This weekend is the opportunity for Moscow residents to be there when she does it, and it's not to be missed.

Bex Marshall will be appearing at B.B. King Blues Bar, 4 Sadovaya-Samotechnaya (Metro: Tsvetnoy Bulvar), on Thu., Feb. 20; Rhythm & Blues Cafe, 19 Starovagankovsky Pereulok (Metro: Arbatskaya) on Fri., Feb. 21; and FAQ Cafe, Ulitsa Bolshaya Polyanka, 65/74 (Metro: Dobrinskaya), on Sun., Feb. 23.

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