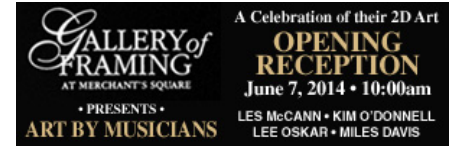


E-NEWSLETTER

LOG IN | CREATE ACCOUNT



SCENE



MUSIC » MUSIC LEAD

MAY 28, 2014

54

Email

Share

Family Guy: Contentment Inspired the Tunes on Jack Johnson's Latest Album From Here to Now to You Concert Preview

By [Jeff Niesel](#)

Singer-songwriter Jack Johnson says he always tries to write about "what was really happening in my life." If that's the case, then life must be pretty good for the singer-songwriter. The songs on last year's *From Here to Now to You* have a real tenderness to them as Johnson sings about his love for his wife and kids. But we all know that happy songs aren't always the best songs and that's not lost on Johnson, a guy whose soft voice and delicate melodies make many of his songs sound like lullabies (and the whimsical tunes he wrote for the soundtrack for the 2006 film *Curious George* certainly fit that bill).

"If it means sounding like you're getting older, so be it," says Johnson of the contentment he expresses on *From Here to Now to You*. "This record is about watching the world through my children's eyes. Many of the songs are just simple love songs. They're a good way for me to remind my wife how much I love her. I'm not great about getting a present. So often the night before Valentine's Day, if I don't have a present, I usually write one of those songs real quick. That's where those come from."

Johnson recorded the album at his own Mango Tree Studio with longtime producer Mario Caldato, Jr. (the guy behind Johnson's biggest-selling release, 2005's *In Between Dreams*, as well as albums by the Beastie Boys, Super Furry Animals, and Seu Jorge), and it features Ben Harper (the singer/songwriter/multi-instrumentalist who played slide guitar on Johnson's first-ever single "Flake"). The album also features Johnson's longtime band members Adam Topol, Merlo Podlewski and Zach Gill. While Johnson laments that "the songs that take five minutes to write often become people's favorites," and "the ones I slave over for weeks often become the deep tracks on the records," there's not a bad song on the album. It's yet another triumph for a guy who still humbly refers to himself as a surfer who aspired to be a good songwriter.

Surfing certainly helped Johnson get his foot in the door as a singer-songwriter. As the story goes, Johnson and singer-songwriter G. Love were jamming one night after they went surfing together, and Love was struck by Johnson's tune "Rodeo Clowns."

"He wanted me to come back to the studio where he was recording," recalls Johnson who, at the time, was well known for directing surfing movies. "We met for the first time that one day and recorded the next day and then people from the label heard it and the next thing we knew it was the next single from the album. It all happened within a week. Even at that point, I didn't think [the music] would amount to the level that it has gone."

An influential alternative radio station in San Diego put the song in regular rotation, and it caught on. Johnson says he still wasn't convinced he had a career that would supplant the niche he had carved out for himself as a surfing film director. Meeting singer-songwriter Ben Harper for the first time would change all that.

"The first day I met [Harper] was at a show in Santa Barbara," says Johnson, who attended the University of California at Santa Barbara. "I was backstage and I heard someone singing my lyrics. He was singing, 'it seems to me that maybe' [from 'Flake']. He eventually came in and played the slide on that song in the studio, but it blew my mind when he was singing the lyrics."

Johnson worked with Ben Harper's producer J.P. Plunier on his 2001 debut *Brushfire Fairytales* and then teamed up with Caldato, Jr. for his follow-up, 2003's *On and On*.

"He helped me design a studio," Johnson says of Caldato Jr. "After the first record, that allowed us to move back home. All the records since my first one have been in my two-car garage. Mario comes over and he brings his family and it's a big get together."

Because of the way he schedules his tours and albums, Johnson ensures he spends a good amount of time in Hawaii. For the years that he tours, he spends a month at home and a month on the road. And for the years that he's recording or just taking some time off, he's at home. He's devoted to trying to make a difference there too and has a foundation dedicated to the many environmental issues facing the island.

"All of our agricultural lands are threatened to be developed," he says when asked about the role his foundation plays in preserving the island's natural resources. "We ship 90 percent of our food in. We used to have sugarcane and pineapple. People are trying to get more farmers growing food for Hawaii. It's a slow process. Our foundation works with elementary school kids and trying to teach them to eat close to the source. One of the lessons had to do with bananas grown in Hawaii versus bananas grown overseas. We ask that question. We want to connect kids to their food at a young age. Marine debris is a big issue. We have plastics that wash up on the beach. We have a plastic reuse approach as well. That's two of the main things we focus on."

It's no surprise that his devotion to the island stems from his devotion to his wife.

"My wife makes me do [the environmental work]," he says, "but I like it anyway."

Jack Johnson, *Edward Sharpe & the Magnetic Zeros*

7:30 p.m. Friday, May 30, Blossom Music Center, 1145 W Steels Corners Rd., Cuyahoga Falls, 330-920-8040. Tickets: \$45-\$75, [livenation.com](#).

54 people like this. Be the first of your friends.

10

0

[More Music Lead »](#)
[Latest in Music Lead](#)
[« Rebel Music: Skrillex Distills Punk Influences on Groundbreaking Electronica Album](#)

Rebel Music: Skrillex Distills Punk Influences on Groundbreaking Electronica Album
Concert Preview



by Jeff Niesel



The Journeymen: Alice in Chains Bassist Mike Inez Discusses Carrying on with a Replacement Singer

by Jeff Niesel



The Mystery Remains: Recently Reunited Indie Rockers Slint Still Have an Aura About Them

by James Helmsworth

[More »](#)

More by Jeff Niesel



Comedian Eddie Izzard Brings Ambitious 'Force Majeure' Show to Palace Theatre
Concert Preview

by Jeff Niesel



Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum Opens 2014 Inductee Exhibit

by Jeff Niesel

[More »](#)