

# THE DENVER POST

## For Jack Johnson, a lot to "Sea" and say

**By Ricardo Baca**

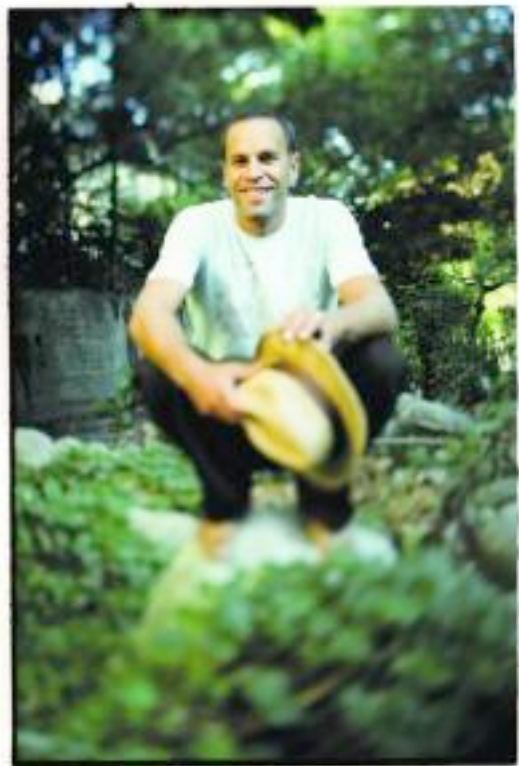
*Denver Post Pop Music Critic*

Is the big oil spill old news by now? Not to Jack Johnson. It's still a talking point.

"I get in the water every day, I surf as much as I can, I have three kids, so when we get a moment we're in there — I feel like I use it so much that I have a responsibility to be a steward of the ocean," said Johnson, who recently donated \$70,000 to relief efforts in the Gulf of Mexico region. "There's going to be a lasting effect on that area, with wildlife and families and the water itself."

Good-guy environmentalist is one of the roles Johnson embraces. It's a big part of an image honed by a musician both celebrated and mocked for his chill-out music, feel-good rhythms and mellow lyrics. Ladies want to be with him. Guys want to be him — even if some consider him a one-trick pony — the guy with an acoustic guitar singing about girls.

There is the good-humored middle ground, of course. The "Saturday Night Live" on-point spoof "The Mellow Show," hosted by a Johnson (played by Andy



Samberg) who randomly gives shout-outs to vegan cookies, cargo shorts and Ultimate Frisbee.

"Yeah, it's pretty funny," Johnson said of the "SNL" skit. "I was just talking with Andy Samberg the other day for the first time ever. Hopefully it will work out, but Andy and I are going to shoot a video for the next single on the record, "At or With Me." I want to leave the video a surprise, because it's a little unexpected, but I'm going to kick his (expletive) pretty hard."

An aggressively violent Johnson is the ideal antidote to our beloved "Mellow Show" host. And while the surfer-singer-activist often is labeled one-dimensional, there are many sides to Johnson that make him one of the more intriguing figures in pop music.

You have Johnson the everyday guy, taking his kids to school and doing yardwork at his home in Oahu. You have Johnson the big kid, who understands why surfer Kelly Slater is more of a celebrity sighting in Hawaii than his own visage. You have Johnson the extrovert, the multiplatinum headliner of festivals such as Coachella and Mile High. And you have Johnson the introvert, the family man who rented a Volkswagen bus last summer and camped the California coastline while writing what was to become "To the Sea," his latest record.

"I did most of my writing on picnic benches and in several parks across California," Johnson said. "A lot of the times, I'd write after the kids were asleep, and I captured everything on a battery-powered four-track (recorder). It was pretty funny because at one point I had a big beard going, and we were right next to a couple campsites that were playing my album — and nobody recognized me."

"To the Sea" is a Johnson record through and through. The lead single, "You and Your Heart," is a jangly, melodic folk-rock jam with a hook that sticks with you — and a message that makes the girls swoon. ("You and your heart shouldn't feel so far apart," he sings in the chorus.) It's a strong single that has captivated FM radio and galvanized his fans around the songwriter, who found inspiration for this record in the recent loss of his father.

"Obviously it was one of the biggest turning points of my life," he said. "I guess with every song on the album, my dad was on my mind — even the songs about falling in love, because the more you fall in love, the more you have to say goodbye in the end.

"It was about me being led to the ocean by my dad and me leading my kids to the ocean. . . . I always joke with my manager, who's one of my best friends, that I wanted to call it 'Music for the Middle Age.' He always laughs and then says, 'There's no way in hell I'll let you name it that.' "

Johnson has quickly discovered that "To the Sea," released in early June, is his return to a "social record" — a piece that is easy to share with his fans. His last record, 2008's "Sleep Through the Static," was a rough one to play out because he and his wife lost some important people during the making of that CD.

"This one feels social again, though," Johnson said. "Even though a lot of it was about losing my father, a lot of it is celebrating his life — and everybody goes through that."

## **Johnson liked "SNL" spoof of the mellow fellow**

Given that Jack Johnson is in the process of setting up a collaboration with Andy Samberg of "Saturday Night Live," the singer-songwriter must have appreciated Samberg's spoofs on his mellowness in the "The Mellow Show," right?

"I was pretty pleasantly surprised," Johnson said. "In Hawaii, I get everything a few hours later (than the mainland). I got a call from a friend who said, 'You got spoofed on "SNL.'" ' It was the first time. I'd just seen somebody else get spoofed, and they got called out pretty bad. But when I saw it, it was good. It was more of a celebration of my mellowness than anything else. I thought it was funny."

In the series of spoofs, Johnson shares the stage with his guests — Dave Matthews (played by Bill Hader), Jason Mraz (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) and Ozzy

Osbourne (played by the real Dave Matthews). That particular episode is still a popular video on [hulu.com](https://www.hulu.com) even though it aired in November.

Johnson's favorite part of "The Mellow Show"?

"In one episode, me and Dave Matthews gave each other a foot-five," he said.  
"That was awesome."