

Jack Johnson: more than a stereotype

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by Poppy Reid



It may not come as a surprise that **Jack Johnson**'s latest album pays homage to the sea, or that like his last tour, 100% of the profits from his upcoming Australian circuit will go to charity; but after speaking with the nonchalant singer, I realise that the stereotype he so easily falls under, prevails for a reason.

To The Sea is Johnson's fifth album and to be fair it's not *all* about the sea, it's infused with love songs for his wife Kim, a track inspired by his newest progeny (*My Little Girl*) and the teachings of his late father who died of cancer in August last year.

"It's about a father leading his son to a place where he can dive deeper and try to understand himself," says Johnson. "The ocean is deep so it has that representation of the subconscious in my life."

For Johnson, life didn't change all that much when he exploded onto the soul scene in 2002. His debut, *Brushfire Fairytales* was a stab at a third-choice career, right after professional surfer and surf film director (both of which he succeeded at). Since his induction to the music industry, the now 35-year-old still lives where he grew up on Oahu's North Shore in Hawaii, he still surfs almost everyday and still make surf films, except now he uses the footage for his music videos.

Johnson says the biggest challenges he now faces is not whether his latest record will go platinum (it's his fourth consecutive #1 album on the ARIA charts), it's whether he'll be able to pass on his dad's wisdom to his kids, or whether he'll be home on time to play Lego with them.

"The first half of your life you just take in the advice, thinking that you're smarter, then all of a sudden you switch positions and are able to look at the relationship you had and figure out the things you want to change," Johnson says he's at a place in his life where he still feels like a son; which isn't such a bad thing. "It's a pretty fun time to be appreciative that you spend hours playing Lego every night."

Still a kid at heart, even Johnson's new record is reverting back to the days of old. Playing in a punk-rock cover band throughout high school, his hero's were **Jimi Hendrix** and his electric guitar. In fact, the reason why his first album was so mellow and acoustic driven was because he did all his writing on an acoustic guitar.

"When it came time to do the second album I felt a bit like the sound was established, so I've slowly added a little more electric on every album until we get to this one here," says Johnson.

One of the tracks that reflect this departure in sound is Johnson's single *At Me Or With Me*, which he conjured on an aeroplane watching television. His lyrics, "but is there something telling you, you can't trust anyone in this town? Oh, baby, those are such great shoes," came from "how insecure humans can be."

"I was watching this TV show, I don't even know what it was called but it was one of those ones where they take a woman and they do a complete makeover and give her a new haircut.

"She felt so insecure and was wanting to know whether people were laughing at her or with her and all of a sudden they gave her this new pair of shoes and she just got so excited about the shoes!" laughs Johnson. "I guess for me it's the waves, I can have my

whole world get pretty heavy but then if I just go for a surf, maybe that's like the shoes for her."

Not that long ago, around the time of his fathers passing, there was a stage when Johnson's world leant so heavy that he wanted to give up touring for good. It could be said the only reason he'll be gracing our shores is because of the proceeds he'll donate to charities like the Johnson Ohana Charitable Foundation or the Kokua Hawaii Foundation and also toward local projects in each town he plays at.

"I wasn't even sure I wanted to tour anymore, but then the idea of making the tour a fundraising tool and going out and leaving every town we played in, in better shape than when we got there; it's just a good feeling," explains Johnson. "It makes it easier to explain to my kids what dad does for work."

Johnson may be a philanthropic tree hugging flower child, but if even one of his teachings get passed down to his children, you can guarantee the world the will be a much brighter place.

"It's a big part of it is just being a dad now, getting to show my kids they can do this."

Jack Johnson will tour Australia from December 4 to 13, supported by **Ash Grunwald** and **Tegan and Sara**.

Australian tour dates and venues below.

Saturday December 4 – NIB STADIUM, PERTH, www.ticketmaster.com.au

Monday December 6 – ADELAIDE ENTERTAINMENT CENTRE, ADELAIDE, www.ticketek.com.au

Wednesday December 8 - SIDNEY MYER MUSIC BOWL, MELBOURNE, www.theartscentre.com.au or www.ticketmaster.com.au

Saturday December 11 - THE DOMAIN, SYDNEY, www.ticketmaster.com.au

Monday December 13 - RIVERSTAGE, BRISBANE, www.ticketmaster.com.au

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